

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of Luke Jones find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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Chair

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# SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

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May 2008

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This phenomenological study explores the spiritual development of 16 undergraduate students attending a public university. Student participants interviewed represented a wide range of spiritual backgrounds including: atheist, Christian, Buddhist, agnostic, Unitarian Universalist, and Jewish. Results indicate that participants entered the university environment as a certain type of spiritual seeker, which influenced how they perceived and engaged the general community, the campus climate, other students, the classroom, and social groups. Participants struggled to integrate their spiritual life with a campus climate and curriculum that emphasized a rational, empirical, modern, and scientific epistemology. As a result, participants lacked an understanding of how to fulfill their passions or purpose after graduation. Participants did not engage in authentic dialogue with much frequency due to a campus culture and societal norms that do not foster authentic dialogue. As a result, they often felt like minorities on campus and lacked mentoring relationships associated with the university. Conclusions and implications of the study concerning research, theory, and practice are reported.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

During my second year working as a residence hall director, I had the opportunity to have coffee with a freshman at a local café. I did not know him well. We had interacted a few times and we always talked about getting together. We finally got together a few weeks before the end of his first year over a couple of café Cubanos. We started talking about religion and politics; and then he shared his spiritual beliefs. He was not religious, but he considered himself “spiritual”. I listened a lot, and then he asked me about my own beliefs. I shared my own struggles in my spiritual journey with religion, how I had reconciled those issues, and which ones I had not yet resolved. We continued to talk for over an hour. It was one of the most authentic conversations I had with a student that year. By the end of the conversation, the student was no more trusting of organized religion than he had been when we sat down. He said something that I will never forget. He told me how difficult it was to be interested in spiritual topics, yet have no one to talk to about them. To this student, none of the other freshman in his residence hall seemed interested in discussing life’s big questions, religion, or anything remotely spiritual. The topic did not come up in classes or in interactions with professors. He told me how refreshing it was to have a “real” conversation with someone about “this stuff” and he wished it happened more often. I remember wishing that we could have had that chat earlier in the year. It was a topic that was of the utmost importance to him, and yet, he seemed spiritually isolated. Without a religious community to identify with, he was without a spiritual home or community that could be a place of support while he was at college. It was his response to that conversation and many more like it that continue to inspire me to explore the spiritual

experiences of students at a public university in hopes that, in my work in student affairs, I might be better able to provide for the spiritual development of all students.

While the idea of fostering students' spiritual development may seem foreign to some faculty and administrators, colleges and universities historically have played a central role in caring for the inner lives of students. Beginning with the founding of Harvard in 1636 and other colonial-era colleges, the mission of higher education was closely aligned with religious beliefs. As late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, students were educated in a wide variety of subjects, but it was assumed that the curriculum included integration of moral, spiritual, and religious education (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006). During the late 1890's even state institutions like the University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, and Ohio State identified themselves as protestant institutions and integrated Christian practices and theology into daily university life (Chickering et al., 2006). It was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that moral teaching and religious education was eliminated from the curricula. As the research university model became more fully established, the secularization of the academy accelerated. Religious and spiritual matters were pushed to the margins, or eliminated altogether from the academy (Marsden, 1994).

In the last half-century, there have been calls to educate students in a holistic manner, which includes their spiritual development. Despite the mandate from the Student Personnel Point of View (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949) to develop the whole person as a part of student affairs work, the spiritual dimension of student development has largely been ignored (Collins, Hurst, & Jacobsen, 1987; Laurence, 1999; Rue, 1985). Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward (2006) make a compelling argument for educating the whole student, which includes addressing social responsibility, civic and political responsibility, moral and ethical

responsibility, personal values and character, sense of self, spirituality, and the practice of faith and religion.

College represents a critical time of development for the young adult, and those who educate students are in a unique place to provide for their development of self-identity, including their spirituality (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Unfortunately, many colleges, and especially public universities, are not taking advantage of that opportunity. According to Lindholm (2006),

Enlightenment ideals, positivistic modes of thinking, and scientific worldviews, which began to exert a powerful influence on American thought in the late nineteenth century, have continued to dominate societal values and individual goal-orientations. Rather than providing a developmental context characterized by self-reflection, open dialogue and thoughtful analysis of alternative perspectives, many of today's college and university environments mirror instead the strong societal emphasis on individual achievement, competitiveness, materialism, and objective knowing. (p. 76)

Dalton (2001) points out that "College students typically find themselves at a crucial point in life, having to make major decisions about life choice and direction yet having few structured opportunities in higher education to examine the spiritual implications of such big decisions" (p. 23). Dalton and other authors underscore that college represents an important developmental opportunity for students in many areas of their lives and this includes their spirituality.

Currently, the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA is conducting the largest study to date that explores the topic of spirituality and religion amongst students and faculty (Astin & Astin, 2003). This research, which includes data from more than 112,000 students at 236 universities, shows students are coming to university campuses with an interest in spiritual matters, and they expect the university to play a role in their spiritual quest. Using this data set, Lindholm (2006) found a high number of students across the nation are searching for meaning and purpose in life (75%) and discuss spirituality with friends (78%). Yet more than half (56%)

also report their professors never provide opportunities to discuss the meaning and purpose of life and nearly two-thirds (62%) said their professors never encourage discussions of spiritual or religious matters. Overall, just over half (55%) are satisfied with how their college experience has provided “opportunities for religious/spiritual reflection”. Despite this apparent interest in spirituality amongst college students, data also indicates that students are entering college with more self-centered goals than ever before. In 2003, students reported on the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey an all-time low (39%) for rating the goal “developing a meaningful philosophy in life” goal as “very important” or “essential” to them, compared with an all-time high (86%) among the freshman class of 1967. At the same time, in 2003, “being very well-off financially” reached its highest point in thirteen years (74%), with students saying this was “very important” or “essential” (Lindholm, 2006). So while students are clearly searching for meaning, purpose, and a guiding philosophy as they enter college, it appears there may be a failure to connect that interest to a practical application in students’ lives.

Researchers and authors are calling for those who work in higher education to recognize the importance of integrating spirituality in student development work (Collins et al., 1987; Laurence, 1999; Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005; Love & Talbot, 1999; Mahoney, Schmalzbauer, & Youniss, 2001; Parks, 2000; Rogers & Dantley, 2001; Temkin & Evans, 1998; Wolfe, 1997). Spirituality is an increasingly important topic for those who work in higher education as evidenced by several new books and conferences (Chickering et al., 2006). Organizations like the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators, American College Personnel Association, CollegeValues.org, and the Education as Transformation project

create publications and hold conferences dedicated to exploring how to address and nurture the spiritual development of college students.

A number of studies have explored college students' spiritual experiences during their college years. Some of these studies have shown that the public university environment has a negative impact on students' religious practices and spiritual lives (Astin, 1993; Bowen, 1997; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Kuh 1999, Kuh, Shouping, & Vesper, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). However, other recent studies have shown that the secular college environment may not have a negative impact; rather, religious and spiritual practices have become more optional and pluralistic (Anderson, 1994; Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001; Higher Education Research Institute, 2007; Lee 2002a, 2002b). While the impact of the public university environment on spiritual development remains unclear, research has shown the environment of the university does impact students' spiritual development (Kuh & Gonyea, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). It is also clear that spiritual development is an important facet of identity development (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). However, much of the research conducted on college students' spiritual development has focused on a traditional mono-theistic student population (Hartley, 2004).

#### Statement of the Problem

American Higher Education has a rich tradition of educating both the interior and exterior lives of students (Dalton et al. 2006). Over time, universities have become increasingly focused on a modern, positivist, research perspective which has resulted in the neglect of spiritual matters, especially at public universities (Marsden, 1994). Holistic education that addresses the spiritual development of students is gaining attention, and is increasingly a topic of discussion within the field of educational research (Braskamp et al., 2006; Chickering et al., 2006). Several

studies have examined the impact of the university environment on the spiritual development of students, but the role of this environment remains unclear (Hartley, 2004). Research is needed which takes into account the complexities of students' spiritual expression and includes diverse spiritual perspectives in order to better understand students' spiritual development on public campuses.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences related to the spiritual development of undergraduate students while attending a public university. The following research questions guide this study: How do undergraduate students perceive their spiritual lives while attending a public university? What types of experiences influence students' spiritual development while attending a public university? And, given students' perspectives on spiritual development, what is the apparent impact of the university on their spiritual lives?

### Definition of Terms

The terms most often used in spiritual research are *spirituality*, *spiritual development*, and *religion*. Although this study will focus on spirituality, it is helpful to spend some time reviewing the meaning of these terms. After a brief discussion, I establish what spirituality means in the context of this study. However, it is important for the reader to keep in mind that participants will operationalize these words in ways that are meaningful to them.

#### *Religion*

Religion is a word that can hold positive or negative meanings. Zinnbauer et al. (1997) write about the history of the use of the word religion and document how this word has come to connote a meaning quite separate from the notion of spirituality. They found that contemporary people define religion more narrowly than it has been in the past and associate it with religious

institutions, theology, and rituals. Their results showed religiousness was associated most frequently with belief in God, or a higher power, and organizational or institutional beliefs. Being religious had to do with belonging to and attending church as well as a commitment to the beliefs of that organized religion. It is this concept of religion that guides this study. Thus, it is possible to be religious, that is, participate in organized religious activities, without necessarily being very spiritual; likewise being religious is not a pre-requisite to being spiritual. Religion refers to just one of the ways a person may choose to deepen his or her spiritual life through a more systematic and traditional theological framework.

### *Spirituality*

Spirituality is a term that tends to be subjective and not easily defined. However, several authors provide useful definitions. Dalton (2001) defines spirituality as “a universal instinct toward connection with others and discovery of our place in the larger web of life” (p.17). Spirituality has also been defined as “an encounter with otherness” and a “process of turning inward to find where we are at home with ourselves in an undivided life” (Palmer, 1998, p.5). Parks (2000) describes spirituality as the search for meaning, transcendence, wholeness, purpose, and “apprehension of spirit as the animating essence at the core of life” (p.16). Zinnbauer et al. (1997) found that people describe spirituality in “personal or experiential terms” (p. 561). Love (2000) describes spirituality as an internal process, whereas religion is a largely external one. He points out that religion can exist apart from the individual, but this is not the case for spirituality. Chickering et al. (2006) define spirituality as a personal search for meaning, purpose, and values, wherever they may be found, and base this on Teasdale’s (1999) description of spirituality. This description most accurately reflects how I see understand and use this term in the context of this study:

Being religious connotes belonging to and practicing a religious tradition. Being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality. Religion, of course, is one way many people are spiritual. Often, when authentic faith embodies an individual's spirituality the religious and the spiritual will coincide. Still, not every religious person is spiritual (although they ought to be) and not every spiritual person is religious. Spirituality is a way of life that affects and includes every moment of existence. It is at once a contemplative attitude, a disposition to a life of depth, and the search for ultimate meaning, direction, and belonging. The spiritual person is committed to growth as an essential ongoing life goal. To be spiritual requires us to stand on our own two feet while being nurtured and supported by our tradition, if we are fortunate enough to have one. (Teasdale as cited in Chickering et al., 2006, p. 7)

### *Spiritual Development*

Several descriptions provide useful concepts in regard to the intentional development of the spirit. Love and Talbot (1999) describe spiritual development as being in awe of one's surroundings, having a sense of wonder about the world, being receptive to the unexplained, being alert and sensitive to changes in one's relationships, or being curious as to the root of our emotions. These authors go on to provide five key elements involved in the pursuit of spiritual development. The first is that spiritual development involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development. The second element of spiritual development involves the process of continually transcending one's current locus of centrality. Element three is the developing of a greater connectedness to self and others, through relationships, and union with community. The fourth aspect of spiritual development is deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in one's life. Finally, spiritual development involves an increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing. Similarly, Dalton et al. (2006) pose five questions that prompt spiritual development in college:



1. Identity: Who am I?
2. Destiny or calling: Where am I going?
3. Personal faith: What can I believe in?
4. Wholeness: How can I be happy?
5. Mattering: Will my life make a difference?

Within this study, I use the term spirituality to mean a way of life when an individual is committed to a search for meaning, direction, purpose, values, and belonging. This commitment includes looking for authentic connection with others and a dedication to living an undivided life. Religion is one way an individual may deepen their spiritual life, but one does not have to be religious to be spiritual.

### Research Design and Methods

I am approaching this study using a social-constructivist perspective. This perspective holds that individuals seek and create a subjective understanding of the world in which they exist. These meanings can be varied and, as a result, I rely on the participants' view of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2003). I am attempting to uncover these lived experiences by using a phenomenological approach. This involves studying a small number of participants through prolonged engagement in order to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas as cited in Creswell, 2003). I will uncover students' meaning by recording their narratives through in-depth interviews. The in-depth qualitative interview is the most appropriate tool for exploring participants' perspectives in an attempt to understand their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The study is also informed by Moos' (1979) social-ecological framework. This perspective holds that people's backgrounds and personal characteristics must be examined, along with the environments in which they live, if one is to understand why people behave as

they do. This perspective also recognizes that not everyone will experience an environment in the same way (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Moos' (1979) model served both an analytical and organizational function as I sought to understand participants' spiritual experiences at the public university and communicate my understanding in chapter four.

#### *Site Selection*

This study is conducted at a large, residential public land grant research university in the northwestern United States enrolling approximately 16,000 undergraduate students and 3,000 graduate students. The university is a predominately white institution and has strong programs in veterinary medicine, engineering, architecture, sciences, business, and communication. The campus estimates a minority population of about 14 percent, a total out-of-state population of approximately nine percent, and an international student population of six percent.

#### *Participant Selection*

Student participants were recruited using a variety of general advertisements across campus and from classes that dealt with spiritual topics. Students were selected for an in-depth interview using criterion selection based on their responses to an online survey. A total of 116 students took an on-line spiritual assessment based on the instrument used by the Spirituality in Higher Education project at UCLA. From this pool, sixteen students (9 females, 7 males; 14 seniors, 2 juniors) were selected to participate in in-depth interviews. These students had a wide variety of religious and spiritual backgrounds. In addition, two professors were interviewed to provide additional data on the student interactions in class and how faculty approach spiritual topics in the classroom.

### *Data Collection*

The 16 in-depth interviews with students were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Interviews typically lasted 90 minutes. I personally conducted each of the 16 interviews and used an interview guide (see appendix A) consisting of a series of open-ended questions. Using open-ended questions allowed the participants to build upon and explore their responses to the questions. The goal with this type of interview is to have the participant reconstruct their experience within the topic under study (Seidman, 1998). The interviews with the professors lasted approximately 60 minutes and were not audio-taped, but detailed notes were taken.

### *Assumptions*

This study is driven by several assumptions based on a review of the literature. These assumptions are:

1. Human beings construct meaning as subjective partners engaged in interpreting their objective world (Crotty, 1998).
2. An individual's background plays an important role in how they will interact with an environment (Moos, 1979).
3. College environments play a role in the identity formation and spiritual development of students (Kuh & Gonyea, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini).
4. The college years are an important stage of development for students and spirituality is an important aspect of that development (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000).
5. Public universities should develop students holistically, which includes the spiritual lives of students (Braskamp et al. 2006).

6. Interpretation or meaning of a phenomenon can be suspended or bracketed in order to allow for new ways of understanding a phenomenon and others' experience of it (Creswell, 1998).

7. In order to understand the subjective experience of people a researcher must access a participant's narratives, language, and culture. The best way to do this is through interviews (Seidman, 1998).

8. The phenomenological approach relies on authentic dialogue, connection, and listening (Craig & Muller, 2007).

### Limitations

Several limitations preclude the generalization of findings in this study beyond the chosen sample. These limitations include the following:

1. The study participants were limited to students considered as traditional age college students between the ages of 20 and 23.

2. The participants consisted of students who were willing to take part in individual interviews regarding their spiritual experiences while attending a public university.

3. The study is conducted at a large residential public research university in the northwestern United States.

However, as with all qualitative research, "transferability" of the findings depends on how useful and meaningful the findings are to others in similar situations Lincoln and Guba (1985).

### Summary

This qualitative study explores the impact of the public university environment on undergraduates' spirituality. This study is embedded in a social-constructivist epistemology and

framed by a social-ecological theoretical perspective. Incorporating a phenomenologically-informed methodology, the methods of this study included collecting data through face-to-face, audio taped, semistructured, individual interviews which were transcribed and interpreted for emerging themes and recurring patterns. Following a presentation of the literature review in chapter two, chapter three presents details on methods, chapter four presents the data analysis, and finally, chapter five provides a discussion of implications and recommendations.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to understand undergraduates' spiritual development while enrolled in a public university. This literature review summarizes religion's influence on American higher education followed by a brief historical overview of the field of student development theory. I will then place spiritual development within the larger body of student development theory before reviewing studies which explore the university's impact on students' spiritual development and the developmental outcomes of college. I end this chapter by outlining the problem and purpose of the study.

#### Religious Influence in Higher Education

One cannot understand American higher education without understanding religion's role in the formation and development of colleges and universities in America. Beginning with the founding of Harvard in 1636, in addition to other colonial-era colleges, the mission of higher education was closely aligned with religious aims. These colonial era universities were founded by Protestant settlers who had left Europe in part to practice their religion. The eighteenth century witnessed the founding of Yale, Princeton, Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania. While the missions of these colleges had broader purposes in mind than to simply train clergy, they had ties to the Anglican Church, and religious education was a part of their missions. Protestants founded colleges that were driven by the church, and it was important for the leaders and faculty of those colleges to adhere to the doctrinal demands of their denomination. The primary purpose of early colonial colleges was both a religious enterprise and a public service (Marsden, 1994). Educators realized not every student was called to ministry, so from the beginning American colleges and universities educated men interested in

law, medicine, and other professions, as well as for the ministry. No institution enforced denominational membership from its students; the religious elements of American colleges were those of piety and moral discipline, not religious theology, although students were required to attend chapel services (Chickering et al., 2006).

By the middle of the eighteenth century, colleges were pressured to relax the denominational emphasis because of the demands of the market place as Baptists, Anglicans, Quakers, and Presbyterians began to establish their own universities. During the nineteenth century, American higher education expanded and colleges were established by local communities, national denominational organizations, local citizens and church, and others by a single benefactor. These universities varied in how closely they were tied to their denomination; but they were all influenced by a church, even if they were funded by the state. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, students were educated in a wide variety of subjects, but it was assumed that the curriculum included integration of moral, spiritual, and religious education (Chickering et al., 2006). A gradual shift began to take place as America imported the German model of higher education that stressed the importance of research, the scientific method, and the discovery of new knowledge. This new emphasis on specialization and research further displaced the classical education upon which the religious colleges were founded. The value of knowing a pre-determined set of knowledge was questioned, and experimental science became the new knowledge paradigm (Lee, 2007). During the mid to late nineteenth century, colleges and universities focused on training a growing population and, as a result, the education they provided was much more pragmatic and vocationally focused. However, even as late as 1890, almost all state universities still held compulsory chapel, and some required church attendance. While they did not promote denominational theology, they did define themselves as Christian

institutions with the propagation of Christian faith and values as an essential component of their missions, even at public institutions (Chickering et al, 2006). Institutions like the University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, and Ohio State integrated Christian practices and theology into daily university life (Chickering et al, 2006). “As late as 1870, a vast majority of universities were evangelical with clergy-men presidents who taught courses defending Biblicist Christianity and who encouraged periodic campus revivals” (Marsden, 1994, p.4). However, an increasingly diverse student body and faculty population who had an appreciation for world religions challenged the idea that Christianity could be the foundation of human knowledge (Lee, 2007).

By the 1920’s the rise of the research university was rapidly transforming the shape and nature of higher learning, and evangelical Protestantism had been excluded entirely from the university classrooms (Marsden, 1994). Nineteenth century colleges and universities had focused on fostering the intellectual and character development of students through moral philosophy, and required participation in religious services. The new universities stressed research, disciplinary specialization, and a diverse curriculum (Chickering et al., 2006). Chickering et al. summarize the rapid secularization of American higher education, “The growing adherence in the academy to scientific research-based approach to learning and teaching and to the development of new areas of knowledge propelled the transformation of American higher education toward secularization and total disengagement from its Christian foundations” (p.78).

After World War II, American higher education was motivated by the idea of practicality, and was transformed by research money from industry and government. Public universities



became important in new ways because they served the technological economy by training its experts and its supporting professionals, as well as conducting its research (Marsden, 1994).

The secularization of higher education and the adoption of a research based educational model had positive impacts. It led to an increase in critical thought, the pursuit of verifiable and quantitative data, and expanded knowledge about the world through scientific inquiry. However, several authors have criticized this new focus of education-not because higher education needs to return to a focus on Christianity, but because American higher education, in particular our research universities, have lost the ability to educate the mind and the spirit of students. Or, put another way, the ability to care for both the interior and the exterior of students (Astin, 2004). Contemporary criticisms of higher education, and of public universities in particular, center on the elevated status of quantifiable facts and knowledge at the expense of more humanistic learning outcomes. Modern day institutions are good at imparting specialized knowledge to students, but fall short at showing them how or why they should use that knowledge to improve the world. Chickering et al. (2006) summarize what they believe are the failures of American higher education:

American undergraduate education is largely focused on the transmission of theories, empirically derived facts, and the disciplinarily frameworks and methods used to create and interpret empirically derived information. Unfortunately examining the ways in which students can use the information and analytic processes about which they are learning to create meaningful individual lives and positive social structure has largely been excluded. Such characteristics as wisdom, compassion, and integrity, and such concepts as justice, ethics, values, morality, virtue, and character are ones that most undergraduates fail to consider because the curriculum does not encourage them to do so. (p. 1)

Marsden (1994) believes that this shift has resulted in an establishment of ‘non-belief’ and religious and spiritual matters being largely marginalized. This has created a system that excludes nearly all religious perspectives from the nation’s highest academic life. Marsden

describes another deficiency of the current educational model: “The divorce of personal, subjective, belief from engagement in the ‘value-free’ arena of objective science has limited not only the answers but more important the questions, in the academy’s search for truth” (Marsden, as cited in Hartley, 2004, p. 114).

Palmer (1998) believes that the modern university’s focus on objective knowledge has caused us to become detached from the world around us and destroys true community. He sees this manifest itself in the form of fear:

The mode of knowing that dominates education creates disconnections between teachers, their subjects, and their students because it is rooted in fear. This mode, called objectivism, portrays truth as something we can achieve only by disconnecting ourselves, physically and emotionally, from the thing we want to know. (Palmer, p. 51)

Palmer believes that this objective way of knowing and teaching comes at the expense of other learning goals, “this means that virtues like compassion, the capacity to ‘feel with’ another, are ‘educated away.’ In their place arises clinical detachment; counselors and physicians are trained not to get involved with their clients, journalists with their stories, lawyers with their cases” (Palmer, 1983, p. 34). This notion of detachment is something Palmer (1998) believes is at the root of the destruction of communities and leaves us with two views of truth. The first is a highly scientific objective view which limits us to internalizing facts without considering other social or moral implications. The second is an overly subjective view which holds “your truth is your truth and my truth is mine... This notion concedes diversity without calling us into dialogue, it leaves us in isolation and destroys community as effectively as the objectivism it seeks to resist” (p.66).

Wilshire (1990) also observes self-fragmentation caused by the modern university system. He writes extensively on what he believes is the lack of moral direction amongst

research universities. He believes that universities have evolved into professional and technological driven institutions that cause faculty and students to divide mind and body.

Wilshire writes that the university is “In the knowledge business and the conception of knowledge which it accepts largely determines its institutional structure and its conception of the knower. In a real sense, it finds no room for us as integral beings in an integral world, for as it grasps us, it splits us into minds and bodies” (p. xx).

In *Making a Commitment to Character*, Boyer (1995) writes, “The nation’s colleges have been less attentive to the larger, more transcendent issues that give meaning to existence and help students put their own lives in perspective” (p. 29). Dalton (2001) summarizes where he believes education falls short. He writes, “Rather than helping students link head and heart, intellectual and ethical development, we often force an isolation of these two important domains of students’ learning and development in higher education” (p. 21).

Astin (2004) conceptualizes the current problem of the higher education system as an imbalance in the attention devoted to exterior versus the interior of our lives. He writes,

While we are justifiably proud of our ‘outer’ development in fields such as science, medicine, technology, and commerce, we have increasingly come to neglect our ‘inner’ development of the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding. (p. 34)

Astin believes that academia leads us to live fragmented and inauthentic lives, ignore that which is spiritual, and regard our spiritual side as irrelevant.

While these criticisms are directed at some outcomes of the changes in American higher education, these changes did not occur within a vacuum. Universities exist within a larger societal culture, and this culture influences the formation of American higher education. Therefore, in the context of this study, it is important to understand some of the societal shifts in regards to views on religion and spirituality.

Over the past 50 years, America's views on religion and spirituality have changed dramatically. Several sociologists have documented the nation's shift from public expressions of religion through the historical traditions of mainstream religions such as Catholicism, Judaism, Christianity, and Protestantism to a more private and eclectic form of faith and belief (Chickering et al., 2006). Many American's spiritual lives are focused on the self, and now describe themselves as spiritual seekers (Wuthnow as cited in Chickering et al., 2006). The 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's was a time of profound transformation for Americans in how they relate to and view religion. Chickering et al. (2006) observe,

In previous decades American sought social belonging through their association with churches and synagogues, and practiced religion in terms of socially defined expectations and beliefs....The majority of Americans today focus their religious energies on the development of personal meaning, on individual religious and spiritual seeking and on private interpretations. (p. 69)

There have been several calls for universities to bridge the divide and develop both the interior and exterior of students' lives. This philosophy can best be summarized as holistic education. In 1925, representatives from fourteen colleges and universities met to discuss issues and problems facing higher education. During the next 11 years student data was collected and analyzed to examine students' ability and performance (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). The end product was a report entitled, *The Student Personnel Point of View* published in 1937 and revised in 1949 (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949). This document put down in writing foundational philosophies for universities in how they should educate students:

This philosophy imposes upon educational institutions the obligation to consider the student as a whole; his intellectual capacity and achievement, his emotional make up, his physical condition, his social relationships, his vocational aptitudes and skills, his moral and religious values, his economic resources, and his aesthetic appreciations. It puts emphasis, in brief, upon the development of the student as a person rather than upon his intellectual training alone. (p. 39)

Holistic education is an important topic and is fresh on the minds of those working in higher education. In their book, *Putting Students First*, Braskamp et al. (2006) make a compelling contemporary argument for educating the whole student. Holistic education includes among other things, social responsibility, civic and political responsibility, moral and ethical responsibility, personal values and character, sense of self, spirituality, and the practice of faith and religion.

While America's public universities have seen many positive developments due to the secularization of higher education, many scholars are concerned that these institutions are not doing enough to educate students holistically. During the late 20<sup>th</sup> century educators have recognized the importance of addressing the various elements of students' lives that are developing while attending college.

### Student Development

From the philosophical approach that treats the student as an individual, the field of student development was born in the 1930's (Strange, 1999). As educational leaders of the time began to explore the implications developing students holistically for campus personnel and student learners, student development began to solidify itself as an area of inquiry. During the 1960's and 1970's, student development theories began to take shape as researchers like Heath (1968), Perry (1970), Kohlberg (1969) and Chickering (1969) charted development during the college years as they built upon previous theories of identity and youth development (Erickson, 1963; Keniston, 1965, White as cited in Strange, 1999). Student development theories should address four essential questions:

1. Who the college student is, what changes occur inner and interpersonally and what do those changes look like?

2. How do those changes occur, what factors lead to their development?
3. How does the college environment influence student development? What aspects encourage or inhibit growth?
4. What developmental outcomes should colleges strive for? (Paker, Widick, & Knefelkamp as cited in Strange, 1999).

A brief overview of some of the research and theories which address these four questions will help us lay the groundwork for understanding the spiritual development of students.

#### *Who Students Are and How They Develop*

We can begin to understand who students are, what their spiritual development consists of, and how changes occur in that development through the lens of foundational cognitive and psychosocial development theories.

Perry's (1968, 1970) theory of intellectual and ethical development consists of nine positions from which an individual views and interprets the world. According to Perry, a person develops in the transition between positions and this movement is not necessarily linear. An individual may regress to earlier positions or plateau and not experience further development for a time. The movement from the earliest position to the later positions involves transitioning from a dualistic mode of thinking, to multiplicity, and finally to commitment in relativism.

The first position is dualism and a person moves from stage one – “basic duality” to the second stage – “full dualism.” When a person thinks dualistically, they typically think in terms of right and wrong, black and white, and in absolutes. Authority figures are seen as having knowledge and this knowledge is transmitted can be transmitted from teacher to student without much critical thought. The focus is on absorbing the information as right or correct, not on

critically analyzing the information. As students experience divergent views from equally qualified experts they can begin to transition into a multiplicity way of thinking.

The second position is multiplicity and a person moves from stage three – “early multiplicity” to the fourth stage – “late multiplicity.” Multiplicity is a way of thinking when there are several valid points of view but the answers are not yet known. During this transition, students become more independent thinkers and recognize that all opinions are equally valid without making value judgments on those opinions. As students begin to consider the support behind opinions, they can transition into a relativist mode of thinking.

The third position is relativism and a person moves from stage five – “contextual relativism” to stage six – “pre-commitment.” Relativistic thinkers no longer consider every argument valid based on the need to provide valid support. Students now consider knowledge to be more qualitative and contextually based (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998). As students weigh and judge viewpoints and arguments, they make choices which inform their behaviors.

The last position is constructed knowledge where an individual moves from stage seven – “commitment” to stage eight – “challenges to commitment” and final stage – “post-commitment.” This transition involves students making a commitment and then learning the responsibilities of that commitment. These “commitments” are the beginning of the ethical development of students.

Erikson (1963) identified eight stages in his theory of human development. In order to successfully navigate each stage, a person must find a healthy balance between two conflicting emotional forces. Erikson believed that each person must take up the task of developing a positive virtue as they transition through the developmental stages. Each of these eight stages corresponds to general life experiences, and the challenges that arise often occur during a

particular age range. Each stage is considered by Erikson as a psychosocial crisis which must be resolved before the individual can successfully progress to the next stage. According to his model, students in college would typically be in the adolescent and/or young adult stages.

Erikson defines adolescence as ages 11-18. He labels this stage “Identity vs. Role Confusion.” During this period, a student develops a sense of self in relationship to others and to internal thoughts and desires. This can be a time of transition between childhood and adulthood. Often this means testing limits, breaking dependent ties, and establishing a new identity. Major conflicts can center on clarification of self-identity, life goals, and life's meaning. As students struggle to find their place in peer groups, be accepted, and liked, they are often asking big life questions like, “Who am I?” Positive outcomes of this stage are a strong sense of self, integrity, and high self-esteem that enables the student to associate with others. A student’s failure to successfully navigate this crisis can result in their social disconnection, which further manifests extremist tendencies and lack of sense of self.

Erikson identifies the young adult stage as ages 18-34, and labels this crisis Intimacy vs. Isolation. Here a student develops the ability to give and receive love and he or she begins to make long-term commitment to relationships. The developmental task here is to form intimate relationships. In this stage, the most important events are love relationships in which one begins to form a connection with another human being on a deep, personal level. An individual who has not developed a sense of identity usually will fear a committed relationship and may retreat into isolation. A student who fails to successfully navigate this crisis may be vulnerable and alienated.

Erikson’s model provides a useful framework for understanding the challenges associated with human development. It is questionable if the stages are experienced linearly and if they



apply equally to men and women. However, his theories have been supported by empirical research particularly as they relate to identity development (Marica, 1966).

Kohlberg's (1976) theory of moral development is another foundational work in student development. This model consists of six stages divided into three levels. According to his theory, a person would progress through each of these stages in a hierarchical way. That is, a person may remain in a particular stage for an unspecified amount of time; but if they progress, they will not skip stages. These stages build on each other and each progressive stage is a higher and more advanced way of thinking (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

The first level is the "Preconventional" level and consists of two stages. A person advances through these stages as they do what is right based on what is best for them, and not just to avoid punishment at the hands of authority figures. A person begins to see what is right as what is fair and starts to recognize the needs of others.

The second level is "Conventional" and consists of two stages. In the early stages of this level, a person correlates motives of actions as right and wrong. There is an importance placed on being good and the approval of others. As a person develops through into the next stage, they begin to consider right and wrong from the viewpoint of society as a whole. There is an increased importance on maintaining one's role in society and upholding the social order.

The "Postconventional" is the final level and consists of two stages. In the first stage, a person begins to examine the characteristics of a good society. Here, the society and its laws are questioned as human rights and the well-being of others are considered with increased importance. In the next stage, while only a theoretical stage, holds that an individual is able to see moral dilemmas through the eyes of others and consider individual's needs in a neutral way. Here the ultimate value is placed on universal human rights for everyone.

Kohlberg's (1976) theory can be useful in understanding a student's way of reasoning when making decisions. Students entering college are often transitioning between stages four and five. Utilizing this theory can assist administrators and faculty in designing educational interventions that assist the student in adopting progressively advanced ways of reasoning. His theory may not translate well to both men and women since Kohlberg's study focuses on younger boys. For this reason, Gilligan developed her model of moral reasoning for women.

Gilligan's (1993) theory consists of three stages. Each stage represents a more complex and developed view of self and relationships. The focus of her theory is that as women develop morally, they focus on caring and connecting with others rather than a sense of justice.

In her first stage, the individual is concerned with the survival of self. Here, an individual may feel unsatisfied in personal relationships and be removed or isolated from those relationships. As they transition into the next stage, they begin to see the importance of the connection to others and integrate responsibility and care into decision-making processes.

In the second stage, an individual is concerned with staying connected to relationships and exhibits self-sacrifice for the good of the social group. Here, the desire for the survival of self as it relates to relationships is of the utmost concern. As she develops from the second level to the third, an individual begins to see her needs as having an increased relevance and starts to reconcile putting the needs of others above her own.

In stage three, the focus is on redefining the concept of morality from the conflict between self and responsibility to that of doing no harm. The individual is now able to make decisions based on not committing violence to self or others.

Gilligan's (1993) theory on women's moral development provides administrators and faculty with a perspective on moral decision making and how it is useful in working with men

and women. The idea of justice and an ethic of care can be integrated into student development work.

Despite the mandate from the Student Personnel Point of View (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949) to develop the whole student, the spiritual dimension of student development has largely been ignored (Collins, Hurst, & Jacobsen, 1987; Laurence, 1999; Rue, 1985). However, there are a growing number of studies that address students' spiritual development and two theorists inform much of this contemporary work.

Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) have built upon foundational student development theories by constructing theories that specifically address students' spiritual development. These theories are, at this point, the most exhaustive works which explore how individuals develop their religious and spiritual identities, beliefs, and attitudes. They guide the work of faculty and student affairs professionals working with college students (Chickering et al., 2006).

### *Spiritual Development*

Building on the work of Erikson (1963) and Kohlberg (1976), Fowler (1981) developed six stages of faith. According to his model, a person may progress through only a few stages, but they will be experienced progressively and stages cannot be skipped. While stages may be experienced at some predictable ages or life experiences, age is not a determinate factor for the stage of faith development a person may be in. Fowler calls these stages Primal, Intuitive-Projective, Mythic-Literal, Synthetic-Conventional, Individuative-Reflective, Conjunctive, and Universalizing. Typically, most college students are progressing through stage three and four.

In the third stage, labeled Synthetic-Conventional, the ability to think abstractly and reflectively provides a new awareness of oneself in relation to others. Here, the individual is no longer completely egocentric, but now is in touch with other people and their needs,

expectations, and demands. This stage is often characterized as the conformist stage because worldviews, meaning-systems, and faith come from certain trusted others. That authority might be parents, teachers, religious figures, the church or a peer group. Central to this stage is the notion that a student chooses someone or something as their authority, and gives that authority unquestioned, uncritical, adherence.

During stage four, the Individuative-Reflective stage, students begin to question if they have an identity apart from the authority they respect or the roles they play. Here an individual develops the ability to critically reflect and examine their own world view and the relativity of various perspectives. They may also reject the literal interpretation of faith stories. The movement from stage three to stage four is a movement from conformity to individuality, from unexamined faith to critical faith, from being who others want them to be to being who they really are. There is a new awareness that self and others are part of a larger social system and that they must ultimately assume responsibility for the decisions they make.

Fowler (1981) provides a framework and lens through which one can understand changes that occur as an individual develops in their understanding of faith and spirituality. Some (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993) have criticized the work of Fowler, charging that he projects his own liberal Christian perspective on the ideal faith-where his theoretical stage six represents the strongest faith. While Fowler intends his model to be applicable to any faith tradition, the data used to build this model is based on Christian students. Still, his work is considered seminal in the field of religious psychology (Chickering et al., 2006)

Parks (2000) builds on Fowler's (1981) model but she focuses on the young adult and college student with her faith development model. She adds another dimension to help us further understand the development that is occurring at the young adult stage. Her model consists of

four stages: adolescent, young adult, tested adult, and mature adult. Her addition of a young adult stage sets her theory apart since other theories consider this a period of transition, not a standalone stage. According to Parks, there are three elements which make up faith development for young adults: forms of knowing, forms of dependence, and forms of community. Most college students would be in the second and third stages of her model.

Stage two, the young adult faith, is typical of college students and is characterized by what she calls probing commitment. Probing commitment is a time when one explores many possible forms of truth as well as work roles, relationships, and lifestyles and their applicability to one's own experience of self and world. In this stage, students begin to define a future for themselves that takes into account the complex and contextual nature of the world (Chickering et al., 2006). Although students are developing an increased and critical awareness of self, they are also somewhat dependent on their parents.

Stage three, tested adult faith, is characterized by tested commitment. Parks (2000) writes that a person in this stage has a sense of being at home in the world and starts to take form when,

One can no longer be described as so divided, nor as simply exploring one's worldview, marriage, career commitment, lifestyle, or faith. One's form of knowing and being takes on a tested quality, a sense of fittingness, recognition that one is willing to make one's peace and to affirm one's place in the scheme of things (though not uncritically). (p.69)

This period is a transition from a focus on external authority to an internal focus as the individual develops openness to multiple truths. Here faith moves from a reliance on external authority to a more internal dependence, and to the recognition of persistent interdependence (Chickering et al., 2006). While some undergraduates do reach this stage, students in this stage are likely to be older or graduate students.

The work of Parks (2000) helps us understand how young adults are developing in their ways of knowing, ways of depending, and forms of community during the college experience. She suggests creating a supportive environment with mentoring communities is the key to helping young adults succeed.

While these two faith development models are the most complete models to help understand faith development, they are not without their critics. Some of these criticisms focus on the “stage” model itself. Love et al. (2005) argue that linear stage models of identity development are not adequate enough to capture the complexities of multiple identity elements. Further, stage models are based on an American world-view where the individual and autonomy are of the highest value, “They assume that progressive development occurs as individuals engage in an increasing level of independent thinking, become more autonomous and less embedded in family ties, and reject authority” (Chickering, et al., 2006, p. 62). In addition, they assume that each stage indicates a higher way of thinking and conceptualizing right and wrong while moving towards increasingly abstract ways of thought (Chickering, et al., 2006).

These theories of student and faith development can assist in understanding how students develop while attending college. Some studies have explored the interaction between the university environment and what impact that environment has on students’ spiritual development.

#### University Impact on Students’ Spirituality

The university certainly has an impact on student development and researchers have documented the importance of a supportive environment. Sanford (1966) was one of the first theorists to recognize the impact of the environment on the person. He recognized the importance of developing environments that offered both challenge and support. A student who

encounters too much challenge without support may become defensive and adopt negative behaviors. However, if a student experiences lots of support with little or no challenge, then there is no catalyst for change or development. Therefore, universities need to build in challenging experiences for students while providing adequate support.

Exactly how the university environment impacts students' spirituality, religious beliefs, or faith development remains somewhat a mystery (Hartley, 2004). Studies in the past three decades have produced a variety of thought in this area. Some authors have concluded the largely secular university environment has an overall negative impact on religious and spiritual practices of college students. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) examined the results of dozens of studies and found that students experience an overall decline in religious beliefs and behaviors. This could be observed in the decrease in positive attitudes toward religion, decline in beliefs in a supreme being, and a decrease in religious activities such as praying, church attendance, and reading sacred texts. Further, they found students had an increase in secular attitudes, and that the university environment does play a role in influencing the changes in religious preferences, attitudes, and behaviors. Their study is one of the most influential in higher education and is often cited when discussing the secular campuses' impact on student religiosity. This is because they took into account cultural attitudes towards religion, as well as non-college students, and observed a significant impact on religious beliefs by the university environment. Other studies have also provided evidence that college does have a liberalizing effect on students as they become less committed in their religious orientation by the time they are seniors (Astin, 1993; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Kuh 1999, Kuh, Shouping, & Vesper, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

However, there have been studies which indicate that the secular environment may not have such a negative impact. A study of four American universities concluded that secular college environments may not impact students negatively; rather, religion has simply become more optional and pluralistic (Cherry et al., 2001). This study explored the spiritual expression of students on four universities: a public research university, a historically black private college, a Jesuit institution, and a private college affiliated with the Lutheran church. Cherry et al.'s findings indicate that the strong tendency toward religious freedom and pluralism in the contemporary university did not lead to a lack of religious vitality amongst the students, and that students are enthusiastic about engaging in religious practice and ideas. In fact, Cherry et al. conclude, "It is possible that young people in American culture have never been more enthusiastically engaged in religious practice or with religious ideas" (pp. 294-295). Students considered themselves seekers that are more spiritual and found a connection between volunteerism with their spiritual lives. Especially relevant to this study is their findings on the public university. Cherry et al. found that a wide variety of options were available to students to practice their religion mostly in the form of officially recognized Christian student groups. While there was a Jewish group, the majority of these groups were mainline conservative Christian groups. Despite the large number of student groups, less than ten percent of the student population was involved in these groups. Overall, there was a lack of religious involvement by the student body, although students did indicate they were interested in spiritual matters.

Currently in its fifth year, the Spirituality in Higher Education research project conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA is a longitudinal study which examines data from more than 112,000 students attending 236 colleges and universities across the nation. In 2007, they reported findings that seem to confirm Cherry et al.'s (2001) findings



that students' religious practices decline while spiritual interests increase. The December 18<sup>th</sup> press release for the project reported that,

After three years of college, students are more engaged in a spiritual quest than they were as entering freshmen. Students rated as very important or essential several key life goals with marked increases emerging in what they reported as juniors:

- “Integrating spirituality into my life” (41.8% in 2004 to 50.4% in 2007)
- “Seeking beauty in my life (53.7% to 66.2%)
- “Becoming a more loving person” (67.4% to 82.8%)

The study also found that after three years of college attendance, students were more likely to have a commitment towards understanding other countries and cultures, and to improving the human condition. While there was growth observed in a more ecumenical worldview, students' attendance at religious services saw a significant decline over the same three years. The attendance rate dropped from 43.7% in high school to 25.4% in college, and the rate of non-attendance grew from 20.2% to 37.5% (Higher Education Research Institute, 2007).

Lee's (2002a) qualitative study of four Catholic students at UCLA found that, although student's beliefs were challenged on a public campus, participants progressed in their faith development. She found that university environments, programs, faculty and curricula can have a positive impact on students' religious identities. Lee (2002b) also conducted a quantitative study and found that students at four-year universities experience an overall strengthening of religious beliefs and convictions. These results are in stark contrast to Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) findings which document the negative impact of the secular environment. Her study found that religious peers, interactions with faculty, and leadership activities can positively influence spiritual development and these results call into question the impact of the public campus on the spiritual and religious practices and identities of students (Hartley, 2004).

Anderson's (1994) qualitative study of three Christian women at a large public university examined how women integrate and make sense of their religious identity while attending college. These women struggled to integrate their spiritual beliefs with their new-found feminist perspectives and found supportive networks outside of the university. Each of these women worked hard at integrating their faith into every aspect of their lives and searched for a supportive community in which they could develop during their college years. Like other authors, Anderson suggests creating more groups or communities where students can find support during their spiritual development.

Hulett's (2004) quantitative study on 301 Christian students at Knox College demonstrated that a significant number of students found the campus hostile to religion. In addition, she found that the campus Christian groups were perceived as intolerant toward others. She concluded that many Christian students seem to feel pressure from the idea that,

One can believe in anything or nothing...and that what is true for you is true enough, even if the Christian believes something else alone is true. So, to seek after spiritual things is OK...but if you think you have discovered truth like God is real and Christianity is true, you ought to keep quiet about his so as not to give offence or be considered exclusive. (p. 18)

Bryant (2005) and Schulz (2005) also found evidence that Christian students at public universities are the victims of stereotypes in the classroom, and find this environment to be intolerant towards their perspectives. These Christian students also reported negative feelings and perceptions from other students on campus.

Moran, Lang, and Oliver (2007) studied the experiences of Christian student leaders at two public universities. They found that Christian students perceived themselves as minorities and felt they were an oppressed group on their public campuses. They believed that their values and choices set them apart from other groups on campus and 'non-authentic' Christians. Their

research suggests that evangelical Christian leaders sought encouragement and support in their campus ministries.

A study by Love, Bock, Jannarone, and Richardson (2005) is one of the few that examines spiritual issues amongst an underrepresented population. Their study explored the intersection between sexual identity and spirituality among 12 lesbian and gay college students. They found these students were in various developmental stages as they reconciled their spiritual beliefs with their sexual identity. These researchers recommended that institutions should “explicitly state that spiritual development is important for all college students. Student affairs professionals need to continue to bring spirituality into education, not keep it banished to small sectors of campus” (p. 208). They recommend that student affairs practitioners encourage conversations and opportunities to discuss spiritual matters. This recommendation seems to be a common thread with studies conducted on spirituality and religion on college campuses.

Another study which examined a nontraditional student population was Bryant’s (2006) study of students who identify themselves as Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Unitarian Universalists and non-religious. She used data from HERI’s Spirituality in Higher Education project to examine the religious practices of these students, their views on political and social issues, their views on the existence of god, and how they answered spiritual questions and existential dilemmas. A few interesting findings particularly relevant to the current inquiry were that non-religious and Buddhist students reported fewer opportunities for spiritual discussions in class compared to other minority religious students (20%). Religious dialogue with friends was highest amongst Unitarian Universalists (43%), while Muslim and Hindu students have the highest levels of unease in talking about religious matters. Bryant suggests that universities

need to attend to the religious and ideological diversity amongst the study body since these views impact the way they experience the university at large. She writes,

Students' receptivity to the campus at large, to the lessons we profess, to the people they meet, and to the developmental tasks set before them, is undoubtedly influenced by their personal beliefs and values and the degree to which they feel accepted within the campus community. (p. 24)

While the impact of the public university environment on spiritual development remains unclear, the environment of the university does matter. Kuh and Gonyea (2005) used data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to analyze nearly 150,000 first year (51%) and senior students (49%) while attending 461 different four-year colleges and universities in the United States. One of their major findings was that the campus environment matters more than the institutional type to the process of engaging in effective educational practices and desired outcomes. They found, "Students who view the out-of-class climate as supportive of their social and non-academic needs more frequently engage in deep learning activities...and report greater gains in all of the outcomes on the NSSE survey, including a deepened sense of spirituality" (p. 7).

What is also clear is that students are increasingly interested in spiritual matters and expect the university to play a role in their search for a meaningful life philosophy (Higher Education Research Institute, 2005). The Spirituality in Higher Education project found that more than two-thirds of students consider it essential or very important that their college enhance their self-understanding, and want the college to play a role in developing their personal values. Nearly half also say it is essential or very important that colleges encourage their personal expression of spirituality. The study also found that 80% of entering students are interested in spirituality, 76% report searching for a meaning or purpose in life, 74% discuss the meaning of life with friends, 81% attend religious services, 79% believe in God and 69% pray.

## Developmental Outcomes of College

There is no lack of recommendations and opinions on what colleges and universities should be doing to encourage spiritual development amongst students. Many prominent authors have written at length about what universities should strive to develop in students and the kinds of environments necessary for that development. Love (1999) believes that spirituality has been ignored on our university campuses and points out the negative resulting outcomes,

Unfortunately, the profession's failure to engage in discussions of spirituality and spiritual development may contribute not only to foreclosure on matters of spirituality, but also to a general narrowness of perspective and an inability or unwillingness to think critically, explore value-related issues, and question authorities. (p. 363)

Astin (2004) highlights another important reason for addressing the spiritual development of students and faculty,

Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind about spirituality is that it touches directly on our sense of *community*. More than anything else, giving spirituality a more central place in our institutions will serve to strengthen our sense of connectedness with each other, our students, and our institutions. This enrichment of our sense of community will not only go a long way toward overcoming the sense of fragmentation and alienation that so many of us now feel, but will also help our students to lead more meaningful lives as engaged citizens, loving partners and parents, and caring neighbors. (p.8)

In their study of spirituality and the work place, Mitroff and Denton (1999) found that organizations viewed as more spiritual get more from their employees, and vice versa. Employees reported that they were able to bring more of their "complete selves" to work. They could deploy more of their full creativity, emotions, and intelligence (p 83). Rogers and Dantley (2001) argue that since institutions of higher education are often being compared to the corporate world and are preparing students for a vocation in that world, colleges should develop what they

call “soul leaders.” These are leaders who have examined themselves in their inward journey and experience a sense of wholeness. “They are then able to operate out of an inner power that is based in meaning, calling passion, courage, vulnerability, spirituality, and community” (Hagberg as cited in Rogers & Dantley, 2001, p. 596).

Mahoney et al. (2001) provide data that suggests a spiritual revival has resulted in a rebirth of religion on campuses, whether people believe it has a place or not. She cites evidence that shows a student population that is thinking more about religion and spirituality when they enter college. Mahoney argues that increased voluntary religious activity, renewed attention to church-college relations and more scholars looking to bring their faith perspective into their work in the academy is evidence of this revival. She believes the remaining challenge left for administrators is to work with a new generation of students that arrive on campus spiritually hungry, and are looking for ways to deepen and express their religious and spiritual commitments.

Chickering et al.’s (2006) book, *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education*, profiles dozens of colleges and universities, classes, syllabi, professors, and promising practices that assist students in their spiritual development. They believe that universities should view spirituality as an issue of student welfare since students, “Pay a price in psychological wholeness and wellness when they are required to have separate public and private personas in order to function successfully in the higher education setting” (p. 164). Furthermore, attention to students’ spiritual lives is necessary to prepare students for a world in which they will need to be open to various forms of community, and will be required to rise to the challenge of constructing communities. They believe this can be achieved by “promoting the quality of

relationships and strengthening community through dialogue and commitment” (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 185).

Parks (2000) reminds us that our surroundings, environment, and social context play a central role in the formation of identity and faith when she writes, “an unrecognized strength of the Piagetian paradigm is its psychosocial conviction that human becoming absolutely depends upon the quality of interaction between the person and his or her social world” (p. 89). She suggests creating supportive environments with mentoring communities is the key to helping young adults succeed. Parks writes, “It is the combination of the emerging developmental stance of the young adult with the challenge and encouragement of the mentor, grounded in the experience of a compatible social group that ignites the transforming power of the young adult era” (p. 93). Mentors are important in providing students with the appropriate amount of challenge and support, but equally as important are mentoring communities. Students need to know that they will not be alone, or be alone with their mentor, in their spiritual journey. “Ideas and possibilities take hold in the imagination of the young adult in the most profound ways when he or she is met by more than a mentor alone-by a mentoring community” (Parks, 2000, p. 134). Parks writes in depth about what constitutes mentoring communities. In brief, they provide students with a network of belonging, meaningful questions, encounters with others that have different views, and practice at dialogue, critical thought, and reflection.

Braskamp et al. (2006) conducted an in-depth study on ten church related colleges and their search for promising practices at schools that “put students first.” Their concept of holistic education has several learning outcomes, which include addressing the spiritual development of students. They believe that colleges and universities must be concerned about who students are becoming as well as what they are learning. According to the authors, successful holistic

education results in students learning more than just disciplinary, vocational, and professional skills and knowledge. Institutions adopting this philosophical approach intentionally address students' physical well-being, their commitment to social, civic, moral, ethical, and social responsibility, as well as their personal values, self identity, spirituality and faith, spiritual and religious lives. Schools in their study are institutions which are concerned about the "interior lives of students-values, spirituality, identity, purpose, and meaning-and the exterior lives of students-observable patterns of behavior" (Braskamp et al., 2006, p.3). They believe one of the major goals of college is helping students to think about who they are as well as what they do. This means, "Helping students contribute to a pluralistic society while still guiding them to discover a self-identity and purpose based on being informed and wise thinkers" and "assisting students to understand and appreciate different perspectives and to begin forming their own perspectives" (p.19). These church related institutions provide models and practices which can be modified to work with schools at both public and private institutions.

Expanding on Rue's (1985) work, "Our Most Outrageous Blind Spot" Collins et al. (1987) assert that public institutions should address students' spiritual lives,

Persons should be afforded the same privilege and extended the same opportunity to attain spiritual development as they are given in all other areas related to student development in the college years. Opportunities in the college years for students to address their spiritual selves are not only appropriate, but in some respects, obligatory. (p. 275)

Hindman (2002) suggests that colleges and universities should engage students in conversations about who they are, who they want to be, what they do and what their deepest hungers are. College presents an opportunity to help students move from living a 'splintered life' to a whole one. Hindman provides several ways colleges can assist students in learning to be "committed to reason, justice, love, compassion, the larger community, and respect for life"



(p. 172). Including the spiritual in the institutional mission, providing role models and mentors, and allowing space for dialogue are just a few ways that institutions can help students know how to make a living as well as live compassionate, just, rational, and respectful lives.

### Summary

Historically speaking, colleges and universities have been intensely connected with spiritual and religious matters. The liberal arts tradition in American higher education has always focused on holistic student development (Dalton et al., 2006). During the past century however, the America's higher education system has gone through dramatic changes, which includes a general process of secularization (Marsden, 1994). In the last 50 to 60 years the academy has accelerated its focus on a positivist, scientific, and objective way of knowing that has marginalized spiritual matters, especially on public campuses (Marsden, 1994). Researchers and practitioners are calling for public and private institutions to adopt a holistic educational approach that includes the spiritual dimension of students (Braskamp et al., 2006).

Research shows that spiritual development is a component of identity development and that this development is greatly impacted by institutional characteristics of a university (Anderson, 1994; Collins et al., 1987; Dalton, 2001; Lee 2002b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). While some scholars suggest that the university environment is inhospitable to spiritual matters (Hartley, 2004; Laurence, 1999; Marsden, 1994; Rue, 1985), studies have recently questioned the impact of the secular environment on students' religious beliefs (Lee, 2002a, 2002b; Cherry et al., 2001). With a few exceptions (Bryant, 2006; Love, et al., 2005), much of the research done in this field has focused primarily on a traditionally Christian student population and fail to capture the complexities of spiritual experiences because they have focused on a monotheistic religious perspective (Hartley, 2004). In addition to the questions that remain on the effect of

secular campuses on spiritual development, it is not clear exactly how or when spiritual changes occur or how specific environments impact students' spiritual development (Hartley, 2004).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences related to the spiritual development of undergraduate students who attend a public university. The following research questions framed this study and served to guide data collection:

1. How do undergraduate students perceive their spiritual lives while attending a public university?
2. What types of experiences influence students' spiritual development while attending a public university?
3. Given students' perspectives on spiritual development, what is the apparent impact of the university in their spiritual lives?

In qualitative studies, the research questions serve to initially frame a study and provide direction for inquiry. The research questions for this study require an in-depth understanding of students' perspectives and experiences. Therefore, this study was based in a social constructivist theoretical perspective and utilized phenomenologically-oriented qualitative methods to capture the richness and depth of the students' lived experiences. Consistent with the phenomenological approach, this study collected data through individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews; the data were then analyzed and interpreted for patterns and themes. The in-depth qualitative interview is the most appropriate tool for exploring participants' perspectives in an attempt to understand their lived experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). As stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), interviews assist the researcher in understanding the constructions and reconstructions of "persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other

entities” (p. 268). A social-ecological theory (Moos, 1979) served as the theoretical framework for the analysis and representation of the data.

## Research Design

### *Researcher’s Perspectives*

This study was designed according to the recommendations of Creswell (2003) who adapted Crotty’s (1998) earlier model. Creswell outlines three questions that are central to the research design: “What knowledge claims are being made by the researcher (including a theoretical perspective)? What strategies of inquiry will inform the procedures? [and] What methods of data collection and analysis will be used?” (p. 5). Knowledge claims include the researcher’s assumptions about ontology, or what knowledge is, and epistemology, or how we know it. The strategies of inquiry refer to methodologies which provide specific direction to procedures used in research design, while the methods of data collection and analysis further refine the research process to the details of data collection and analysis.

#### *Knowledge claims.*

I am approaching this study from a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionists hold that individuals seek and create a subjective understanding of the world in which they exist. Schwandt (1994) summarizes the constructionist view: “The constructivist or interpretivist believes that to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it” (p. 118). The social constructionist approach relies on the assumption that “the terms by which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people” (Gergen, 1985 p. 267). Research conducted from the social constructivist perspective relies heavily on the participants’ view of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2003).

This study is also informed by a phenomenological philosophical perspective.

Phenomenology can be thought of as both a philosophy and as a methodological approach. I will describe how both are used in this study. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to understanding the experience of others (Craig & Muller, 2007). As a philosophical perspective, phenomenology recognizes that experience is subjective and individuals can experience the same phenomenon in different ways depending on the past experiences of the individual.

Phenomenology posits that the perception of reality of any given object or experience is dependent on the individual. Subjective experience is not something that exists only in our heads; however, it is our consciousness of things we encounter in the world. Further, the most important interactions are those that occur between two conscious subjects (Craig & Muller, 2007).

Phenomenology has a rich history rooted in philosophy, and Hegel was the first to construct a well-defined technical definition of phenomenology (Kockelmans as cited in Moustakas, 1994). Hegel described phenomenology as, “knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience. This process leads to “an unfolding of phenomenal consciousness through science and philosophy” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Edmond Husserl was also a foundational philosopher of the phenomenological tradition. Husserl believed that one can know another’s experience only by interpreting their experiences through their own and assuming that those experiences resemble their own (Craig & Muller, 2007). Husserl developed the concept and method of transcendental phenomenology, which consists of three elements: (1) Epoch, which is the process of refraining from judgment and learning to see the everyday things around us in new ways; (2) Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, which is a process by

which a phenomenon is reduced to its core meaning and essences which compromise the experience from the vantage of the self; and, finally (3) The Imaginative Variation, which derives a structural description of the experience, presenting a picture of the conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it (Moustakas, 1994).

Buber distinguishes his notion of phenomenology from Husserl's by focusing on the concept of authentic dialogue (Craig & Muller, 2007). This concept of dialogue involves two individuals turning towards each other in authentic relationship. In order to establish this authentic relationship an individual must become aware of the other and engage in dialogue. Dialogue is realized when each of the participants has in mind the other and intends to establish a living mutual relationship. Dialogue can be understood in contrast to monologue, which is characterized by a focus on the self. Buber argues that monologue is a symptom of the modern world and the type of speech that is most common. Buber also goes on to describe the idea of the I and Thou relationship, wherein individuals retain their unique identities but come together around a common goal or understanding.

Gadamer elaborates on Buber's I-Thou relationship and shifts the focus from merely being open to each other as beings, to engaging a subject that individuals attempt to understand from their different perspectives (Craig & Muller, 2007). Gadamer also underscores the importance of context and history to our ability to interpret and understand others. These historical experiences shape our own prejudices, and we must recognize and understand those if we are to truly engage in conversation. Gadamer points out, "A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light" (Craig & Muller, 2007, pg. 241). Gadamer also gets at what I believe is the core of the phenomenological tradition: being open and listening. Gadamer believes, and I agree, that this attitude of openness

must exist in order for a genuine human bond to develop, and this may mean accepting things that I may not agree with even though I am not forced to do so. Key to engaging in this conversation is the art of asking the question. As Gadamer points out, “In order to ask one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know...Posing a question implies openness but also limitation” (Gadamer as cited in Craig & Muller, pg. 242). He believes the art of understanding another is a process of interpretation, primarily of language, which is the hermeneutical experience. When authentic dialog is occurring, the process interpretation is an ongoing one. Conversation rooted in dialogue is best summarized by Gadamer: “In dialogue spoken language - in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other’s point - performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics” (Gadamer as cited in Craig & Muller, 2007, pg. 244).

This phenomenological philosophy is particularly germane to this study because of the recent emphasis on the importance of creating campuses which foster this kind of authentic dialogue within mentoring environments (Parks, 2000). These perspectives helped me to conceptualize and focus in on exploring with the student participants the types of relationships and interactions they have encountered in the university environment that have impacted their spiritual lives. Phenomenology is primarily concerned with how individuals come to experience and know each other as accurately as possible, most often through authentic dialogue. Since we can never completely enter another person’s being, we can never fully comprehend someone else and how they are experiencing the world.

*Strategies of inquiry.*

As a methodology, phenomenology attempts to understand others as accurately as possible. Moustakas (1994) provides this summary definition of phenomenology as a methodology: "...it attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience" (p. 41). Phenomenology as a research method aims to get as close as possible to the true experience of another through authentic relationship. To understand a phenomenon, the researcher must understand from the perspective of the participants. "Approaching people with the goal of trying to understand their point of view, while not perfect, distorts the subjects' experience the least" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 35). Such approaches to understanding require that the researcher suspend, or "bracket" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52) his or her own meanings, prejudgments, or experiences of the phenomenon in order to grasp the understanding of what is real according to the experiences of others. This methodological approach assumes that the experiences of the participants can be understood from their perspective by encouraging participants to share their experiences through face-to-face individual interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and the careful analysis of shared information.

I used semi-structured interviews as a way to encourage the participants to share their thoughts and experiences. This style is different from structured interviews, which focus on a pre-determined set of questions asked of all respondents and leave little room for the interviewer to deviate or the respondent to expand on his or her answers. In contrast, unstructured interviews start broad and general and then become narrow, focusing on specific themes and working



towards the development of a narrative to describe the phenomenon under study (Fontana & Frey, 2000). In semi-structured interviews, a researcher may have a general idea of topics that could be covered in an interview, but allows the subject to direct the conversation. The importance of others' stories is paramount, and listening skills are extremely important as the researcher attempts to understand cultural context of the participants' actions (Seidman, 1998). In order to understand the subjective experiences of other people, a researcher must access participants' narratives, language, and culture. The best way to do this is through interviews.

## Methods

### *Context of the Study*

This study was conducted on the campus of a public university in the northwestern part of the United States. This university was chosen for several reasons, including convenience. Since I work at this institution, I have relationships with and access to students, faculty, and advisors who served as valuable resources in connecting me with participants for the study. Furthermore, the close proximity of the university allowed me to have prolonged engagement with participants and the site under study. It was important to choose a public university because there is still a debate as to the impact the public university environment has on students' spiritual lives (Hartley, 2004). This research university has many of the characteristics of the 76 land-grant institutions across the United States. It is in a rural, small town and is a largely residential campus, enrolling approximately 16,000 undergraduate students and 3,000 graduate students. The university is known for its strong programs in veterinary medicine, engineering, architecture, sciences, business, and communication. The university is a predominately white institution with a minority population of about 14 percent, a total out-of-state population of approximately nine percent, and an international student population of six percent. While

generalizability is typically not the primary goal of qualitative studies, practitioners at similar university settings may be able to draw parallels between the study site and their own institution and students.

This university has six learning goals of the baccalaureate listed on official university web pages. These goals are intended to be incorporated into the curriculum at all levels. The sixth learning goal is of particular interest because it touches on several spiritual concepts and includes: understanding values, goals, other perspectives and cultures; reflecting on global issues; and practicing integrity, citizenship, and service. These are elements of spiritual development because they are directly related to who students are, what they believe in, what they believe about what is right and wrong, how they see themselves in relationship to others, and what commitment they feel towards others and the world. Further, many students explore and answer these questions through a spiritual or religious framework.

The spiritual nature of this learning goal indicates that the institution has some vested interest in who students become and in their interior lives. This is important to note since I am interested in finding out what role the university plays in the development of the students' spiritual lives.

It is also important to understand that the somewhat remote and rural location of this campus results in a lack of options for spiritual or religious expression that might be present in more populated and diverse cities. This can be especially true for students who practice underrepresented faiths on this campus like Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam.

### *Participant Selection*

The goal of the selection process in this study was to recruit a group of students that represented a wide range of faiths, spiritual backgrounds, and majors, as well as varying degrees

of solidification of beliefs. I was looking for some students who were very strong in their religious beliefs and participated in what are considered more traditional religious practices such as church attendance, bible studies, prayer and corporate worship. As well, I was looking for students who were very confident in their beliefs as atheists or agnostics. However, I was also looking for students who considered themselves spiritual but not religious, and whose spiritual practices may be very different than might be assumed for students who identify as spiritually involved. Such spiritual students may have negative feelings towards religion or may be in the process of changing or creating their own spiritual beliefs. I was attempting to get a variety of perspectives not only with relation to spiritual beliefs, but also in level of interest in spirituality. I wanted to hear from students who were both moderately interested in spiritual matters and those who were very thoughtful and intentional about seeking out experiences they considered to be spiritually engaging. I also decided to recruit students who were in their junior and senior year so student participants would have more experiences within the university environment to reflect upon.

In order to select such a diverse group of students, two different fliers were duplicated and posted around campus in various classrooms and buildings. The first flier targeted a more traditional religious student and was entitled, "Spirituality, Faith, and (name of institution)." This flier read, "How does attending this university affect your spirituality, faith, or religion? Participate in this campus wide study and you can help answer this question by sharing your stories and experiences with us." The second flier targeted students who were perhaps less religious but still considered themselves to be spiritual. The title on this flier was, "Spiritual but not religious?" This second flier read, "If this describes you, we want to hear about your experiences as part of a campus wide study on students and spirituality." An email address was

on the flier if students wanted more information. In addition to the fliers, two separate classified ads ran in the student newspaper over the course of two weeks, and targeted these two different groups of students. A group was created on the social networking site Facebook.com, and an online flier was purchased which ran over these same two weeks directing people to find out more information on the study.

Along with general advertising to the student population, recruitment which targeted specific groups was also employed. I made visits to several philosophy classes which dealt specifically with religious or spiritual topics. These classes included the Philosophy of Religion; Philosophies and Religions of China and Japan; and Mind of God and the Book of Nature: Science and Religion. I also obtained a list from the Office of the Registrar of all students, with their contact information, who had been enrolled in one of the aforementioned philosophy courses over the last three semesters. These students were emailed information regarding the study. My hypothesis was that at least some portion of students chose to enroll in these courses because they were interested in spiritual matters and that these classes would have an influence in their religious and spiritual beliefs.

I also met with various clubs and organizations during their weekly meetings, including Campus Crusade for Christ, the Jewish student club Hillel, the atheist agnostic student group, and a discussion group which focused on religious issues and met weekly at the Common Ministry house located centrally on campus. The leaders of other groups were also contacted via email and phone, and they were given information which was passed on to their students; these groups included the Latter Day Saints college group, The Inn collegiate ministry, Baptist Student Ministries, Athletes in Action, The Middle Eastern Student Association, the Buddhist student group, and the Christians Campus Fellowship.

Through these visits and emails, students were informed in a general way about the nature of the study and encouraged to email or explore the Facebook group for more information. When students took this additional step, they were presented with more detailed information about the purposes of the study and provided a link to an on-line questionnaire.

The on-line questionnaire was a modified version of the survey tool used by the Spirituality in Higher Education project that was developed by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. Permission was granted by the researcher in charge of that project to use all or part of this survey tool. In all, 36 items were used from the UCLA survey to form the on-line questionnaire (Appendix B). These 36 items were selected because they were less biographical in nature and more directly related to the actual spiritual beliefs and practices of students. Some examples of data sought through the questions on the survey were: How much time do you spend praying? How have your activities changed since coming to college? How important is it to you that the university helps you develop your personal values or encourages your expression of spirituality? How important is it you to reduce pain and suffering in life? Do you see a conflict between science and religion? For what reasons do you pray? How often do you read sacred texts, meditate, or do yoga? What do you consider to be spiritual experiences? What is the ultimate spiritual quest to you?

This tool, the College Student Beliefs and Values (CSBV) survey, was developed during 2003-2004. Using pilot tests and the factor analysis technique (Principal Components factor extraction with Varimax rotation), the 175-item questionnaire was developed and administered in 2004 to over 112 thousand students at 236 colleges and universities. The results were categorized into 12 outcomes: Spiritual Factors ( $\alpha = .88$ ), Spiritual Quest ( $\alpha = .85$ ), Equanimity ( $\alpha = .76$ ), Religious Commitment ( $\alpha = .96$ ), Religious Struggle ( $\alpha = .75$ ), Religious Engagement

( $\alpha = .87$ ), Religious/Social Conservatism ( $\alpha = .72$ ), Religious Skepticism ( $\alpha = .83$ ), Charitable Involvement ( $\alpha = .71$ ), Ethic of Caring ( $\alpha = .79$ ), Ecumenical Worldview ( $\alpha = .70$ ), and Compassionate Self-Concept ( $\alpha = .78$ ) (Higher Education Research Institute, Appendix A).

The intention of having students take this survey was four-fold. First, the biographical information gathered provided a way to select a diverse group of students; second, I was able to see which students were not merely interested in spirituality but were actively pursuing activities which were spiritual in nature; third, students were given the opportunity to indicate if they would be interested in participating in an interview and provide their contact information, and last, this information was useful in guiding probing questions during the one-on-one interviews. The data collected through this online survey was not relevant to the data analysis and as a result it is not included in this report.

During the four weeks of recruitment 116 students completed the online survey. Of these 93 indicated they would be interested in the interview portion, 9 said they would like more information and 14 said they were not interested. From these students, 20 were invited via email to participate in an interview. In these invitations, they were provided with more details about the study, asked to identify times which they could be interviewed, and informed that they would have a choice of receiving a ten dollar gift certificate to Starbucks, Blockbuster, or a local movie theatre. In addition to the gift certificate, one student would be drawn to win an I-Pod Nano. Of the 20 students who were invited, sixteen were successfully interviewed. Four students had to cancel due to scheduling conflicts or simply failed to show up.

### *Participants*

During the course of interviewing, several students talked at length about some of their classroom experiences and how professors approached dealing with spiritual topics in class.

Given this information, I included as participants in the study two professors who teach classes that deal with religious and spiritual topics in regard to their approach with the class and general observations of students. One professor taught a Bible as Literature course, and the other taught several religious philosophy courses. I did not audiotape these faculty interviews, but I did take detailed notes.

The 16 students selected for interviews were juniors or seniors. I purposively selected students who were in their junior or senior year and therefore would have spent more time at the institution and have more experiences to reflect upon. These students represented a wide range of majors, backgrounds, experiences, and spiritual beliefs and included: nine females and seven males, 14 seniors and two juniors, including two students who had transferred after one year at another four year university. The students represented the following majors: journalism, agriculture, education, business, chemistry, philosophy, accounting, computer animation, science/pre-vet, broadcast, political science, Asian studies, fashion design, anthropology, biology, and hospitality business management. Three students were Asian and thirteen were Caucasian. Before describing the spiritual makeup of the participants, it is important to understand the challenge in spiritually classifying students. One of the goals of this study was to obtain the experiences of spiritual but not religious students, and this type of student does not easily fit into traditional classifications like Christian, Jewish, or Catholic. This became clear after emailing a group of students and asking them to define their spiritual or religious category. Several emails I received back contained rich narratives that revealed just how complex that question was. The longest narrative I received back read:

My father was Methodist and converted to Catholicism once my parents married. My brother and I were both baptized as Catholics and we did the whole Sunday school thing until Jr. High. We moved to Japan and we continued our religion there, but I didn't want to continue, neither did my brother and the church on-base

wasn't that great. So we gradually stopped going. I have always gone to church with my friends' families as well, whether it be Baptist, Methodist, Mormon, etc. I actually really enjoyed going to other churches to see how they did things and how Catholicism differed. Once I started sophomore year in high school, I took AP European History and that was the tip of the iceberg as far as how long I was going to pretend I believed in something I really didn't believe in. I learned about how in some religions, different leaders just didn't get along, so they branched off and started their own religion. I just thought everything was just made up at that point.

Now, I have a more mature look at religion. I understand that for some people it is a wonderful guide to help them reach their full potential. I believe some people don't need that guidance as prominently though and just because I may not go to church doesn't mean I am a bad person. I actually do go to church on occasion- to accompany my mother, or religious roommates, or because I think a church is beautiful and I want to see the inside. I am not back and forth anymore, but I have a good understanding, balance, and realistic stance to what I believe.

I am spiritual but I do not believe religion is right for me. I think it is a very narrow minded outlook on life. It reminds me of how much our intelligence has grown and I think those who participate in religion should still believe the earth is flat. But I am spiritual because there are things that science hasn't and won't prove. I know there is a supreme being but I don't believe his son was sent to us and I don't believe in the Virgin Mary. Not everyone can believe in the same thing though, so I am content with the variety. Thank you! Hope that helps

Another student appeared to struggle with the notion of classifying herself as a Christian and was not sure quite how to describe herself:

I replied to your other email already, but you asked what religion I would affiliate myself with in this other email, so I thought I should answer to help you organize your interviews. I consider myself spiritual, however I am closer to Christianity than any other religion. I am open to a lot of explanations about life through other religions and also science, but when it comes down to it I believe in a God that is behind the love and beauty of this world/universe.

Another student echoed the Christian leanings without subscribing to all of the beliefs typically associated with Christianity:

I was raised Baptist more or less but I have an interesting view on religion. I believe in God so I guess I'm agnostic, but I do believe Jesus existed and that he



did great things but not that he is necessarily the savior. Just let me know when you would like to do the interview.

In addition to these emails, I also noticed that after beginning the interview phase of the study, religious students who had indicated they were Christian or Jewish were in fact much less adherent to their religion than had appeared from their responses on the online survey. With that clarification in mind, the students could be categorized as the following: four students described themselves as agnostics; six label themselves Christian (although two of these students did not adhere to all of the traditional viewpoints of Christianity); one student is Jewish; three students are atheists; and two are Buddhist. However, every student who was atheist or agnostic also described themselves as spiritual but not religious.

Another way to think of the spiritual make up of students is to conceptualize them in a way outlined in a recent article on college students' spiritual journeys (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, & Echols, 2006). These researchers identified four types of student spiritual seekers. The first two fall under the category of religious seekers--those who pursue spirituality inside a religious context. They are the faith-centered seekers, or students who engage spirituality only from the context of their own religious tradition; and multi-religious seekers, or those who seek to deepen their religious spirituality through interfaith and multi-religious exploration, dialogue, and practice. The other two types of student fall under the general category of secular seekers. These are students who are engaged in a spiritual search outside the context of religion. They are the mindfulness seekers, or students who focused their inner search on ways to heighten self-awareness and understanding; and wellness seekers, or students who engage in spiritual activities in order to achieve a more holistic, healthy and integrated way of life. Using these categories from Dalton et al. (2006) provides an overall framework for grouping the student participants in this study. It is important to note that these categories are not meant to be exclusive, rather, they

help describe characteristics of college student spirituality and there is significant overlap between them. Understood this way, I interviewed four faith-centered seekers, five multi-religious seekers, four mindfulness seekers, and three wellness seekers. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the participants. Student names are pseudonyms.

### *Methods of Data Collection*

The 16 students identified for participation in the interview phase of the study were sent an email that explained more details about the nature of the study and allowed them to ask questions for further clarification. Students were asked to respond with times during the week when they had a two-hour block of time free for an interview as well as what gift certificate they would like. Student interviews were scheduled over a one month period of time, and a week prior to the interview, each student was sent a reminder email along with three questions to begin thinking about. These questions were: What was your upbringing/background with spirituality and or religion? How has your spirituality changed since enrolling in college? And finally, how do you define the terms spirituality and religion?

I encouraged students to think about these questions and spend some time writing down a few of their thoughts so that they would be better able to provide thoughtful answers once we got together for the interview. Interviews typically lasted 90 minutes and were audio-taped. As the principal researcher, I conducted each of the sixteen interviews and used an interview guide (Appendix A) consisting of a series of open-ended questions. Using open-ended questions allows the participant to build upon and explore responses to the questions. The goal with this type of interview is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study (Seidman, 1998). This interview, or conversational, guide is not meant to be rigid but flexible, and assists the interviewer in developing probing and follow up questions (Rubin &

Rubin, 2005). This interview approach attempts to understand the complex behavior of people without imposing any pre-categorization which may limit the range of inquiry (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

*Table 1. Participant Demographics*

	<b>Religious Affiliation</b>	<b>Academic Background</b>	<b>Year</b>
<b>Faith-centered</b>			
Rachel	Christian	Journalism	Junior
Erik	Christian	Agricultural Business	Senior
Julie	Christian	Education	Senior
Abigail	Christian	Business	Senior
Stacey	Jewish	Anthropology	Senior
<b>Multi-Faith</b>			
Tiffany	Agnostic	Pre-Veterinary Science	Senior
Steve	Agnostic	Philosophy	Senior
Kelly	Christian	Asian Studies	Senior
Mary	Christian	Biology	Senior
<b>Wellness</b>			
Patricia	Agnostic	Business Hospitality	Senior
George	Atheist	Accounting	Senior
Barbara	Buddhist	Fashion Design	Senior
Mike	Buddhist	Broadcast Communication	Senior
<b>Mindfulness</b>			
James	Agnostic	Computer Animation	Senior
John	Atheist	Journalism/Political Science	Junior
Robert	Atheist	Chemistry	Senior

All but one of the interviews was conducted in a public area, the student bookstore. This area is typically quiet and comfortable, and established a relaxed environment. Each student was asked if the setting was to his or her liking. Only one student asked for a more secluded location and, per his request, we moved to a seating area in a nearby academic building.

At the beginning of each interview I invited the participant to read a consent form, and provided an opportunity to ask questions before signing. The participant then signed two copies of the consent form, one for the student to keep and one to keep on-file.

Each interview began with an introduction and casual conversation to establish rapport. At this time, I also gave the participant their gift card. Using the interview guide (Appendix A),

I asked the first open-ended question. As the respondent answered, I would ask follow up and probing questions allowing the participant to elaborate further and provide detailed examples. Once that question had been answered, I proceeded to the next topical area. This process was repeated until all topic areas had been addressed. I took notes throughout the interviews as I thought of follow up questions or as concepts and potential themes seemed to emerge during the interview. These topical areas included: participants' background with religion or spirituality, their current spiritual beliefs and practices, how those beliefs and practices have changed since coming to college, how the university environment impacts their spiritual development, their views on other students, faculty, and the general campus climate, their expectations of the university in regards to their spiritual development, their academic and social experiences, their goals and aspirations, their relationships, and attitude towards others. At the conclusion of the interview, the participant was thanked and informed of the opportunity to hear the initial findings of the study and provide additional feedback as a part of a focus group later in the study.

#### *Member Checking Through Focus Groups*

During the data analysis phase of the study, I invited students to participate in a focus group discussion that would serve as a “member checking” mechanism in regard to the developing analysis. Creswell (2003) describes “member-checking” as “taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate” (p. 196). Three of the participants were able to arrange their schedules to attend a focus group, which was held over the lunch hour in a casual and private space on campus. One student was a faith-centered seeker, the second was a multi-faith seeker, and the third student as a mindfulness seeker. Lunch was provided, and participants were given the opportunity to dialogue around the emerging themes. I was able to hear participants’

reactions and thoughts amidst lively discussion of various topics that were emerging from the data. These sessions were not recorded. Instead I took notes of important concepts to assist in the development of themes and interpretation of the data.

### *Data Analysis*

The goal of the data analysis in qualitative, phenomenologically-oriented studies is to “...reflect the complexity of human interaction by portraying it in the words of the interviewees and through actual events and to make that complexity understandable to others” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 202). The act of analysis is an ongoing one that does not begin once interviews have ended. In fact, data from the first interviews helps to guide and inform subsequent interviews, and I noted themes as they began to emerge from interview to interview. Once I transcribed each interview, I engaged in the data analysis process outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2005). The first stage is recognition, which involved reading each interview, making note of concepts, and writing a summary of what is going on, e.g. the initial “themes.” In the second stage, I synthesized concepts and themes in an attempt to understand the overall narrative that in turn led to the discovery of new concepts and themes. Following this, I coded each concept and theme by assigning a label to each and then marked where those were appearing in each of the interviews. In the final stage, I sorted the data by grouping all of the data units together and looked for similarities and differences between groups of participants on the same concept or theme. From this process, I developed my themes, which form the headings and sub-headings in the analysis section of this report.

### *Theoretical Framework*

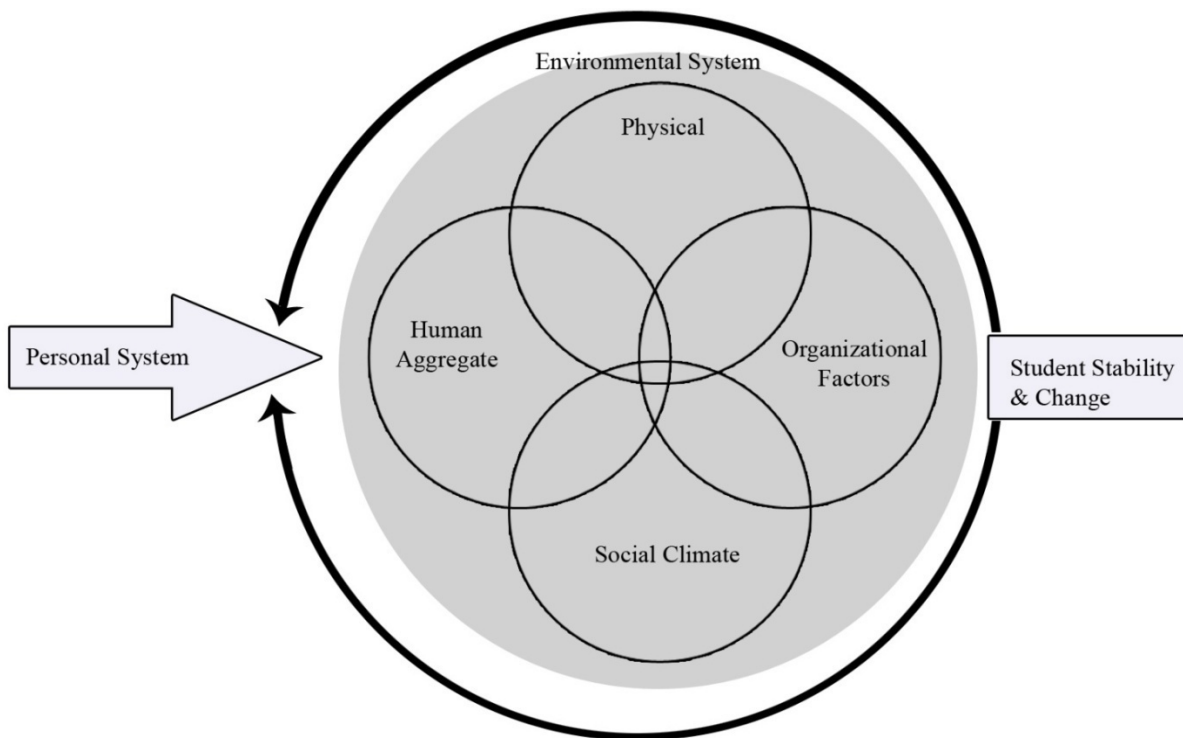
I rely on the social-ecological framework developed by Moos (1979) to interpret and represent data from the study. Like other theories which fall into the “person-environment

interaction” category, it stresses that people’s backgrounds and personal characteristics must be examined along with the environments in which they live if one is to understand why people behave as they do, while recognizing that not everyone will experience an environment in the same way (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Moos focuses on the social climate’s influences on the people who inhabit it. In short, his model takes into account a student’s personal system, which includes the student’s sociodemographic variables, expectations, personality factors, and motivations as the person enters an environmental system, which is made up of a physical setting, organizational factors, social climate and the overall make up of the student body, or what Moos calls the human aggregate. As the student enters this new environmental system, he or she goes through a process of assessing, adapting to, and coping with this environment. The degree to which the student is successful influences the individual’s values, interests, mood, health and overall satisfaction. This in turn affects the student’s personal system as well as influences the environment. So then, Moos also recognizes the reciprocal impact these factors have on each other. Moos goes on to describe how he assesses social and organizational climate by considering three domains: relationship, personal growth, and system maintenance and change. Within the social climate, relationship refers to the extent to which people are involved in their environments, helping each other and expressing themselves in an open and free manner. Moos continues, “The degree of support present in a setting is especially important. Emotional support in a student living group reflects concern for others in the group, efforts to aid one another with academic and personal problems, and the emphasis on open, honest communication” (p. 14). In an organization, relationship refers to a sense of community, high campus morals and positive interaction between faculty and students.

In the social climate, personal growth refers to goal orientation or those areas in which development and self enhancement tend to occur. For organizational climate, this same dimension describes the emphasis which is placed on self-understanding, reflectiveness, intellectuality, scholastic discipline, and academic achievement.

Finally, the system maintenance domain in social climates characterizes how well expectations and rules are communicated and enforced as well as how adaptive the environment is to change. Figure 1 is a simplified model of Moos' (1979) framework, which helps to illustrate his concepts. This model helped me to frame questions that focused on how students were interacting with various environments once arriving at college and how these interactions were influencing their sense of self, community, and spirituality. After analysis began, based on emerging themes, I further adapted Moos' model (see Figure 2) as an organizer for presenting the analysis.

*Figure 1. simplified model of Moos' (1979) framework*



Another person-environment interaction theory that also informs the way that I approach this study is Astin's (1984) theory of involvement. Astin argues that, "a particular curriculum, to achieve the effects intended, must elicit sufficient student effort and involvement of energy to bring about the desired learning and development" (p. 522). In this model involvement simply refers to the "investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects" (p. 519). Astin points out that the most precious institutional resource is student time, and how well an institution guides and shapes how students invest their time will impact student development. In essence, Astin shows that the more time students spend in learning activities the more they learn. However, he reminds us that there is a qualitative aspect to involvement as well as a quantitative one. He argued that for learning to take place, students need to be actively engaged with their environment, and student affairs professionals and faculty need to create opportunities for involvement in and out of the classroom (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Given the spiritual overtones of the sixth learning goal articulated by the institution under study, as mentioned in the section on the context of the study, I was curious to see what kind of activities students were investing in that progressed them towards that goal.

### Validity

Given that interviewing utilizes social-constructionist, relativist, and interpretivist approaches, the question arises, how do we go about addressing the question of validity? Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the focus should be shifted and reconceptualized to one of trustworthiness and quality rather than validity. If we are to accept the many realities which exist in a relativistic approach, we need to embrace the fact that we cannot fully know, explain, or define a person's experience. There will be some areas which leave silences, and we must represent these silences in the final presentation (Smith & Deemer, 2003). Human beings and



their experiences are complex, so we must do the best we can to represent these experiences as ethically and accurately as possible. To accomplish this we can include processes that attempt to minimize the distortion that can occur because of the interviewer's role in the interview, the first of which is to recognize the role of the instrument, the human interviewer (Seidman, 1998).

### *Personal Biography*

In order to increase the trustworthiness of this research project, it is important to disclose my own background and investment in this topic. I am a white Christian male working in student affairs at the university level and have a passion for encouraging students to explore and develop their sense of self, discover their strengths, explore their spiritual life, and positively impact others by living a meaningful life. While I try and put my own assumptions about this topic to the side, I do interpret the narratives of the students through my own lens and as a result the findings are informed by my own experiences and background.

### *Trustworthiness and Credibility*

Prolonged engagement, suggested by Creswell (2003), is one way to increase the credibility of a study. This was achieved in this study by communicating through multiple email correspondence over time, spending a significant amount of time with each participant in order to establish rapport, and by including students in smaller discussion groups as part of the member checking focus group.

The member checking focus group was another means by which to increase the trustworthiness of the study. One focus group discussion was held where four participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on emerging themes.

Peer debriefing was also utilized as a part of the effort to increase trustworthiness and credibility. Creswell (2003) describes this process as "locating a person (a peer debriefer) who

reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher” (p. 196). Four individuals acted as peer debriefers throughout the duration of the study. I discussed the formation and development of the study with a female colleague in student affairs, a male pastor who has worked with the students on campus for over fifteen years, a male PhD student enrolled in the English department, and finally with my faculty chair.

### Limitations

This study is limited in its generalizability in two ways beyond those typically associated with the qualitative research approach. First, this study is conducted at a predominately white, rural, research university in the northwest. Geographical regions differ in their populations and attitudes towards religion and spirituality. It is important to note that this geographic factor contributes to the university atmosphere and culture. Second, this study has a limited number of participants and, while diversity is represented in the experiences and backgrounds of the students interviewed, there is not a great deal of ethnic diversity represented amongst participants. However, as with all qualitative research, “transferability” of the findings depends on how useful and meaningful the findings are to others in similar situations Lincoln and Guba (1985). This study includes students from both religious and non-religious backgrounds. Participants included students described themselves as Christian, Atheist, spiritual, agnostic, Buddhist, and Unitarian. While great efforts were undertaken to recruit a student from each major religion, adequate participants were not found who were LDS, Muslim, or Catholics. However, my pilot study conducted on the same campus (Jones, 2003) did include a student from each of these backgrounds and there were mainly similar experiences between these participants. While there may be subtle differences in how students from these other faith

backgrounds experience the university at which the current study is conducted, there is a great deal of transferability between students who are committed to a monotheistic religion.

#### Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Human Subjects Review board and the Office of Grant and Research Design at the institution under study. All participants were informed of the nature of the study through multiple communications and were given the opportunity to end their participation or decline to answer questions at any point they felt uncomfortable. The primary ethical concern in this study was the potential loss of confidentiality. In order to address this issue all participants were assigned a fictitious name for the final write up, and transcripts, release forms, and audio tapes were kept in a locked drawer in the principle researcher's office.

#### Summary

This qualitative study used face-to-face, audiotaped, semi-structured individual interviews of 16 undergraduate students at a public, four-year, research university as a way to understand the impact this environment had on their spirituality. The data were analyzed from a social constructionist phenomenological perspective. Emerging themes were explored and compared with relevant literature and are presented in further detail in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS

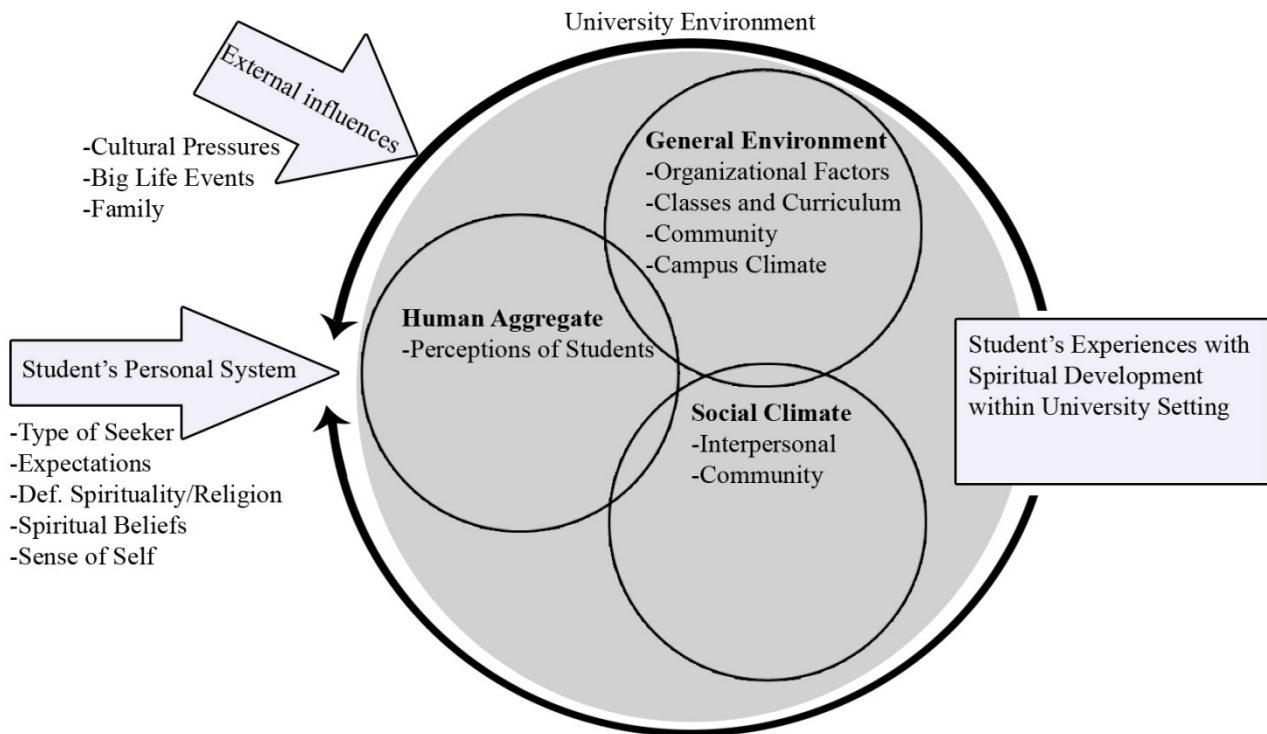
The purpose of this chapter is to present the analysis of the interview data gathered from 16 student and two faculty interviews. This chapter begins by presenting the theoretical framework used for organizing and presenting the analysis. Next, the themes generated from the data analysis are presented using the theoretical framework. In keeping with the phenomenological nature of this study, excerpts from the participants' interviews will be presented along with brief explanations to provide thick, rich descriptions, which are important to support the credibility and reliability of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

As described in chapter three, Moos' (1979) social-ecological framework, which describes the interaction between a person and an environment, is the foundation for analyzing and presenting data from the study. This framework served as a resource in developing interview questions, and, as the study progressed, I began to see how the participants' experiences at the public university integrated with the framework. I thus developed a modified version of Moos' framework (see figure 2) as a way to organize and present the themes that emerged during data analysis. Therefore, this modified framework, based on Moos' original model outlined in chapter three, serves explanatory and analytical purposes, as well as an organizational function throughout the presentation of the analysis.

I kept the basic framework of Moos' (1979) model as a way to understand participants' experiences. His model outlined the process of a student entering and environment with their personal system. That student then engages and interacts with the human aggregate, the physical environment, various organizational factors, and the social climate. These interactions then impact student stability and change. My modified framework (see Figure 2) combines the

physical environment and organizational factors into the category of general environment and I kept the human aggregate and social climate. As a result of the emerging themes I also added the external factors category to my model. My modified framework describes how participants entered into and interacted with various elements within the university environment. The process begins when the student enters college and brings along his or her own personal system of identity, made up of their spiritual background, socio-demographics, and beliefs.

Figure 2. Adaptation of Moos' (1979) Social-Ecological Framework



These background variables influence how students react to and interact with the university environment. Students enter the university asking and seeking answers to spiritual questions. Their backgrounds and expectations will affect what types of groups and communities they get involved with and how they perceive various elements of the university

environment. I conceptualize the university environment into three main categories: the general environment, the human aggregate, and the social climate.

The general environment includes the physical environment as well as organizational factors, the surrounding community, campus climate, and classes and the curriculum. The human aggregate refers to the perceptions and influence of the general student body. Finally, the social climate includes two major subcategories: interpersonal interactions and interactions within the context of a community.

As the student experiences and engages the university environment, there are external influences affecting their experiences. These external influences include larger societal pressures and cultural norms, big life events, and family relationships. The various experiences within the university environment affect the student's spiritual life, including his or her beliefs, sense of self, purpose and passions, as well as overall emotional and spiritual well-being.

The impact of this environment on the student is ongoing and influences how the student continues to engage with, perceive, and experience the university environment. These categories provide the structure to present the analysis in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

### Students' Personal System

Student participants in this study brought with them a deep and complex way of understanding their spiritual lives and sense of self. Students entered the university environment with a wide variety of religious beliefs and experiences that influenced how they perceived and engaged the university. Despite their varied backgrounds, students have many similarities in how they describe their experiences at the university, but there are also differences. Perhaps the most significant differences exist between the students who entered the university as faith-centered seekers and those who were multi-religious, wellness, or mindfulness seekers. Based

on emergent themes, I conceptualize students' personal systems according to several themes which include: type of seeker, expectations, definition of religion and spirituality, spiritual beliefs, and self-understanding.

### *Type of Seeker*

As described in chapter three, student participants had spent considerable time intentionally developing their spirituality prior to college. For the most part, participants entered and continued through college as a particular type of spiritual seeker. Dalton et al. (2006) outlined four types of student spiritual seekers: faith-centered seekers or students who engage spirituality only from the context of their own religious tradition; and multi-religious seekers, or those who seek to deepen their religious spirituality through interfaith and multi-religious exploration, dialogue, and practice. The two other types are the mindfulness seekers, or students who focus their inner search on ways to heighten self-awareness and understanding; and wellness seekers, or students who engage in spiritual activities in order to achieve a more holistic, healthy and integrated way of life. There is considerable overlap between these categories, and as a result they are not exclusive. I used participants' responses to the online survey and in-depth interviews to place them in one of the spiritual seeking categories. The next four student descriptions are provided so that readers may gain a better understanding of how I used these categories.

#### *Faith-centered seeker.*

Erik grew up in a Christian family and was raised going to church. He prays to God for guidance in life, forgiveness for sins, and to deepen his relationship with God. He considers himself a born-again Christian and regularly attends church. Erik is involved with Campus Crusade for Christ and describes himself as secure in his beliefs. He believes that people who

don't believe in God will be punished and does not believe that the world arose by chance. For Erik, the ultimate spiritual quest is to know God. He described his upbringing and his spiritual life at college:

I was fortunate for the background I had and knowing a lot about God, so I knew what to turn to when I was at the bottom of the barrel, when I knew I needed something I knew what to turn to. I turned to God, I just looked for something to get involved with, and God just put Campus Crusade for Christ in my path, and I first got involved in the Bible study in my dorm and got to be friends with some older guys in that bible study and they just became my friends, and wanted to get to know me and help me through that. And one of the Crusade guys on staff just gave me direction and they just shared from their personal experience and how they had personal relationships with God, and just giving me direction, and encouragement, and grace, and truth, and loving me for who I was, and understanding I did mess up, and I was learning, but also giving me truth from God telling me areas that needed to be worked on. Through that I just had a real desire to know God and live for God, a purpose for God, and slowly I've gotten my faith stronger, to the point I am now leading the Bible study and doing the same thing for other guys that they did for me, and helping my faith jump from a set of motions I felt I had to do, to where it is something that I want to do, that I would sacrifice everything else for, my faith in God.

According to Erik's responses to the survey questions and his account of his spiritual life, he seemed to fit best in the faith-centered category.

*Multi-religious seeker.*

Kelly does not consider herself a born-again Christian but did grow up going to a Christian church. She describes herself as a "seeker" and believes that love is at the root of all great religions. She believes that there is more good in the world than evil and also believes that the world did not arise by chance. She prays for help solving problems, to relieve the suffering of others, and to praise God. She conceives of God as a creator, teacher, and Supreme Being. She has enjoyed attending a Unitarian church a few times while at college. For Kelly, she finds emotional connections with friends to be one of the most important aspects to her spiritual life.



She has not left Christianity, but has incorporated Daoism into her spiritual beliefs. She talked about her current outlook on her spiritual beliefs:

I've been describing myself as spiritually or religiously in limbo because I haven't given up on my Christian faith, I definitely believe in God, my feelings about Jesus are confused right now because I know he was a person, I'm just not sure about Christianity in general. I definitely feel very spiritual, I'm just not huge into the whole strict religious practices and stuff. Like you have to go to church on Sunday and you have to give to the church and you have to pray all the time. Because the bible just basically says if you believe that Jesus is the son of God then you will be saved. And then people are like well now you can't get to heaven, blah, blah, blah. I guess it is my dislike for the Catholic church and how they say you have to do this and do that, and if you don't do that then your chances of getting into heaven are less, and I don't like that. And also I feel that humans are imperfect and we are not as knowledgeable as God, so why do humans have the right to interpret the bible as they think it should be? I don't think humans can interpret it correctly because it is God's word and humans are corrupt.... My friends know I am not going to say anything negative about their beliefs or discourage them from believing one thing, but when I was interested in the Unitarian church I mentioned it to them, and I was like, hey guys, do you want to check this out with me? It looks like a really cool place and they are accepting of different people and beliefs, which is why I like it, they are really accepting, anyone can go there, you can believe in God or not believe in God, they have a moment of silence where you can pray, or meditate or just do whatever feels natural to you.

According to Kelly's responses to the survey questions and her account of her spiritual life, she seemed to fit best in the multi-faith category.

*Mindfulness seeker.*

Robert is secure in his beliefs as an atheist despite attending Christian churches during his childhood. It is very important to him that he works to reduce pain and suffering in the world and improve the human condition. He also thinks that believing in supernatural phenomena is foolish and that non-religious people can lead lives that are just as moral as those of religious believers. He does believe the world arose by chance and for Robert, the ultimate spiritual quest

is to make the world a better place. He is active in the Young Democrats and Progressive Student Union and has participated in campus demonstrations to raise the awareness on issues related to university apparel made in sweatshops. Erik talks about how his commitment to social justice impacts his view of spirituality:

I consider myself an activist as well as an atheist, and that action [campus demonstration] sparked the administration to sign off on the worker rights consortium which is what we were hoping for, and so today I was at the ceremonial signing of the bill. So helping my fellow man by doing activism which leads to change is very spiritual for me...I was seeing how what I did was changing the world, and I haven't had time to really think about what happened this morning, but I think that is one of the only times that what I have done has affected change on such a drastic level, this was so major, and how the university is going to operate, hopefully forever, and when I come back and see that all this university clothing was not made in sweatshops, and that is definitely spiritual, a good feeling...I think because I see injustice, that the motivation for correcting that injustice, is because I am capable, because I have the ability financially, and mentally to make the change, I feel like I owe it to my common man to perform my best to cause change. So it's not some outside power motivating me it's completely internal.

According to Robert's responses to the survey questions and his account of his spiritual life, he seemed to fit best in the mindfulness category.

*Wellness seeker.*

Patricia describes herself as "spiritually seeking" and believes that most people can grow spiritually without being religious. She prays to be in communion with God, to express gratitude, and for emotional strength. She continually takes time for self-reflection and meditation, and believes in the goodness of all people. For Patricia, the ultimate spiritual quest is to discover who she really is. She spent much of her childhood growing up in Japan and has an appreciation for different cultures and spiritual traditions. She talked about feeling like a whole person:

I think you should be whole, like I started to learn about Buddhism in an anthropology class, and there were some things that I liked about it, like technically they aren't supposed to have a written book, there is no one leader, and it is more individual, and having self respect, and they focus a lot on if someone dies you can care, but you have to be detached, and I don't know if I liked that as much. But I kind of thought I don't have to pick a religion, as long as I feel whole that is what matters to me...I'm still seeking because I haven't limited my beliefs yet, I am always growing and I could always add or alter things to what I believe, but I am not going to stick with one religion and just say this what I am, this is what I believe, it is all written down. Mine is more like, I like this, and I like that, and this makes sense, and this doesn't...I try to at the end of the day, or throughout the day, ask myself if I were to die today would I be happy lying in my coffin? Did I tell everyone that I love you that I wanted to, did I eat my vegetables, because that is important to me, I don't want to go every day and not just sort of be neat I guess. Did I work out? Did I study? If I died today, would I be happy with my last day?

According to Patricia's responses to the survey questions and her account of her spiritual life, she seemed to fit best in the mindfulness category.

An understanding of the various seeker type categories is helpful in understanding the differences that arose between the student participants in how they viewed and interacted with the university environment. However, in addition to the type of seeker, students' personal system also consisted of their expectations, their definitions of spirituality and religion, their spiritual beliefs and their sense of self. I will describe these of these background factors.

### *Expectations*

Expectations play an important role in how students transition to college, encouraging students to take advantage of some opportunities and ignore others (Howard, 2005; Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). Expectations are dynamic, and, as students experience their environments, they alter their expectations (Pike, 2006). Additionally, expectations may

influence student behaviors in ways that help to reinforce the characteristics of the academic environments (Kuh et al., 2005).

For the most part, the students in this study had little expectation that the university would play an active role in their spiritual lives. Several students talked about how college would be a time of self-discovery, of breaking away from their parents, and establishing their own identities, but this was seen as a byproduct of attending college, not necessarily as a result of any effort by the university. So while participants were interested in seeking to discover who they were and their passions and purpose, they weren't necessarily looking to the public university to play a large role in that process. John is a journalism major, an atheist, and is passionate about reporting on and increasing awareness of third-world countries. He had just finished telling me about his concern for the poor in Africa and Asia, and I asked if attending the university had helped him develop that passion. He spoke to his expectations as he entered the university:

I don't think it is so much the university, well maybe it is, I guess just the concept of going to college, where everyone thinks it is a place of higher learning, and I took that to heart. So I really started exploring these things because I wanted to stop devoting the day to a video game or whatever, and give more time to what I think is really important. I don't know if the university influenced it as much as just watching the news.

John's expectations of what higher learning was supposed to entail influenced his choices about what kinds of mental investment he was going to make.

Abigail is an out-of-state Christian student and had spent a year at a private Christian college before transferring to the university. She had just finished talking about some of her experiences at the Christian college and I asked her if she felt like the public university had played a role in her spiritual development:

I don't think they [classes at the university] have impacted my spirituality that much. I guess my mentality is that I'm at a public school and religion is not going to come up as much, and I am in the classroom to learn and that's it. Religion is not coming up, and that really never crossed my mind as to if the professors are going to talk about it. I would expect it from my philosophy class or something but other than that, in my mind I am in the class to learn about that subject and that's it, the professor is not going to talk to me about something like that.

Both of these excerpts illustrate a common thread among the students; regardless of their spiritual beliefs, students seem to accept the notion that attending a public school meant that, save for the occasional philosophy course, spiritual matters and big life questions would not be an area of exploration. This is particularly interesting given the sixth learning goal of the university, which addresses spiritual learning outcomes. If the university intended for students to engage with the curriculum around those issues, the participants were not getting that message.

Research has shown students are coming to university campuses with an interest in spiritual matters and expect the university to play a role in their spiritual quest (Astin & Astin, 2003) and in their search for a meaningful life philosophy (Higher Education Research Institute, 2005). However, participants did not express expectations that the public university they were attending would play a role in their spiritual development. Participants benefited from, and appreciated, positive experiences on campus and in class that engaged issues of a spiritual nature. They often spoke of wishing to have more opportunities to talk openly about religion, purpose, meaning, global citizenship, vocation, etc. However, upon entering the university, participants assumed that any exploration into life's larger questions would be something they would do on their own time, outside of the class. They did not initially expect that the university would play a role in helping them figure out a meaningful life philosophy, a sense of calling, or develop their passions. Developing thought in these areas was seen by participants as an unintended byproduct of attending college, not as an intentional learning outcome of earning a degree from a

public university. The lack of expectation that the university would play a role in participants' spiritual development may be one reason why students did not seem concerned with the lack of opportunities on campus to engage their spiritual development. For the same reason, the university administration and faculty at the public university may not hear students voice a concern that there are more opportunities for spiritual engagement, even if such engagement is critically important to the holistic development of students.

### *Definitions of Religion and Spirituality*

I had outlined earlier what spirituality and religion mean in context of this study. However, as part of this study, I explored how students defined these terms. This was important for me to understand, so that as I progressed through the interview I would have a better idea of how to phrase my questions about spiritual or religious activities. Some of the students who were atheists viewed spirituality as something associated with religion. As they spoke, they described activities, which according to my definition were spiritual, but they did not initially view them as such. As our conversation continued, they seemed to embrace this wider definition of spirituality because they did consider themselves spiritual people.

Students typically viewed religion as having more to do with a specific association with one sect, denomination, or type of religion. Religion was often described as rules to abide by, specific doctrines or beliefs one must subscribe to, sacred texts to read, or corporate acts such as confession or worship.

Definitions of spirituality were much more robust, varied, and complex as students described philosophies, activities, experiences, emotions, and ways of living they considered spiritual. Students often described spirituality with words like connection, searching, openness, empathy, caring, and being in awe. Students conceptualized spirituality as an internal and more

individual pursuit than religion. Spirituality was often associated with authentic experiences and relationships. Students noted that one did not have to be religious to be spiritual and those who were religious were not necessarily spiritual. Many students talked about the need to have one's spiritual beliefs connect in a real way to their outer lives and make a positive difference. If someone was religious but it had no impact on their everyday life, then they were not seen as spiritual. I develop this idea further in a latter section. The following descriptions on religion and spirituality show the diverse range of thought on these two concepts.

I don't know if I could say what the differences are [between spirituality and religion]. I know there are. There are some people who say they are spiritual but not religious, religious is more guidelines, spirituality is more feelings, that's what I think of. Spiritual is like you know there are things around you that you can't see or understand, you may believe there is a higher being or a God or something or there are spiritual beings around you is the general thing that comes to mind. And trusting those or interacting with those and knowing there is more to this life than what you can see. That's a hard concept to define, knowing there is more than what you can see. [John]

I consider myself a very spiritual person, but spirituality to me, like you said, is a very vague word, and to me it can be as simple as a bike ride can be a very spiritual experience, or volunteering or community service like the Teach for America thing. Something that makes you feel good and connected to other people, that's how I would define spirituality. So even though it is not religious, spirituality, I feel like I get the same good feeling that a religious spirituality gives other people. [Robert]

Spirituality has a little bit of being religious and a little more being agnostic, because I feel like I am always searching for something, so that whole searching aspect of it is where the spirituality part comes in, exploring new ideas and exploring different faiths and seeing what other people believe, and talking about things I like and saying oh yea, that is something that I can incorporate or something that makes sense to me, maybe I could try that. [Tiffany]

Religion I would say is something that you do to live as a group of people but spirituality would be as an individual, like how do you mentally make yourself healthier? So I guess religion is more of a group, spirituality would be more individual, religion would be your outlet and how you have been raised. I think

religion is like, we believe that cheese is the best thing on earth, but with spiritually you can say I think that yogurt is the best thing on earth. [Mike]

If I said that I was religious I would want to add more to that. People get a negative feeling when you say religious, I think of legalism, you do these things because that is what you are supposed to do. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth when I say religious. If someone says are you religious, I say yea, but I try and explain a little bit more about what I believe. When I think of religious for me, I think of a certain spiritual sect and beliefs that you follow. I would say that is what religious means, a certain set of guidelines that you follow. [Erik]

Participants' conception of religion fit with Zinnbauer et al.'s (1997) definition outlined in the introduction. Most participants defined religion narrowly, as having to do with an organized way of practicing spiritual beliefs. This often had to do with belonging to a specific church and participating in activities such as worship and church services. Religion was typically perceived in a more negative way since it was associated with rules, a lack of critical thought, closed-mindedness, and as being judgmental. Likewise, participants' definitions of spirituality mirrored those ideas in contemporary writings on student development (Cickering et al., 2006; Dalton, 2001; Love, 2000; Zinnbauer et al.). Spirituality was conceptualized as a connection with others, of leading a meaningful life, the discovery of purpose, belonging to a community, a personal search for meaning, a relationship with a higher power, and experiencing the wonder of nature.

### *Spiritual Beliefs*

The spiritual beliefs of students are quite varied, and while some similarities are present, there are major differences between the faith-centered seekers and the multi-religious, mindfulness, and wellness seekers. One commonality was that all students, at some point prior to entering college, had gone through a period of critical examination. During high school, students typically had asked themselves if they really believed the religion in which they were raised. For some students, this was just a natural part of adolescent development. For others, the



questioning began during a philosophy class they had taken at a community college during high school prior to enrolling in the university. These classes sparked their interest, exposed them to new ideas, and caused them to reexamine their religious beliefs. As a result of this period of critical examination, most students entered college with a certain trajectory. That is, on some level, students had made a decision as to what degree they were committed to following a certain spiritual path.

The faith-centered seekers in the study were fairly committed to the notion of pursuing a deeper experience in the Christian religion of their upbringing. Students who had become skeptical of the religion of their childhood typically decided to be atheistic and tended to fall into the category of wellness and mindfulness seekers. Student participants that entered college with a concept of a higher power but were open to exploring many religions were typically multi-religious seekers. These commonalities and differences were most apparent in their beliefs in God or a higher power, the purpose of prayer, the nature of evil, and what it means to be a spiritual person.

*Concept of God/belief in a higher power.*

While students conceived of God in a variety of ways, it was interesting that all students held at least some room for the notion of a higher power. Even the most atheistic of students admitted that there was part of them that held on to the thought that something was out there, and in extreme circumstances would pray. Therefore, while I interviewed a few students who classified themselves as atheist, they had commonalities with various spiritual seekers in that they left room for a higher power and had thoughts on how this affected their lives.

The Christian students held traditional views of God. These students view God as someone who is involved in their lives, has a plan for them, and actively leads them in the decisions that they make.

Students who were spiritual but not religious viewed God in a variety of ways. Some felt that God, whatever it is, does not take an active role in life, but merely observes us.

I think there is something after you die, maybe you come back or stay there, or become an angel, it's there. I think our consciousness goes somewhere and there is something, like God, that would welcome it. But what that is I don't really know, I just know it is there. I believe in God, but I believe that Jesus was a man, just like Muhammad, and John, and Luke, and Judas were men... I think he [God] lets us do what we want to, I think there are possibilities of something happening but I think that stuff is set in motion by us, and not by him, and whether he puts it in front of us or not, it's set in motion by us. [James]

I did the buffet thing, I looked at all the world's religions, or most of them, and then I decided which ones most fit what I liked and then I changed it to fit me and I don't know if I am allowed to do that, but that's what I did. I found my niche in Buddhism, I loved his teaching, but it was very peaceful, you have never heard of Buddhists killing millions of people, and I believe in Karma and all that stuff, but Buddhism is a non-theistic religion and I believe in a God, but it's not a Christian God, it's like a deist's God, where he created it and then stepped back and is not involved in our day to day lives. [Barbara]

Others felt that God would intervene in life in extreme circumstances but, for the most part, stayed out of the everyday lives of people.

There was this cartoon I saw in the newspaper that I thought was profound. There was this polar bear and a rabbit that have spiritual conversations and the rabbit is asking well, does God have control over my life? And the polar bear goes over and picks up a stick, and he says, this is you, you are like a stick, and drops the stick in the river, and the stick flows down, and it comes to a fork in the river, and he picks up the stick, and puts it one side of the fork, and the stick floats wherever it wants to, and he says that is what God is like. We have choices in our lives, but there are times when God guides us one way or the other, he influences us, like this is something you should be doing. [Kelly]

Even though many students felt that the higher power did not influence their daily lives, they often expressed the desire to connect with God on the direction in their life.

I do I think it is nice to think there is someone watching out for us that transcends all of this, but I think of it more as a here and now thing, not necessarily like an afterlife reward punishment system but something more that can help you in your day to day. I was doing research the other day on the 12 step program and everything, and they were talking about how you have to hand your addiction over to the higher power, because you can't handle it on your own, and I think it is neat to think there is some omni-present being every once in a while giving you a boost when you need it, but then any time something bad happens I am like hey, what's that about, stop that. I think the God as I see it is different than a lot of people, just because it is more personal day to day type stuff not the whole please help me do this today so I can get into heaven, it's more like God I have a flat tire, that sucks, why did you do that type of a thing? [Tiffany]

*Purpose of prayer.*

Since most students left room for a God or a Supreme Being in their lives, they were also engaging in prayer for a variety of reasons. Some students, like Patricia, prayed as a way to vent about sadness, as well as to ask for help on the behalf of others.

I talk to the supreme being every now and then. I think he knows who I am, I think we have an informal relationship because I don't ask him for things, I do like, if I want something I will do it myself, I don't need him to do it for me. Usually once a month I'll have a breakdown and I talk to him about that, but I'll only allow myself to do that once a month, because I don't like to cry because when I cry I feel like what I am upset about is so silly and unimportant compared to what is going on around the world. When I get sad I'll think I shouldn't be crying, I'll read something about a girl being raped and think they are allowed to cry today, and people in war are allowed to cry today, and I can't and so he knows that so that is my way of saying go help them sort of thing. [Patricia]

Other student participants talked about praying for loved ones.

I believe that prayer has an effect. I know there are people who believe it works because it allows you to connect your subconscious to other people and give them strength, kind of weird. But I believe that a person's strength, when they can pray allows you to show how much you want that person to live, because if you only pray when you have to it shows a lot more than if you just pray every day, and

you always pray for the wellness of your family, and all the sudden your dad is ill and you went to pray, would God notice the difference? Would there be any difference in the way you pray. I believe he has a spiritual power that gets to everyone else and that he will transmit that to someone else if you are not there, and allow them to have a little extra strength. [James]

Student participants also prayed for clarity about what was happening, to seek direction in life, or simply express gratitude.

There are times when I will be really upset and I won't see the bigger picture of things, and I get really upset and I like to vocalize it, and why the hell is this happening to me, what's this for, what are you doing to me, or there will be times like this morning when I was walking to class and the sun was coming out and it was a gorgeous day and I was like, ah this is nice, thank you, there is no ritualistic sense to any of it I guess. [Tiffany]

#### *Nature of evil.*

Students seem to have spent at least some time considering the nature of evil, or, put another way, why bad things happen to good people. It is important because many of the students have the desire to help people, relieve suffering in the world, and leave the world having made a positive impact on others. Their notion of why bad things exist in the world and what they can do about it is often a source of tension for students. On the one hand, many students believe in the good nature of people, and yet they see people doing so many evil things.

Some students subscribe to a viewpoint that all things happen for a reason, but then struggle to make sense of the reason for so much strife in the world around them. Tiffany, who is a multi-faith seeker, felt this tension when she attempted to counsel her students as a resident advisor:

I think it has really helped out being open to new things because I have met so many different people, and our campus isn't very diverse but just the little differences in people made me realize everyone is unique, and that applies to religion or spirituality too, everybody believes something a little different, but at the same time my experiences, most have been good, but when bad things have

happened it's hard to understand why do bad things happen to good people, there have just been things that have happened to my residents or other people in the building and I'm just like oh my gosh it's not fair, it's just bad you know? I like to do the whole, everything happens for a reason, but I mean, I am struggling with that myself at the moment, it's hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel and know at some point that this is going to make sense and be ok. But I guess that's where my degree of faith comes in, I can look at awful things and tell myself that it's going to be ok, and whatever vehicle I have to take to get there I know something is going to come along that's going to make everything better in the long run, and that's like when my residents would have bad things happen to them, it was hard because you are sitting there with them and you feel for them so much, and you know what they are going through sucks, but at the same time you have to be that person who is like, it's going to be ok and I don't think I could tell that to people with any confidence if I didn't believe it myself.

Many of the spiritual but not religious students place a heavy emphasis on not judging others and the right for people to live the way they choose, and yet, they recognize that because of people's choices in lifestyle, other people around the world are suffering. Kelly, a multi-faith seeker, talks about the freedom to choose and the nature of evil:

My step dad would do this, he would say give me a hug and I wouldn't want to give him a hug...maybe we were fighting about something, but he would pressure me into apologizing and getting over it really fast, which I never wanted to do, and would have to give him a hug, but still be mad about it. And when someone forces you to do something like that it's not really love. But, when people give you freedom and choices, that's love. God can't make you love him, he can't make you give him hugs, so God has to give you the choice and by giving people choices and freedom, some people make the wrong choices. I don't understand why some people do the things they do...but there is evil and I guess Satan influences people maybe. And I also think to understand what good is there has to be evil, if there is not a bad thing, there can't be the good thing, but because there is good there is also not good, people make a distinction.

Finally, some student participants felt that evil was a purely social construct:

Yea, I think evil is kind of an excuse in a way, to try and put it outside of your realm of experience. I've had some mental experiences when I started dabbling in mysticism, and it seems sinister, and it seems like there is some stuff out there that is just dark, but in a way it is just a reflection of how we interpret it, like there

are these qualities out there but I think we make it evil, we define it. I think people put too much importance on good or bad, black and white, democrat or republican, there are a lot more sides to the coin. Yea, I think evil is kind of an excuse in a way, to try and put it outside of your realm of experience. [Steve]

*What it means to be spiritual.*

Student participants discussed what it means to be a spiritual person or live a life that is from the spirit. Christian students often related this to their relationship with God, and in having their faith influence their daily life as they interact with others. This notion of connection between spiritual beliefs and practical implementation is seen across all of the students, and there is an element of searching for ways to make a connection that makes sense and has a positive impact. Being spiritual for many students involves being open, appreciating life, music, art and nature, searching for answers, asking questions, listening, feeling connected to others, slowing down, and paying attention to the little things in life.

Steve talks about this need to practically apply things he has learned from his trips on psychedelic drugs:

Timothy Lear wrote a book called the psychedelic experience where he compared the LSD experience alongside the Tibetan book of the dead and he thought if you were in the right mindset and you looked at it in a certain way while you were tripping you would go through a light version of the death rebirth intermediate stages and experience all this. This author said, I had this intense experience and it would last a few days afterwards but then it would go away so it really only makes sense if you want to get any benefit out of it is to learn how to incorporate it into your life through music or art or whatever. That's what one of my favorite artists Alex Grey said too was that LSD experiences are inspirational but they don't matter unless you learn to incorporate that into the sober world.

Mary felt that being spiritual was about a connection with God:

I guess loving the world and loving people no matter what their beliefs are and living and making the right choices, feeling connected to God, being able to talk, even though I'm unsure what God is exactly, some of me thinks that God is part of myself.

Several students talk about being disillusioned with religion because it did not connect to their everyday life or seem to have a positive impact on those around them.

I'm spiritual but not religious, I have a lot of issues with organized religion, because the church my parents and I went to until I was 16 the pastor drove a BMW and wore nice clothes and went to Hawaii three times a year and there were people starving in the church, so it was like where are you getting this money and not that he should starve but it's like, he became a televangelist and went from this small place to this multi-million dollar building and it has a reader board, just ridiculous and the tithing thing where it's like give give give, and you're not seeing where its going you're seeing him with nicer cars, but what about the people below poverty level? I just feel like people follow what the pastor says like a cult. I like watching the history channel on Jones town and seeing the cult mentality and why people do this, I think people just follow what people say rather than learning it from people in the bible. Like the speaking in tongues thing, like people say I'm an Assembly of God so I believe in it, but they haven't really thought about it themselves. I just feel like people should research it on their own. [Barbara]

Oh absolutely, I know some people who go to church every Sunday, would never miss it but then the other six days of the week they do some things that I'm like, that's not very Christian. I think it's too bad because I think religion in its basic context is a good thing but I think when people get so wrapped up in doing the little rituals and the dogmatic things it loses sight of its focus. [Tiffany]

Kelly talks about her spiritual journey and trying to decide if she believes in God:

I don't know, last year I remember having a conversation with one of my friends and I was like I think I am going to start believing in God again which I thought was funny because we actually did sit down and have a conversation about it and I guess at that point I was looking for some kind of fulfillment or some kind of sense that ok, you know you are not alone, and there is someone in this with you I guess. And so in that regard I think a lot of people are looking for salvation or perpetuate their soul or something, and for me I was looking for a buddy I guess.

She goes on to talk about the importance of asking questions and always searching:

I'm naturally a big question person about a lot of things and I think if I were just to accept something and just be like ok this is what it is, I would be bored and I think always having a next question you are trying to answer is what makes life

interesting. So I can't think of anything specific, but I guess I can tie it all back to the lab I am working in. We are doing research on this one property that we knew has been proven time and time again and one thing got tweaked in the experiment and something different happened and sent us on a whole other path and that sent us on to another path and that's how I want to do things in a spiritual sense, like once I accept something, asking myself why and seeing if that opens up anymore doors because I refuse to believe there is a definite answer for any of this, we are never going to be able to prove anything but it is sure fun to try. I had never really had an a lot of information about Daoism but once I started to learn about it I feel connected to it, not as a religion, but as a philosophy more because there is Daoism as religion and have some weird practices, and they all strive for immortality, and if you see videos on it people seem kind of crazy, but more philosophically, because Dao is the way and the way is specific to each person so you can't really describe what Dao is, and I really like that idea, that if you follow the way that is appropriate for you then you are doing something that is right and you are going the right way for your life, and I also think that is an important thing that people are their true self, and don't try to be something they are not. So I really like that I feel like it is really applicable to how I feel about life.

Stacey also touches on this element of searching:

My friend said that the best way to understand God is to search for him and one thing that he has gotten from his bible is that God wants us to search for him and I take that as, if I do my own searching and thinking and trying to understand the different religions and spirituality then I can understand God better and the way he works better. So right now I am in still in that stage of searching and trying to understand different things better.

Some students expressed their feelings of being unfulfilled or sensing that something was missing when they were at college. This may have been a sense of purpose, a community, a sense of belonging or connection with God and this feeling led them to seek out ways to fill that void.

At a couple of different points I was like I need God, this life is just not satisfying me, it's fun for an hour or two hours or whatever I am doing partying, living for myself, or following my own desires, it may last for a little while, but it's not fulfilling, it doesn't have a lasting effect that I knew I had when I was younger. I came to college and realized I was missing that, I was craving God, and realized what was missing, I knew my life wasn't complete. [Erik]



Both my parents are atheists, my mom was born and raised Presbyterian but she lost that in her middle school years, and my dad was born and raised Jewish, their parents didn't cultivate in them so in turn they didn't cultivate it in me or my brother. So I don't really have a background in that. So I would say my upbringing is more pragmatic, skeptical and science based. When I came to college I felt something was missing almost, like a sense of community and culture that comes with spirituality and organized religion. So last year I finally joined the Hillel group and I felt really comfortable with them and it felt like they fulfilled that need for community, and it was definitely a learning environment as well for the Jewish part of my family. [Stacey]

Most participants viewed their spiritual life as somewhat separate from their college experience. Students were rarely engaging spiritual topics in their classes, and many participants did not have a core group or community with whom they could talk about their spiritual lives. As a result, many participants were seeking ways to engage their spiritual life outside of the university. Some participants developed their spiritual life primarily through a student group like Campus Crusade for Christ, Hillel, or the Progressive Student Union. These groups were powerful influences in their spiritual life, and provided a place of belonging where students found spiritual support. Participants who did not belong to a specific student group lacked the formal outlets for spiritual exploration. Through these groups, participants engaged in volunteerism, mission trips, and alternative spring breaks as ways to learn more about themselves, others, and deepen their spirituality.

Participants had many ideas of what it meant to lead a spiritual life, pursue spiritual development, or to deepen their sense of spirituality. All students spoke of the desire to learn more about other cultures, religions, and people different from themselves. They thrived on spiritual discussions which were characterized by authentic dialogue and exchange. Nearly every participant (15 out of 16) had a strong desire to help others in the world and improve the human condition. Relationships and a sense of community, or connection to others, were of

central importance in the spiritual lives of participants. Although not every participant had a spiritual community in which they felt they could belong, their stories revealed a deep longing for connection and to find their spiritual place on campus.

### *Sense of Self*

The last category I describe within the personal system of students is their sense of self. In the context of this study, sense of self was discussed as it relates to their sense of spirituality, which for some students is connected to a specific religion. This was true of the faith-centered seekers, but other students derived a large part of their sense of self from the activities they engaged in, which they perceived as spiritual in nature. These students' sense of self directly connected with their spiritual journey. This connection between students' concept of self and their spirituality is not surprising given the work in student development that takes into account this spiritual dimension (Fowler, 1981; Love, 2001; Love, Bock, Jannarone, Richardson, 2005; Parks, 2000).

The notions of purpose, calling, and vocation are key aspects to students' sense of self and represent "big life questions" students are attempting to answer during college (Parks, 2000). Further, college campuses are in a unique place to help students realize their sense of purpose in life (Parks, 2000). I asked students what they were most passionate about, what they felt their purpose was, and what they felt they wanted to accomplish or contribute to the world. Students fell into three main categories: those who had a very specific idea of their purpose, those who had a general idea, and those who had little or no idea of their purpose in life. Students who had a specific idea of how they would contribute to the world typically had some direct experience doing what they were passionate about, and were the exception. Nearly all students had a general idea of their purpose in life, but had difficulty articulating how that purpose would

translate to their practical life after they graduated. Only a few students could not articulate even a general sense of purpose in their life, and of all the participants, they were the ones who struggled to articulate any spiritual philosophy to the way they lived their life.

*Students who have a specific idea of their purpose.*

Students who fall in this category have a better idea of how they will contribute to the world once they graduate. Robert, a chemistry major, is very politically involved on campus through the progressive student union. He has some practical experience teaching kids while in college after he took the initiative to get involved in a program through the Center for Civic Engagement.

I've been really involved in research that I really like, since sophomore year I have been working in a lab where I build and am testing a spectrometer that detects explosives in airports. Currently people wearing perfume or lotion will set off this thing because it has the same chemical structure as explosives, and when it gets set off it is very expensive, and a time demanding process to ground all the planes and have to strip search this person to make sure they don't have explosives on them. so those false negatives are a big issue for the TSA and that's what our lab is working on fixing, so it has been a very rewarding experiencing how my chemistry work can influence change as well. I like having that direct action feeling of seeing your change rather than having it go through two years of experimentation and processing. but I like the chemistry thing and I feel like eventually I can merge these two lives [his science life and spiritual life] into one hopefully.

Q: Have there been ways that has happened in school so far?

Yes, last year was my first attempt and I tutored a science Olympiad team in Colton and it is a competition where middle and high-schoolers will build like a catapult and then they take it to competition a regional and a state, and so I worked with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders teaching entomology and forensic detection, physics, and building a Rube Goldberg device. So that was merging the science life with my education with my social skill of being able to talk to these kids and it went really well and my team placed there in state.

Tiffany also has some specific ideas of how she can help people and contribute through research in science.

I think big picture, just being that go to person for people, I want to be a vet and I want to do neurology, and have that degree of specialty, and there are lots of research opportunities with animals that you could never do with people, and just some of the things I have done in my research lab. Like my dad has a drug problem, he was addicted to narcotic pain killers and in my lab that's what I am doing in my lab, we are trying to find a way to eliminate the use of those types of drugs and just thinks like that where I can project big picture and see that it can make a difference for people. That's the biggest way I can see myself really making a difference and who is to say if it will happen, but maybe the things I do with that can contribute somehow to the bigger picture of that. I think the day to day just trying to do the best I can to be a nice supportive and helpful person to people around me because there is no reason for people to be mean to others or try and make people's lives shitty, we are all here together and in it together so why can't we have a little synergy?

John is journalism major. He has an idea of what he wants to do and aspires to write on third-world countries and raise awareness about global issues. He makes an interesting comment about possibly being discouraged at the idea of one person really making a change since not much has changed with Darfur, even after a reporter he admires won a Pulitzer prize for his writings on that region.

Yea, it seems farfetched, I mean in terms of making a huge difference, I mean I referenced Nicholas Kristof, he has won Pulitzer prizes for reporting on Darfur and that's a huge deal, winning a Pulitzer prize, and it hasn't made a great difference, and this is a guy who works at the New York Times, so I am thinking if he wins that and look at what is still happening, what can I do? It is sobering.

*Students who have a general idea of their purpose.*

Most students have at least a general idea of what their purpose in life is. For Christian students, this was usually to live a life pleasing to God, to love God, to love others, and to spread the Gospel. For non-religious and spiritual students, this is typically articulated as helping

others, making a positive impact, or making the world a better place. However, when probed further, these students were not easily able to identify specific ways they would help or love others. Further, they could not recall being presented with, or having taken part in, any activities that gave them practical experience doing the things they are so passionate about. Kelly, a multi-religious seeker, talks about feeling as though she has a purpose:

I feel like I have a purpose that I was born for, I don't know exactly what that is. For some reason in high school I felt like I was going to go to college and meet my soul mate, and we were going to fall in love, get married, have a family and it was going to be amazing...so I feel like there is a goal that is in my life that I am aiming at, that is meant to be, like a fate kind of thing.

In my conversation with Erik, a Christian student, he describes how his degree might relate to his purpose and how to help people, but he has no practical experience doing what he dreams of:

My purpose in life is to live for God. For every moment just to say, what does God want me to do? If I make decision no matter how big or how small, just asking what is Gods will for the situation right now, it may not always be a clear answer, but just the kind of what would Jesus do, what would honor God, further his kingdom, what would honor God in my actions?

Q: Do you have a sense of what God wants you to do after you graduate?

I am pretty open right now, I haven't heard God say this is what you should do, I'm just pursuing jobs working for an ag company as a field man, I don't know, there is not always a definite path we have to take or we dishonor God, I don't think there is always one certain thing we have to do in every situation, but me and my fiancé feel God calling us to the work force right now and getting jobs, but wherever we go just knowing our purpose for God in our workplace and getting involved with different circles at church or different organizations and for our workplace to be an example for God, talk about spiritual things with people, talk about Christianity with people, be in a church to help them grow and be open to people and just be the light of God wherever we are. We are thinking eventually we may go to be missionaries to be overseas like maybe Africa is where our hearts are right now, just dreaming about that, that God may call us overseas or something.

Q: How do you see yourself reducing pain and suffering in the world?

Well, in our vision of Africa we see meeting people's physical and spiritual needs. The most obvious is physical pain and suffering but we believe there is also spiritual pain and suffering and we want to do both, meet their physical and spiritual needs at the same time, we don't want to just go in and share the gospel and just meet their spiritual needs when one of the first things that disciples did after Jesus was gone was they asked guys to take care of the widows and orphans, to make sure their physical needs were met, so God is calling us to meet those physical needs too. So in going to Africa with my major of ag business and my fiancé's major of nursing I can help with agriculture and business and organizational structure and Andrea can help with medical stuff. Meeting those physical needs and then also meeting spiritual needs in sharing the Gospel and talking about spiritual things and see if they are satisfied and if there is pain and suffering there too.

Q: Do you feel like you get an opportunity on this campus to meet people's physical needs?

No I don't think so, what would there, yea, like food, um...like, nutritional needs, or diseases, no, I would say there is not an opportunity to meet people's physical needs.

Q: Do you do much community service in and around this community?

No not really, no, I've never had the opportunity to meet people's physical needs. I have one friend with an eating disorder and I can encourage him, but that's the only thing I can think of...so no.

Rachel is a Christian student majoring in journalism and talks about her sense of purpose:

I think right now, my purpose, well, overall my purpose would just be to make Jesus and God's name famous on the Earth, so just telling people about him and like through my life showing people that God exists and you can have a relationship with Jesus Christ, kind of like those juniors and seniors did my freshman year, showed me what it looked like to be a Christian and not be a missionary, because you look at missionaries and you go, oh of course they are Christians, like everyday their job description shows people they are a Christian where as being a journalist, there are lots of non-Christian journalists, so it's like what it looks like to live and have a career and be a part of the world but be a

Christian and maintain a relationships with Jesus Christ? So I think my purpose would be to do that for other people.

Many of the mindfulness seekers talked about their purpose in terms of just being the best person they could be:

I want to be the best person I can. Just try not to do any wrong to anyone and if I do I try to correct it try to help my friends out do good things for them do good stuff, pay people back for the kindness they do to me and if I can go out of my way to do something nice for someone, and if I think of something do it, if I hurt someone, apologize. Just try not to do any harm and do good and although that's not possible try and correct it if I do wrong. [James]

Mike, a Buddhist, talked with me about his general idea of his purpose, but he also related finding his purpose to who he is:

Live day by day and do what I can in the moment right now while starting to structure a bridge towards the future.

Q: What are the things you see yourself wanting to accomplish in the day or in the future?

Just simple goals like I am going to finish this homework assignment by four or I'm doing laundry today or email a friend I haven't emailed in a while, by doing the things you have to do each day you get closer to your long term goals.

Q: What do you see as your long term goals or that what you want to do before you die?

I'd like to figure out who I am by the time I die.

Stacey talked about her purpose and then related her strength in her faith to strength in knowing who she was:

I think that will give me a better sense of security with who I am, I'm pretty secure at the moment, but everyone has their time when the struggle with different things and lot of the people I have experienced who are secure in their faith are also very secure with who they are as a person. I remember my mom saying when I was younger that if I had been involved with the outgoing Jewish

community then I would be a more outgoing and secure person because I have those tendencies where I want to be boisterous and be the life of the party, but I don't and one thing I would like to get out of being secure in my faith is being secure in myself.

Multi-religious seekers, like Kelsey, also mentioned this desire to figure out who they are and their purpose:

I want to be the best person I can be, I'm not perfect, I can try and be as close to perfect as possible but I am still going to make mistakes. To be the best person I can be and then take responsibility for my own actions.

Q: What does that look like to you?

Helping people when they need help, making the effort to change something in society that needs to be changed. Like racial issues. I am very interested in indigenous issues and especially in this country they are overlooked, because the indigenous population is so small they are marginalized, those issues don't enter into people's consciousness on a regular basis. So that is one thing that I am really passionate about in general.

Multi-religious seekers seem to be much more influenced by the university environment in shaping their beliefs, sense of purpose, and passions. Perhaps this is because they are more open to new ideas or because they take a more active role in researching and pursuing different spiritual philosophies. Tiffany highlights this exploration of different philosophies while in college:

As much as I would like to say that I had that figured out when I was 15 it has defiantly changed a lot since I have come here and as far as my purpose, I have always thought the only reason we are here is to make life easier for each other and that hasn't really changed but my approach to it has changed like how I interact with people or how I see the implications of what I am doing and how I can think of different ways to help people. So in that regard it hasn't changed, but my beliefs, I went from being Catholic, to non-denominational Christian, to atheist to being agnostic and now more spiritual. I have just been hoping around a lot and as far as that aspect of who I am as a person it has changed a lot since I've come here and I think it is just because there are so many things to look at and



things to experience and people to meet who are all so different, it's hard not to let yourself be morphed a little into this that or the other thing.

In talking about purpose and vocation, students also talked about the tension that exists between doing something meaningful and being comfortable. Mary touches on this idea:

I am struggling to find a job right now, that's part of that, is who I am, to me right now is what am I going to do with my life, and I feel like I want to make an impact on the world, I really know how right now...it goes along with the serving thing, matching my passions and interests with something really great that I could do. I think I have known who I am for a while. My mom always tells me about my 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who knows who she is or something like that, I wore sweats and didn't care what other people thought, I did in high school but...I want to serve I guess...and enjoy life, like I want to find a job that makes me happy, everyone does but I've struggled a lot with do I want more money or something less secure and I have heard about that a million times over through my life but when you actually get to that decision it's like, do I want health care? Or you have your parents telling you to get a better job and I'm feeling like an unpaid internship is the better route, but I don't know.

Steve is another student who brings up this struggle of wanting to live a meaningful life within a system that promotes a utilitarian view of education.

It seems like a lot of people at college including my girlfriend, they are just kind of going through the motions, it doesn't seem like they are really that involved towards what they want to do, I'm not either, but I guess you could tie that into the sense of spirituality, there is no direction, it's kind of just follow this straight line that has been set up by academia and society, get the grades, get the piece of paper, get the job, get the family, you know...close the book.

*Students who have little or no idea of their purpose.*

Only a few of the students did not have at least a general sense of their purpose. These students also seem to be the ones who had the most difficulty finding any place on or off campus that served to encourage them on their spiritual journey.

Steve is a philosophy major who has little to no idea of his purpose and struggles with depression. He has explored many philosophies and spiritual backgrounds. He has also

experimented with psychedelic drugs such as mushrooms and DMT (also called the spirit molecule) as a way to heighten and guide his spiritual quest. He left Montana State after his first year due in large part to his process of questioning his purpose when things were not working out with the film school there. He describes his current state in finding purpose in life:

I feel a little aimless right now, like I haven't really found my calling whatever you want to call it. I still feel like I am relying on my parents financially. I feel in the nest in that respect, so I don't know if I am going to really feel the urge to really pursue something until I am on my own, I feel like I am going to need to be on my own without that support and comfort level of mommy and daddy's bank account before I can be like, this is what I want to do.

George has the least humanistic outlook with his notion of purpose. He is also the least interested in spiritual matters of all the students in the study. I asked him if he had been able to answer the question, who he is and what his purpose is in life?

I don't know if I have answered those questions but I think that I have come to terms with them so I don't drive myself crazy. I just remember at one point those questions really did concern me a lot, probably my freshman year and they arise from time to time, I think I am at ease with them, I don't know that I have answered them. Basically, I only have a certain amount of time in the world so while I am here I am going to do things for fulfillment and to make my life enjoyable, but I find enjoyment in helping someone else...so...career wise I'm not sure, I don't really practically try and go and help people right now, but I'd like to have a financially sound basis and have money to go and do things or give to charity. That's one reason I chose accounting is because it pays well and if I don't have to worry about money then I can do things that I really do enjoy. I would like to leave a mark and be remembered for something, what that is exactly I'm not sure. It would be nice.

Participants' notions of their purpose in life and what they want to do after graduation was informed by their spiritual beliefs. While some students did not have a specific idea of what they would be doing post-graduation, their desire to make a positive impact in the world and live a meaningful life was rooted in a rich spiritual journey.

In conclusion, students entered the university environment with a wide variety of spiritual beliefs and experiences that influence how they perceive and engage the university. I noticed many similarities across all the students in how they experienced the university environment. However, significant differences were apparent in how students perceived and engaged the university environment. The most significant differences were between students who are faith-centered seekers and those who are multi-religious, wellness, or mindfulness seekers. These differences will be highlighted throughout the rest of this chapter.

### University Environment

According to my adaptation of Moos' (1979) model (see figure 2), students enter the university environment they interact with in several areas. This environment is categorized into three major areas: the general environment, the human aggregate, and the social climate. This section will report on how students from a wide variety of backgrounds and spiritual beliefs interact with and perceive the university environment.

#### *General Environment*

The general environment category encapsulates many areas that students describe when talking about the university in more general terms. In order to make sense of these broad generalizations, I organized the data into four areas: (a) organizational factors, (b) classes and curriculum, (c) community, and (d) campus climate.

#### *Organizational Factors*

Organizational factors refer to those systems of operation or world views that are built into the organization and impact the way students experience the university environment. These organizational factors contribute to an overall campus culture. Culture can be thought of as the “collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions

which guide the behavior of individuals and groups and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off the campus” (Kuh, 1993, p.2). There were many similarities in the way students described the general university environment and culture. These included the characteristics of “neutrality”, “busyness”, and “scientific worldview”. These characteristics are described in the following paragraphs.

*Neutrality.*

Most students talked about the university being a neutral entity. They felt that it neither discouraged nor encouraged spiritual exploration. Students had a difficult time identifying ways they were encouraged to think about big life questions in their daily experiences on campus. Occasionally students talked about a 9/11 remembrance or anti-violence display that they would encounter when walking across campus, but, for the most part, students did not see the university as a spiritual or non-spiritual place. Several students pointed out that if a student was interested in developing their spirituality, they would need to take the initiative to pursue that desire on their own. Opportunities were not going to present themselves to the student. It was the student’s responsibility to find communities or spaces where they could further that pursuit.

Renea describes this phenomenon:

I think there are people involved in the different ministry groups on campus that are interested in your spiritual exploration but they are spread so thin they can’t address it with you as often, plus you have to seek it out and I never sought out anyone to help me out with that and no one sought me out either. I think it is a two way street.

Abigail spent one year at a private Christian school before transferring to the public university. The private school had a structure that gave her many options for spiritual exploration in the forms of discussion groups, bible studies, community service, and speakers. The curriculum included spiritual issues, and since not every professor was a Christian, she did

hear other religious and non-religious points of view. While she recognized that not all of these opportunities would be as prominent at the public university, she struggled the first two years after transferring to find places and communities supportive of her spiritual pursuits. When she went from an organizational culture that promoted spiritual exploration to one that was neutral, she struggled to give the same time and energy to her spiritual life as she focused on the academic rigors of classes. As she describes her first year after transferring, she mentions dealing with an increasingly busy schedule:

I think I just stopped praying and talking to God and I just kind of took a step back instead of steps forward. I think as the semester went on I just got focused and so engaged with my school work that I put class above the main focus of God and that was my down and the distance I felt, the ups would be going to church and remembering that I should be focusing on God, but as soon I came back to campus it was just, you know, I didn't have that.

*Busyness.*

This issue of busyness was one that seemed to affect students from every background. Students overall seem to struggle with being too busy. Many spoke of not having the time they wanted to focus on their spiritual life or to reflect on where they were going in life. Many participants felt that after graduation they would have more time to figure out their purpose in life. Further, when students mentioned joining student groups or hearing about events on campus like speakers, art exhibit, or film series that sounded interesting to them, they were too busy to attend. The following excerpts highlight some common thoughts about being busy:

I think people are so busy trying to figure out who they are that they don't bother to talk to other people about figuring out who they are, they are worrying about themselves and not about others. Everyone is thinking about themselves. [Mike]

I don't apply my spirituality at all right now, I haven't had time, I've been so busy, it's just been on the back burner, this atmosphere isn't the most nurturing for religion and spiritual development. I like Zen Buddhism but there is only one group that meets here but they are all over the age of 50 or 60 and I was like, is

there anyone my age around here that I can talk to about these things? So I am kind of waiting until I get to Los Angeles or New York somewhere more mainstream where I can actually develop it further. [Barbara]

John provides a valuable perspective on the issue of busyness. He reminds us that students make choices on how to spend their time, and often being busy is a matter of choice and schoolwork is not what always occupies students' time:

There are different ways to be busy. There is busy playing World of Warcraft for half the day which is what I used to do as opposed to now...it is fine to be American and be greedy and all these things to an extent, but when that is all you are that is when I have a problem with it, you have to be spiritual about something else that connects you with the rest of the world.

The busyness in participants' lives seemed to contribute to their inability to take time to reflect on where they were going in life, how their education was connecting to their goals, passions, and dreams. In addition, students seemed to lack time to connect with other students or faculty in meaningful dialogue about matters which were most important to them.

*Scientific worldview.*

Part of what currently defines research universities is the emphasis on rational empiricism, objective, value free knowledge, and the scientific method (Palmer, 1983; Marsden, 1994). Faculty have questioned the effectiveness of this rational approach to knowledge to answer the questions of life (Wolfe as cited in Braskamp, et al., 2006). Participants also questioned this purely rational emphasis. The struggle between a rational, logical and an emotional, subjective way of viewing the world was evident in every student's story. This was most often manifest in issues of science, evolution, and wanting to hold on to the idea that there was something more in the universe. Science students especially felt this tension. Evolution was just one issue that brought these two ways of knowing into conflict for students. Robert is a science student and atheist. He describes the tension between being spiritual and in the sciences:

As a chemistry student, I have had a very difficult time connecting with even fellow chemistry peers. I kind of have a dual life of this very hard science, hard facts, there are right answers and then this more social life, or being a resident advisor and doing activism stuff, and every once in a while those two lives will meet and cause some problems with chemistry people not understanding why I spend so much time doing this other social justice stuff. A lot of my friends and teachers encouraged me to go to a liberal arts school, and they were really sad I went to a state school which was focused on research, and engineering, and science, and so I came to college wanting that small liberal arts school experience while still being able to get that good science experience, which you won't get at a liberal arts school. So I really focused on that social aspect, and I think the other chemistry majors are coming to here thinking we are here to learn chemistry, nothing else, and it is pretty demanding. But for me it has been easy, and so I have had time to put into the social stuff. No chemistry major is an RA, or involved in the progressive student union, or the Young Democrats. There are about fifteen of us and I am the only chemistry major who is involved with student clubs, and the photography clubs, and other than that I have poked around to see if I could find out about anyone else and I haven't been able to, they are all strictly chemistry, not even fraternity or sororities, they like to stick to the science stuff.

Mary is a multi-faith seeker who is also a science major. One of the most interesting discussions she observed was in her philosophy class, between a scientist who was religious and a scientist who was an atheist. They debated their views on how science did or did not support the idea of a God. Mary describes her own views of how science and religion are related:

For me it makes it more believable that there is a God because science takes it so far and in that process, like evolution you study the nitty gritty of evolution, but it's like micro or macro, you go down to molecules and atoms and they keep going smaller and smaller to infinity and that's what God is, it makes it more believable because it is so, what we do know and discovered is amazing, but what we haven't discovered is even more mind-blowing, so I think science is trying to find out about our world, and people make theories, some scientists don't believe in God, but they are just observing the world. I don't think religion and science should clash at all, I don't really understand why they have to because they are two different things, I guess science can become a religion, if you believe your theory is correct then that is just like religion.

When I mentioned to John that I have heard scientists speak who are also religious he was very surprised and curious:

I have always thought about that, the religion and science...it is hard for me to believe that someone can bring those together, especially a scientist. Because you know the facts and he must have a concept of what faith is and I always thought that faith was belief without evidence in front of you.

Other students described wanting to be passionate and emotional, but also felt like they needed to approach the world in a logical and rational way. Tiffany talks about rational thinking and wanting to be spiritual, and believes there is something out there that explains what happens in life:

Sometimes I will be doing research and I think about the whole mind brain connection, and I think about how there are some things that we can't explain, and when I am researching or studying I can totally accept that, who knows why that happened, just did, experimental error, whatever. And then I think that there are times in my life where stuff has happened, where I can't explain it and I just have to think there has got to be an explanation for this. Last summer this girl I had been living with, she and I had been talking a lot about maybe I should maybe possibly thinking about exploring the idea of believing in God again, and she was like you know what you should do, you should just throw something up there and just talk for a little while, you don't have to be talking to God or anyone, just talk. And so I was like that is stupid but I ended up doing it and I said you know what, you just need to show me something big that I can't say that's a weird coincidence, but that really makes me believe ok, there is something more to this world. And after I did that I took a nap and I woke up and I had a missed call from my dad who I hadn't spoken to in months, and months, and months, just out of the blue and I was like ok that counts.

John described how he feels the tension of being rational and recognizing the need to use emotional appeals when he writes about third-world countries:

With what I am hoping to do, people only respond to things that have emotional aspects to them, they don't respond to things that are really bland and rational, they respond to emotion and sometimes emotion can be irrational, but powerful. So I have to be emotional and passionate about what I am planning to do, but I do hold to the concept of rationality of what we can feel and see and I submit to that



most of the time and with regard to religion I'm happy for those who find a higher place emotionally with their faith as long as it doesn't hurt other people, but it does hurt other people, it does cross the wall of separation of church and state, so that's why I have a problem with it, if didn't I wouldn't have a problem with it.

Barbara wrote a paper for her philosophy class and argued there was no God, and yet she cannot accept that there is no God:

I remember writing a paper on taking a stand on if there is a God or if there isn't a God, and we had to support it with an argument, and I picked that there wasn't a God, and supported it with Freud and Niche, and the more educated I get the harder it is to find faith. I don't remember who said it, but it is easier to find proof for your faith than faith for your proof. But I don't know it was hard after I did that report. I can see that man never wants to be alone and needs someone to be accountable to, and so they don't ever want to be alone and that's why they made a God figure and stuff like that.

Q: But you still believe in a God?

Yea, I know, that's why it is a constant struggle.

Q: So what part of you believes in some kind of a God?

I think it's that working in art and fashion that you just look around at things and I never learned about Pangaea and the big bang in a Christian school, and so I've been trying to educate myself on that. But I look around and I just can't imagine the world happening just on its own. But I don't think God is as involved in our lives as people think, that he is constantly there. I'm sure he has better things to do than give you an A on your test, but some people need that psychological reassurance that oh someone is here for me.

Stacey has a different experience than most students. She has been gradually becoming more open to the idea of God despite her atheist upbringing. She has been exploring Judaism by getting involved in Hillel and describes this tension:

My mom is very science and logic based, so that's a bit of an internal struggle for me, is trying to analyze everything, and come from the standpoint that maybe there isn't a God, and we have to look at this through science, and then there is the other side where emotionally I am more drawn to Judaism, and that way of

thinking. And so I am hoping I can go towards meshing the two together and be comfortable believing in a higher power and also having the scientific aspects as well. Right now I think I still lean towards the scientific way of thinking, but over the semester I have become more comfortable thinking that there are going to be things that we can't explain and maybe one of those things is God.

The Christian faith-centered seekers have been able to resolve the issue of science and creation in their own way. While they may not be completely sure about the nature of the universe, it is not an issue they feel is central to their faith. They continue to leave room for science in the creation of the world. Erik describes his thinking:

In science classes they are required to teach about evolution and going through those classes, evolution makes sense, scientifically you could say that could happen, it could after millions and millions of years there is a chance that could happen and for a while I wrestled with that, does that mean that God created it still? In one of my science classes the professor made this one comment and was talking about the metabolism rate related to temperature and he kind of paused and he says if this metabolism doubles for every 10 degrees of Celsius temperature change, if this equation was any different, life could not exist. That was just one of many things that helped me come to grips with that. There are things like that in science where if they weren't exactly the way they were life could not exist. But also realizing that the whole creation thing is not that important to what my faith is or what Christianity is, like God could have just formed the Earth and let it evolve into these things, or he could have made it in seven days, I came to the conclusion that it is not a real important issue to my Christian faith, it doesn't matter if he did it in a million years or seven days, I know Christianity is real and right and that God is real and who Jesus is and what he did.

The issue of integrating spiritual ways of knowing with a scientific approach or world view is included here as a general university environmental factor. However, this topic led students to talk more about classes and how spiritual issues are raised as a matter of their curriculum.

## *Classes and Curriculum*

The design and implementation of the curriculum is a central component to a university's commitment to developing students (Braskamp et al., 2006). The university's combined classes and curriculum are driven by its mission and underlying principles. Through the course of the interviews, students occasionally talked about classes that had impacted their sense of spirituality. The classes that students discussed the most in relation to addressing spiritual ideas were philosophy classes on religions, anthropology and history courses which talked about religion in a historical context, and literature classes, such as *The Bible as Literature*. Part of this may be due to sampling, since students were recruited from philosophy courses. However, these student participants had also taken the same general education classes as part of their graduation requirements, so they have many shared class experiences they can speak of. Outside of the classes mentioned above, there is a noticeable absence of topics such as ethics, morals, values, purpose of life, or citizenship coming up in the normal course of classes. For courses that do touch on the spiritual matters, they play a role in shaping what students believe. Kelly talks about learning about Daoism in her philosophy class:

I just like that we are exploring religions that I haven't heard about as much, and that I can incorporate some of those things into my own life, like Dao following the way. If I am following the way that is the way for myself, then I am following Dao because I do what is right for myself.

Q: Have you had other classes that have impacted who you are or how you believe?

I don't think so, my other classes are more lectures on history and chemistry. I'm taking *Philosophies of India* next semester so that will be cool.

Mike talked about how a community college philosophy course impacted him:

I didn't have a strong opinion on whether I believed in God or not, and later in high school I took a Philosophy 101 class while I was going to a community

college, and I realized it was hard for me to relate to Christianity because there was so little fact connected to it, and in Buddhism it's not what you believe it's a way of living. So it was much more real and believable. I guess I am a little bit of a realist.

Stacey discusses how being exposed to new ideas in class shapes her beliefs and puts her atheist upbringing in tension with her current spiritual pursuits:

I keep noticing that in my philosophy classes that there are so many different perspectives, and so many different ways to approach the idea of God and spirituality, so in that sense I just try and go off of my emotional reaction and then try and think about how I react to that, and my previous ideas of what I grew up with as what is true compared to what I think is true now and what other people think is true.

While being exposed in class to general topics which touch on spirituality can impact students' spiritual lives, it was the exposure to discussions and interactions with other students and faculty which participants spoke the most positively about. For now, I will limit my current discussion of classes to the curriculum, but when I discuss social interactions in a future section, I will develop the impact of these classroom interactions more. At this point, it is simply important to note that student participants' spiritual lives were not stimulated by the curriculum except for a few notable exceptions.

### *Community*

Community within the context of the general university environment refers to the community in which the university is situated. Being in a rural and somewhat remote location (about 90 minutes from a large city) affects students' experiences. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, there is a lack of diversity that is present in larger communities. The community has more than a dozen Christian and Catholic churches and one Muslim mosque. There are no Jewish synagogues or Buddhist or Hindu temples. Some students expressed

surprise at the number of churches and opportunities in the community while others from under-represented spiritual traditions felt there was a lack of diversity in the community.

### *Campus Climate*

The campus climate within the general university environment addresses how students generally described the climate. Later when I discuss the human aggregate, I will write about how students perceive other students, which also contributes to the overall climate on campus. Central to the campus climate is the perception of the sense community on campus. Community is a descriptor of the campus in general that attempts to capture the essence of the culture and climate of the campus, as well as members of a campus. (Braskamp, et al., 2006) Institutions which lack community do not have a high level of interaction between students outside of class and tend to have a high degree of student apathy (Astin, 1993). Further, students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus (Kuh, et al., 2005).

Students perceived the general climate in different ways depending on their backgrounds. The Christian faith-centered seekers spoke of the campus environment as being challenging to their faith. Many of them described how the environment had made their faith stronger, but only as a result of being challenged or attacked in and outside of class. This sense of living counter culturally, in comparison to the rest of campus, caused Christian participants to invest more in their off-campus ministry groups, where they sought refuge from the hardships of the university environment. Within these groups, they would be able to debrief their experiences and find support for continuing to live out their values and beliefs in the midst of a culture that did not seem to share those same values. Erik describes how he views the campus climate:

I think it's made my faith stronger because it is such a dark place, because it is a hard place to be a Christian it has strengthened my faith and made it deeper. It

has challenged it and it's persecuted it and become stronger because of it. Because it is a dark place it has made my faith stronger.

He goes on to describe what he feels is the prevailing philosophy of the university culture:

In college you get this feeling like do what you want to do and that is right for you. Not necessarily partying, just doing what you want to do and if you enjoy that keep doing it, that's good for you, whatever feels good, do it is what the feeling is at this university...I think it gave me the opportunity to become stronger, to be a light here. I saw the need to share and be a Christian and be open about Christianity. I saw the opportunities, living in the Christian school family, church, there wasn't a lot of opportunity to be bold with my faith because it is a dark place it has given me opportunities to be bold with my faith...The university doesn't have events which deal with religion. Most are like, what issues are you going to deal with in college...like be safe when drinking or being sexually safe, or how to study, not real purpose of life or spiritually related.

Julie is another Christian student who feels that being at the public university is challenging:

It is a hard environment if you are not real secure in your faith. My first three years of school here I was so in my faith, and there is a lot of partying that goes on here, and it is very different than a private Christian college...so there are a lot of parties and quite a bit of drugs, There are a lot of people that go home with people they just met, and stay the night, it is a hard environment to be a Christian at times if you are just so so in your faith. I guess you are just more likely to sin...or more likely to participate in those acts, I think it is fine to have a drink, but to over consume all the time, you are not having faith in that act, going home and sleeping with someone you just met, I don't think God wants you to do that with your body. I don't know...that's what your friends do that is what is social, to go out and go to a party, that is what is social to do and there are not a lot of other outlets to be social.

Non-faith-centered seekers tend to see the environment quite differently. They typically perceive the environment as mostly Christian. They feel that the most dominant voices and most active groups on campus were the Christian student groups, and they often felt as if they didn't fit into the majority Christian atmosphere. Tiffany describes this visibility of Christian groups and how it makes her feel:

I think as far as visibility is concerned, there are a lot of pro-Christian sentiment just from the outside, and I was walking to class the other day and on a wall there was this scripture from Romans or something, and I was thinking, that is inappropriate, as a state institution I don't think there should be any religious undertones to anything that goes on here. If there are student groups that is all well and good, but as far as not being able to walk to class without having the reminder that oh, right, I don't belong in that group, it kind of frustrates me. I don't know, it's funny because I know there is an atheist/agnostic group on campus, would people be as accepting if someone were to write is God dead in chalk? People would be up in arms and it would be a big deal, but because so many people on our campus share those beliefs, it is more acceptable because they are the majority, and who is going to speak out against it? It frustrates me personally, but at the same time, it is their right to do that. I think the majority of students on campus are Christian.

Kelly also shares the view that Christian groups are the most prevalent on campus:

I definitely think the Christian groups are overwhelming of the other groups, like the atheist and agnostic group. There are two Christian groups I see being very active on campus, passing out fliers, having booths and giving out lemonade and cookies and there are also a group of students I pass by frequently that are singing worship, which kind of freaks me out...but I think the school is kind of indifferent, people just do whatever they feel like.

Despite the perception that there is a high visibility of Christian groups on campus, nearly all student participants agreed that the university is not doing much to address spiritual issues. This was discussed in the general campus climate but is reinforced when George, who is a resident advisor in the residence halls, talks about why the residence life staff never attempts to develop programming that incorporates spiritual topics.

It's such a touchy subject to program around and you don't want to end up with an all out war which can happen within the span of five seconds. I think it is something that most people avoid unless they already knew like if they were religious and they shared that with other people on their floor then they would have a program because they knew that had the same beliefs, but I don't see that happening ever.

Along with a general campus climate that discourages intentionally addressing spiritual topics, a culture exists where spirituality is a rather private subject. It is not something that students are accustomed to talking about with one another. Despite the fact that some of the student participants had a strong desire to talk about spiritual issues with others, they did not feel it was socially acceptable to discuss the topic. John, an atheist, talks about this dynamic:

It's hard to have a spiritual outlet because people are not receptive to talking about this. You can talk to someone about football really easy, to anyone, but this, who can do it? Or maybe I can and I just don't think I can, it's just the impression I get. And if you do bring up spiritual topics, because it's not normally talked about, people think you have changed and they will start thinking, what happened to you, something has changed and they will see you as a different person.

The general university environment consisted of four areas: (a) organizational factors, (b) classes and curriculum, (c) community, and (d) campus climate. Each spiritual seeker type seemed to experience these environmental variables differently and impacted their spiritual experiences and how they viewed their curricular and co-curricular activities, as well as the general campus climate.

### *Human Aggregate*

Students had general descriptions of the campus climate, but had much more specific ideas when it came to describing their perceptions of other students. Those descriptions fall into this next element of the university environment, the human aggregate. The human aggregate can have a powerful impact on how a student experiences the university environment and was perceived differently by student participants. I asked students to describe the general campus climate and if they thought other students were as interested as they were in pursuing spiritual development. Once again, the biggest differences were observed between the Christian faith-



centered seekers and other student participants. These differences centered on how Christian students viewed themselves and how other students viewed them. However, similarities were present in how participants perceived the interest level of other students in spiritual matters.

### *Perceptions of the Student Body*

Student participants shared a desire to know themselves, know others, explore spiritual matters, and were actively looking for opportunities to deepen their spiritual lives. They were not afraid to voice their opinions and seemed open to discussing their spiritual views with anyone who had an open mind. However, compared to the average student, they perceived themselves as the exception to the rule in possessing these qualities. As a result, they viewed themselves as a sort of spiritual minority on campus. A word that came up often when describing other students on campus was ‘apathetic’. John not only observes this apathy in students, but wants to do something to wake students up from this apathetic state:

People are just afraid to voice their opinion, or maybe they are just indifferent, I think a lot of it is indifference actually, they just don't care. That is a huge thing that I am trying to tackle over all, that is the biggest thing that I am going to try and solve through all of this is mobilization, and indifference, and apathy and I think people just don't care about their religion. I don't know why that is, it just is, people are just apathetic towards politics, towards religion, but they aren't apathetic towards fantasy football. I like fantasy football too, but you have to consider some other things in life besides that. I want to stop the indifference and apathy.

One of the Christian students, Erik, talks about the attitude of other students:

It's just a real indifference, or apathy, they only see what is right in front of them, they are not thinking about what happens if they die, or if know what religion is right. The general consensus is whatever happens happens, just a fate thing, fate will happen and I have no power, just not actively thinking about spiritual things or pursuing spirituality.

Participants saw the average student living with a shortsighted view of life and more interested in what party was coming up, what class they had homework in, and romantic relationships than they were in figuring out how they were going to have a positive impact in the world. Kelly touches on this issue:

For students in general, I think it is kind of a neglected topic or neglected part of their life perhaps. In my experience my friends and I don't have spiritual conversations very often. I think it is just neglected by all the different kinds of things people can do. People are totally into their studies, or they are into partying, or working, they are doing all sorts of different things, so maybe they are not focusing on that as much.

Many participants divided students into distinct groups when trying to describe the spiritual make-up of the student body. Categories included religious students, students who were anti-religious or non-religious, and students who did not care about spiritual matters. It was this last group which often perceived as the largest group on campus. The following excerpts from Abigail and Mary highlight this tendency to divide and categorize students:

I feel like our student body is split in half there are people in the middle who are religious but they socialize with people and then you have those who despise religion and then you have those who are very strict religious, so I think it is a good mix of people, it's not one way, just in the middle. [Abigail]

I see maybe three main populations, I would clump atheist/agnostics, and I would put me in that group as well, just spiritual, a wider range of thought on religion and think about it more maybe more Daoism than from a Christian background or something. Then in the middle are students who are brought up in church maybe not, they don't really care, and then the last would be the extremely Christian, those who think if you are not a Christian then you are going to hell. [Mary]

As described in the section on campus climate, secular or multi-religious seekers feel that a mostly conservative Christian student body dominates the campus climate. However, Christian students tend to see the climate as antithetical to their values and feel somewhat persecuted.

Rachel, a Christian, describes some of the anti-religious sentiment on campus:

I think a lot of the younger population doesn't want rules, they are off on their own for the first time, and they just want to do what they want and be independent, and they don't want another entity in their life giving them rules, so I think a lot of students are thinking, nope religion is not for me, especially at this school. I don't think other students are intentionally trying to figure out who they are. I think it is just sort of happening, but not intentionally.

Participants in general seem to view themselves as a minority on campus since other students on campus were perceived as not interested in spiritual matters. However, the feeling of being a minority was heightened for Christian participants. This minority status is usually in reference to their religious beliefs, but also to their dedication to their morals, values, and because they actively attempt to share their spiritual beliefs with other students. Christian students not only discussed the somewhat hostile campus climate, but often talked about knowing they had the right religion based on researching and exploring their faith. Non-Christian students did not seem to view the campus climate as hostile and believed that Christian students had not spent time critically examining their faith. Tiffany highlights this contrast:

I think the majority of students on campus are Christian. I don't know how many of them have actually explored much about it or if it is just because they were raised that way. And for me that is really hard for me to see that as legitimate. How can you live your life around something that your parents told you? I feel like a lot of that needs to be exploring and finding out what works for you, and if that is what works for them, then that makes it an easy search. But I think there is a Christian sentiment on campus and I wonder how much of that is spoon fed. That's another thing that is frustrating to me is here I am really unsure about what I think, and not sure what I believe, and then there are people who are like, this is what I have been told and it works I guess. I don't think the campus is hostile. I think most people college aged are really accepting of other beliefs, especially now with everything going on in the world. I think people are more aware of it and how it can cause prejudice, and discrimination, and I think most of us don't want to see any of that happen, so everyone is pretty chill with each other, but it is hard not to notice the little things here and there where you are like oh yea, most people probably have a Christian view.

Barbara, an atheist, comments on this perception of a lack of critical examination on the part of Christian students and on the apparent hypocrisy she sees of many Christian students:

I think a lot of students are still pretty happy just believing what they grew up believing. Like you find the random frat guy who drinks heavily every weekend, and wakes up in random peoples beds, and doesn't go to church and you ask him what is your religion, he'll be like I'm a Christian, but I think it's more of the Christian when it is convenient sort of thing, and they don't really have to face their consequences, and they are just going through the motions, so I don't know, I would hope there are other people who are more intelligent and they would ask themselves what am I believing and why am I believing.

Kelly has an interesting perspective as a student who used to be more religious. She discusses how seeing demonstrations by Christian students on campus makes her feel:

There are two groups I see being very active on campus, passing out fliers, having booths and giving out lemonade and cookies and there are also a group of students I pass by frequently that is singing worship, which kind of freaks me out.

Q: Why?

Now that I am spiritually in limbo and I am not as involved in the Christian religion as I once was, I'm starting to see how non-Christians view Christians and that kind of demonstration, I'm not sure how to describe it, it can make people feel awkward. Which is interesting because I was once in a group that carried a big wooden cross around a mall. We walked around with a giant wooden cross, so that was an interesting experience, but now I can see from the other side of that how people would be affected by that. People think it is kind of weird and it makes them feel awkward.

John talks about his perception that Christian students are closed minded and this makes it difficult for him to relate to them:

It's difficult to deal with religious people because they are not willing to expand their view, a lot of them aren't, and I think that is true, I think a lot of them believe their view they read in their books, and that is their view, as opposed to the scientific method. It is a method that in its nature is open to change, and religious people are not open to change and in that respect it is difficult to be tolerant of them.

Some perceptions of the student body were fairly consistent across the four different types of seekers in the study. Student participants perceived other students across campus as being apathetic, or divided up the student population into categories of religious, non-religious, and not interested in spiritual matters. Perceptions differed between how faith-centered Christian seekers see the campus climate as being hostile, and the way non-Christian students viewed the campus. Non-faith-centered seekers perceived a predominately Christian culture on campus and described their mostly negative perception of Christian students. When talking about perceptions of other students with non faith-centered seekers, the topic of evangelism on campus came up numerous times. These types of evangelical interactions are included in the social climate category of the university environment.

#### *Social Climate*

The social climate of the university environment consists of narratives that involve interactions with others around spiritual issues. Participants had these interactions both interpersonally and within a larger community. These interactions were critical to student participants in understanding themselves and others. The interpersonal, one-on-one interactions typically occurred between friends, classmates, religious clergy, and professors. It was easier for students to identify negative interpersonal interactions than positive ones. Negative interactions typically involved evangelistic activities, or interactions with people who were closed minded, stubborn, or rude. Positive spiritual interactions, while less frequent, challenged student participants to explore new ways of thinking and often broke down stereotypes. Interactions within communities were nearly always positive experiences. These communities were places for students to receive encouragement and support, as well as be challenged to deepen their

spiritual life. Both types of these interactions contribute to how students see the spiritual climate of the campus.

### *Interpersonal*

The types of interpersonal interactions that centered on spiritual matters were diverse, but limited. Students talked about interactions centered on evangelism, discussions in class, conversations with professors, meetings with university administration, and exchanges between friends.

#### *Evangelism.*

Over the course of my interviews with students, one of the most commonly addressed topics was evangelism. Both Christian and non-Christian students discussed evangelistic conversations as one of the few spiritual interactions they had while on campus. Having these spiritual conversations is often a built-in element in belonging to a major faith-centered group such as Campus Crusade for Christ. While students are not required to share their faith, they are strongly encouraged to team up with one of the leaders and other students, approach random students, and ask to have a spiritual conversation. These conversations were a way to build relationships, but were ultimately about sharing the gospel and finding out if students were interested in knowing more about Jesus Christ. For Christian students, evangelism represented a way to demonstrate their love for others, obedience to God, and their desire to discuss spiritual issues with other students. Christian students also felt that sharing their faith helped them to deepen their own understanding of their own spirituality and strengthen their beliefs. Erik, a leader in Campus Crusade for Christ, talks about his reasons for sharing his faith:

There are multiple reasons. For one God commands us to, he says go forth and spread the Gospel with people, and two because God calls us to love others, and for me one of the ways I can love people, because I feel that Christianity is the right way, I can share with them what I believe is right, and they have the option

to choose that or not. But I believe showing love to someone, I am loving someone, if they are willing, to share what I believe and what I believe is right, I believe that is showing love. And three, because I know it is right and God is pleased with what I do.

Rachel talks about the approach of evangelism with Campus Crusade for Christ:

I live in the dorms, not so much this year, but last year we shared a lot where we would just go and knock on doors, and be like we are with Campus Crusade and we were wondering if you wanted to talk, and then share the book and then talk with them about nothing, sometimes the girls will be like, well I'm going through this really hard time in my life, and they'll talk to you about what is troubling them and it's like wow, you trust me right off the bat? This year one of the Crusade staff, me and another girl, we will go down to the dining center and eat lunch with people and have a spiritual conversation with them.

Q: What is a spiritual conversation?

Like, ask them what they believe, be like, well, what is your spiritual background, like did you go to church, like a lot of people have gone to church growing up and so we ask them how that experience was for them, how they would explain Jesus to someone, what they think of God, just things like that, just to get an idea of what they believe and what their background is. And in there just trying to always push personal relationship with Jesus Christ, or like do you know Jesus, or do you know God, kind of like that and well, do you want to, and give them the opportunity to tell them how they can.

Q: So do you just walk up to someone and say, hey can I have a spiritual conversation with you?

We just say, hi we are with Campus Crusade for Christ and we were wondering if we could sit and talk to you for a while. And most people are like oh yea sure and then we are just like well, we just wanted to ask you some spiritual questions, and we start out with normal conversations, and then just ask them if it is ok to ask them spiritual questions, and people are usually like ok, and then we ask them if they grew up going to church....so yea.

Q: Is that awkward?

Yea, it can be awkward and scary, I think it is getting easier for me just because paired with my major, journalism is pretty much going up to random people and talking to them. I think they complement each other in a way.

Q: So why do you do that, talk to complete strangers?

Because this is a lot of what Crusade does, but with Crusade and with my own thinking, everyone should have the opportunity to hear about the Gospel and hear about Jesus Christ, and how to know him, and since I know it is my responsibility to share with other people.

Julie is not involved with Campus Crusade for Christ, but is a Christian student who does like to share what she believes. After working at a Christian summer camp for kids, she found it easier to talk about spiritual issues:

I was more secure coming back to school with my faith. I'm not a big knock on doors person but I am very social so if it comes up in conversation I will do that, I don't necessarily share my faith like I am Christian, but I will talk to people about faith and influence them that way. I don't think people really care about your story. It's all about your own life, you are so involved with your own life that it is more developing that for them, than being like I am a Christian and here is why and you should be too. I think that I am very much like, you believe what you believe, I will believe what I believe, but I will try and influence and subtly influence towards, like I have two friends who claim to be Christians, but also believe in reincarnation, and reincarnation is definitely not something of Christianity, and I talked to them about it but didn't go into it a lot, I explored it with them and said it wasn't what I believe, but it's cool if you want to believe that, because I believe when you die you go to heaven, and that is where you reside, you don't come back as another life form, and we explored that a little, but I'm not going to try and list out ways that is untrue, I am more about having a conversation with them, and exploring why they believe that way, and addressing it, and seeing why they feel that way, and explaining what I believe, and see if that sparks an interest, and see where the conversation goes with that as well.

The non-Christian student participants had often been approached by these groups, and shared their opinions of these interactions, as well as other activities which they felt were evangelistic in nature. Other events included large demonstrations on central campus, outsiders



who came with a big cross on campus and were hostile to members of the university who walked by telling passersby to repent of sins, singing worship songs on campus, and handing out literature. George, an atheist, talks about his experiences with evangelistic activities:

On campus groups, like Crusade, just make me think about that stuff, because I don't know, they irritate me a little. Like a friend of mine was walking down the mall, and they had a booth set up and they were trying to hand him something, and he was like no thank you, and they were like, what's wrong with you, you don't believe in God? So just one incident, I don't mean to generalize, but if you want to be spiritual or religious, that's fine, but I don't understand this missionary thing of trying to get everyone to sign up, that really kind of confuses me and when they come talk to you, and try to get you to go to church, they are like I'm concerned for you, and I want you to get into heaven too, and I'm like, are you saying I'm not a good person or something? They are just always talking about how they know these things, and I just wonder if they realize what the word means, because it is a belief, and you can't know it, but they are like you haven't felt these things, and you can't talk any sense to them because their answers just don't make sense, and they don't have to because it is faith, and just the fact that they are able to do that means you can't have a serious conversation because it boils down to this faith thing.

James also discusses the lack of discussion on religious topics and the reluctance to engage with those who share their faith publicly:

I've learned here that no matter what your religion is you can be friends with anyone, and if people's religions conflict then they won't talk about them. Most people won't ask what your religion is. I think the whole campus climate is that way, you want to tell people your religion that's fine, but most people won't stop talking to you or interacting with you because of your religious views, unless you are an evangelist who talks out to people on the mall and makes it known, and other people just back off. It's usually the people who always want to talk about religion and convert people that most people won't talk to.

Tiffany had a spiritual conversation with some students from Crusade at lunch one afternoon and describes the interaction:

Some people actually stopped me the other day and they were like, can we have lunch with you? And I sat with them, and they were asking me about all that stuff. I like having those conversations, but I want to say out front that you aren't

going to change my mind about anything, but I always like hearing other people's beliefs on stuff just because it's interesting, and I respect people who can have that much faith in something, because I have a hard time with it, and I know a lot of people who are like minded and very analytical, and they look at people who have more faith and are spiritual and they think, oh they are stupid for believing something they can't prove, and I don't think that. I respect it because it is hard to do, and I like having those conversations but it was funny because they started the conversation by saying, if you were to get hit by a bus today do you think you would go to heaven? And it's kind of a lead into, well if you aren't sure then Jesus can save you.

Q: So how long did that lunch last?

It was about an hour, and they asked me a lot of questions, and I answered them and I felt bad they were asking all the questions, so I asked them questions, it was all in good fun, not hostilities, but I feel like sometimes it is funny, I hear a lot of people who aren't very open to having those conversations complaining about, oh my God these people came and asked me these questions, but I think it must be just as frustrating for them when there are people like me who are like, I don't believe in that, so I always try to be nice when I have those conversations with people.

Mary wants to join the Peace Corps and said she did not want to convert people. I asked Mary to clarify what it was that she didn't like about evangelism:

That we know better than the rest of the world, or on a smaller view, the people who get on their soap boxes out on campus, and say you are all going to hell, it's like they don't have any humility, which is a key thing in Christianity that Jesus talks about, and shows, it's just saying I am better than you, and you need to live up to me, and that is something that really bugs me about people and in the government.

John doesn't understand the notion that he can't lead a fulfilling life without being religious:

Religious people want to proselytize you, they will make the argument that we want you to have this, we want you to have this morality and be happy, my argument is, I'm not happy? I'm not living a fulfilling life? Is that what you are assuming about me? Because I don't believe in this, I don't have any of it? And I find that really offensive. I should have thought about that a little more, but I think you know what I am getting at. I feel like I have a fulfilling life, I get fulfillment in listening to the Beatles, where someone might hear chord

progressions, I hear a lot more in it. And that is fine for me, I don't need a God to be spiritual. I guess that is one thing that has really angered me about religion for a long time, and I don't see when that is going to change because by nature, religion, you want to spread it, and I don't see how that mentality on their part is going to change, so that will persist and I will always be rather angry about that, wanting others to have this as if we don't have it. Maybe I am misinterpreting them, I would be interested in what others have said about that or if you would ask a religious person about that.

These evangelistic interactions are just one example of spiritual conversations happening on campus which, for better or worse, is one way students are talking about spirituality.

*In the classroom.*

When asked to describe classroom material or experiences in the class which have shaped or impacted their spiritual lives, students' responses were limited. However, the classroom environment was an important influence in how students viewed the university's approach to spirituality. The most commonly cited courses that deal with religious or spiritual topics were philosophy classes which dealt with religious or spiritual topics, The Bible as Literature course, and the occasional history course which incorporated religious history. Occasionally, student participants described classroom experiences that included good conversations facilitated by faculty that were good at including students' opinions and their own spiritual backgrounds.

Stacey talks about a positive class interaction in one of her philosophy courses:

Today is a perfect example, we were talking about immortality, and we were talking about our own views of immortality, and people were giving their own views and their interpretations of the material that we went over, and that is generally how all these discussions go with this class. People give what their beliefs were that they grew up with over time, and they give their interpretations of the arguments that we went over in that section. I love Dr. Johnson's classes because they are so open-ended. His exams are very open-ended as well. People can bring their own ideas and interpretations to things and they are not wrong. That's what I really enjoy about his classes, he tries to cultivate people's thinking and understanding of different things and is really encouraging of that, and accepting to that, and even if you don't get someone's argument quite right, if you

understand it and have an understanding of your own ideas, then you are right and that's what I like.

Julie remembered a professor who let his spiritual outlook influence the way he interacted with students:

This professor is awesome. He says, I'll say this to you on the first day and on the last day, but I love and care about each and every one of you and that just comes back to loving and he has genuine interest in me and the rest of the students and our education. Like if you fail this test I better see you in my office kind of thing, like we will talk about it and see what we can do about it, he really wants to see all of his students succeed. The class was integration of PE in the classroom, so we give a health lesson and a PE lesson, and afterwards he debriefs you on it, and after my PE lesson with my best education friend, he was debriefing it on us and he said, I think you need to know this and gave us all these compliments and reassured us that we were going to be really good teachers, and like that meant a lot to me for him to say that to me, and I think that comes with knowing your students and I think it came from him not only wanting to give us that feedback but just being that loving mentor person.

Robert, a chemistry major, finds healthy debate and disagreement in class to be a positive thing:

World civilizations, as a required class which you are supposed to not like, I loved it because we were talking and discussing and debating and you don't see that in chemistry classes which is ok, because you are not going to debate molecular structure and things like that, but I loved the idea of being able to disagree with people and accepting and tolerate that disagreement. I have learned, or have been trying to learn, to accept other beliefs, even as an atheist accepting beliefs of people who consider themselves religious, and that has been hard for me too, just because of all the bad press the Christian religion gets, and it's only the bad things you hear, so I know amazing Christians and even though I don't agree with their beliefs I think it is really fun to talk, and tolerate each other, and get that diversity of beliefs.

Although Abigail could not give any examples of classes which impacted her spirituality, she did talk about what a professor who had a spiritual outlook would like in class:

I think they would just display concern for other students, and take into consideration everything they discuss in class, and if religion does come up in class, they would be open to it, and I guess you would see them somewhere

outside of the classroom doing spiritual stuff, like their spiritual beliefs, other than that everyone has a belief, they believe in something, so generally everyone is spiritual as far as professors go, they may not consider themselves spiritual but they will show characteristics as to what they believe.

While some participants spoke about the benefit of positive spiritual discussions in class, there were also negative experiences by Christian participants who felt they were attacked or ridiculed in class by classmates or professors. This may be one reason why Christian students feel the university is oppressive towards them. Erik talks about feeling attacked in class as a Christian:

I was spiritually attacked in my classes, and professors, in general, not everyone, kind of didn't like Christianity, if it was involved in their class structure, talking about religion, it was just an undertone they didn't believe in Christianity. Because of the persecution I received in class, it has made my faith stronger, it made me want to fight for God, and made me want to know more so I could have arguments against those arguments. I had a philosophy class that really attacked Christianity, it was philosophy of ethics. In some world civilization classes, talking about the history of Christianity, there is definitely dark spots to Christianity's past, but they would give a negative tone to the history or they would focus a lot on the bad stuff, and that is usually what history is, focusing on wars and big events, which usually are horrible things, but it just seemed like an emphasis on negative Christian history in those classes. For philosophy I would say that he really pushed his own ideas, and he was very opinionated, and he didn't really listen to arguments. If you tried to have a discussion about it with him, he would just blatantly humiliate you in class, even though there were a lot of Christians in class, although they weren't active Christians, if you would try and argue or say anything, he would listen to you but his first reaction was a rebuttal and I just felt like the arguments in his class weren't appreciated so it made me kind of quiet, I wasn't as open in class because I knew of his opinions and his feelings against Christianity and not being open to it. I don't feel open to talking about it or discussing it, certain scenarios, like in classes not being open to say hey, this is what I believe because I am a Christian, this is my beliefs and my perspective, or asking how this interacts with religions, like I don't feel it is very open in class, I don't think it is open for other religions either, in general religion is pushed out of the classroom. You have to leave it at the door because it doesn't apply to whatever is in the classroom so you have to leave it behind you. We are learning about science so Christianity is out the door, we are learning about

history so we can't discuss it, we aren't talking about religion, classes separate whatever the subject is from religion.

James also discusses his interactions in class and has observed Christian students being discouraged during class discussions:

Dr. Johnson does a good job of consoling students who may feel hurt by class discussions and says, these are just words this is just a class, you know? Some people try to preach and he stops them, not because it is bad, but because this isn't a class to preach in. Defend your beliefs, but don't push them onto others. I took a digital diversity class, and we hit on religion and homelessness, and most people kept quiet, and it was just me and someone else who would pipe up and once people break the ice, others come in. It needs to happen more in the classroom setting before it can happen in the real world, because everyone is taught to keep their views to themselves in certain areas and not push it and be closed minded and that it's not something that should be involved in the real world. But it is something that drives your life, and in extreme cases people push it on to others because that is what religion says, you are supposed to preach, especially Christian religions, most Christians don't share much in class because they get beat back too often.

John talks about the impact spiritual dialogue in class can have, and he has also observed Christian students not speaking up in class:

I'm taking philosophy of religion and that helps open up the dialogue. It's a place where we can actually talk about what we feel. That's taught by Dr. Johnson, and in that class you get an opportunity to talk to people of various faiths, but something I have noticed in that class, is people who believe in a religion really don't talk at all, and I guess that only reinforces my idea that they are not open to discuss in what they believe in, it is only the people who are non-believers who are talking about things in the class and contributing to the discourse. There is a huge opportunity in class to share, but there is only a limited amount of us who are really questioning it, that's what I see. It's unfortunate because it is a great opportunity to be tolerant and ask people what they think about.

Student participants also spoke of faculty who made an effort not to include spiritually related discussions as a part of classroom dialogue and in interactions between classmates.

James described professors' aversion to spiritual topics:

I've seen teachers jump away from spiritual issues. They will literally change the entire subject in class and cut someone off the second they mention religion, and it's hard to be in a world history class without talking about religion, kind of stupid, but it happens. I always thought the coolest thing in class was when someone would say something about religion and the teacher would actually say something about it and say, well if that's your belief then you need to bring examples, bring your Bible. We were talking about the holocaust and someone said something about the bible and the teacher asked, where does it say that and the student pulled out the bible and read it off, and knew where it was and then had a discussion about how that pertained to what drove the holocaust, because the holocaust was very religiously bound. History classes teach you history and that you have to leave religion out of it, which is what drives the people who make the history in the first place, so why not teach that along with it? It makes no sense. You are not teaching religion, you are teaching history yet professors are afraid to tread those waters.

Class discussions were a potential source of spiritual engagement for some participants. However, most participants were not encouraged to discuss spiritual questions as a part of their classroom experience. In addition, many faith-centered seekers experienced the classroom as a hostile environment, and while this spurred them on in their spiritual development, it came as a result of a negative experience.

The discussion about classroom interactions and how professors approached spiritual topics led me to interview two professors. One professor was Dr. Johnson whose name had come up numerous times when students described positive classroom experiences that impacted their spirituality. Dr. Johnson teaches World Civilizations, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophies and Religions of India, and Philosophies and Religions of China and Japan. I had encountered Dr. Johnson when I was in the recruitment phase of the study, and he allowed me to speak to one of his classes about the research I was conducting. The other professor is Dr. Smith, who teaches world civilizations and the Bible as literature among other courses. I also encountered Dr. Smith as I was asking professors if I could visit their classrooms. Dr. Smith felt that allowing me into

the Bible as literature class to talk about my research would blur the line between students' beliefs and the subject matter, a line he had worked hard to establish in his classroom. It seemed to me that talking to these professors was a good way to contrast two different approaches to addressing spiritual topics in class.

*Interlude: A tale of two classrooms.*

I met with Dr. Smith first, and he talked about his approach in teaching the Bible as literature. One of the first things he gives to his student is a handout, which is primarily for Christian students, that informs students of the need to set aside their personal beliefs and convictions and examine the Bible as literature. The document starts by informing students of some of the inconsistencies in the Bible and that “non-fundamentalist” scholars agree that the Bible evolved over several hundred years and was influenced by the bias of their authors. A few excerpts from the document are helpful in understanding this professor's approach:

For a small number of students, the scholarly study of the Bible as literature is painful, or even traumatic. There are certain findings of Biblical scholarship so fundamental that they cannot be responsibly ignored which nevertheless offend some people's religious beliefs.

The following are only a few examples. Non-fundamentalist scholars agree that the Torah (the first five books of the Bible, often also called “The Pentateuch”), evolved over hundreds of years from various sources, some of which can be fairly clearly distinguished. The basic tool for tracing such sources is the numerous inconsistencies, anachronisms, and contradictions which the text contains. Far from being incidental to Biblical studies, these textual problems lie at the center of our understanding of how the Bible came into existence.

Historical criticism demonstrates that the accounts of events presented in the Bible are influenced by the biases of their authors, and uses these deviations from the probable facts to understand the evolution of the concept of history (for instance, in Kings and Chronicles). The gospels have especially been subjected to intense scrutiny for indications of the biases of their authors. All of this material is basic to a modern scholarly understanding of the texts.

Secular, Jewish, and many Protestant and Catholic scholars now agree that the prophecies of the Messiah in the Jewish Bible are not literally fulfilled by Jesus Christ, but that the early Christians creatively reinterpreted the Messianic



tradition to fit their lord. The common notion that the Jewish Bible testifies unmistakably to the truth of the Christian scriptures is not borne out by nonsectarian scholarship.

The document closes by giving the “literalist” student several options in the class. These options include: considering themselves a spy in alien territory, learning about how the human mind works, learning about contemporary Bible scholarship, or dropping the class if they are too offended. In the document, Dr. Smith also warns students about trying to convert the teacher or fellow students by making proclamations of faith.

Dr. Smith explained that he tries to keep this class lecture-based with little or no discussion. This was because when there are discussions, the emotional students, who he felt are typically the most religious, tend to dominate the conversation. He has observed mini-support groups that will form in class, where small groups of students quietly refute arguments with each other during lecture. Dr. Smith is an atheist but tries not to let students know that right away so religious students will be open to class material. Dr. Smith wants to keep students focused on providing logical, reasoned, arguments based on evidence and relevant information. While he tries to keep his dialogue non-combative towards religion, he knows many professors who do not take the same approach. He has observed professors who make it a point to discredit religion in their class and use a much more aggressive and combative approach than he does. In his opinion, these approaches do not work well with students. Dr. Smith is not usually aware of students’ spiritual backgrounds or beliefs unless they share them in a paper. Since the class is a lecture class, students do not share their backgrounds with one another. He has only occasionally had students come talk to him in his office hours and discuss religion, philosophy, and evolution.

The other professor I interviewed was Dr. Johnson, who teaches several philosophy classes that deal with spirituality and religion. His name came up numerous times with students as they shared positive discussions in class. I talked to Dr. Johnson about his approach to addressing students' spirituality in his classes. He builds his class around a mixture of lecture and discussion. Dr. Johnson is comfortable with students voicing their own opinion of a religious philosophical argument as long as they are able to demonstrate an understanding of the philosophical argument as it relates to class material. Dr. Johnson facilitates the discussions in a way that encourages all students to speak. He does this by always finding something positive in what students have said, and avoids comments that would seem demeaning of the students. In addition, Dr. Johnson finds something positive to say about all spiritual philosophies as they come up in the class material. At some point, not always at the beginning of a semester, he does share that he is a pluralist, shares his own spiritual beliefs, and explains what being a pluralist means. Dr. Johnson has written extensively on what it means to be a pluralist. In its simplest form, being a pluralist means accepting that there are truths in all religions. Alternatively, there are many paths that lead up the same mountain; there is no one "right" way. He writes about how his pluralist approach translates to the classroom:

My experience in the college classroom is that most students understand religion to be highly exclusivist in a pernicious sense. Some students appreciate the logic of exclusivism, but most are wary of exclusivism's judgmental approach.

Students also generally tend to discard the mythological world pictures of exclusivist religious traditions. I have found that many students welcome the possibility of pluralism once they are introduced to the idea. They also like that religious and scientific worldviews might be seen as compatible and less strictly

competitive. The task as I see it is to make religious pluralism more accessible to people as a way of life and study.

When I teach religion, I regularly identify myself to the class as a religious pluralist. I do not usually share my personal life with students in the classroom, but it is important in this case to offer religious pluralism as a way of life. Once, toward the end of the semester in a philosophy of religion class, I asked students to share their thoughts about the course in a two or three minute speech. Many students expressed gratitude for the lesson on religious pluralism.

I have since been reminded that a way to extend religious pluralism in the classroom is to inculcate and practice pluralist virtues. These virtues include hospitality, neighborliness and friendship. They are sanctioned in sacred texts and in the various religious traditions themselves. In India, for example, *hospitality* was personified as the Vedic god Aryaman. It has always been a primary duty of persons in India to extend hospitality to the Other. Hospitality is also important in Islam as part of alms-giving (*zakah*), one of the five pillars. The purpose of *zakah* is to ease the economic hardship of others, which is a basic component of hospitality. Hospitality can be modeled in the classroom by insuring a safe and orderly learning environment, and by providing the means for student learning.

Dr. Johnson tries to present other perspectives than his own, pointing out the different arguments for or against his and other philosophies. His primary goal is to present all arguments to spiritual philosophies and religions so that students get a diverse exposure to the philosophy being studied. After many years of teaching, he now feels confident in his ability to maintain a

respectful classroom environment while encouraging personal, yet balanced, debate and conversation. Dr. Johnson believes that students are always viewing the material through their own spiritual background and beliefs, and therefore it is important to find ways to integrate those beliefs in discussions, assignments, and tests. He has observed that the scholarly community at the research university is somewhat polarized, with those who are very religious on one side and those who are more science oriented on the other. He has found little room for people like himself who are in the middle. Dr. Johnson has also observed many professors approach their classes with an agenda to attack religion and religious students. He occasionally has students come by his office to talk about religion and spirituality.

*Interactions with faculty.*

University faculty are in a position to have the greatest influence on students. Relationships between faculty and students are thought of as the essence of the college experience (Pacarella & Terenzini, 1991) and play an important role in developing our future leaders and citizens of the world (Parks, 2000).

In general, participants did not interact often with faculty outside of the classroom. This was somewhat surprising given the students' high level of engagement with the university environment. Student participants talked about perceiving professors as too busy, intimidating, or uninterested in talking about issues outside of classroom material. For the most part, interactions with faculty outside of class were short and dealt with questions on class material. There were a few noteworthy exceptions. A few students had meaningful conversations with professors which occasionally delved into spiritual matters. These interactions formed a powerful impression on the student and, because these interactions were so rare, students spoke

of highly of them. Julie, a Christian and an education major, talks about two professors that have made a difference in her life:

I have two professors I can think of that I have a friendship/mentor/advisor vibe going on with, one I have had dinner with her family and has taken me out to eat, and the other, we have plans for next semester when my friend gets back, we are going to get together and I will email them and ask how life is going so we have a friendship level as well. They are both education professors, and one is special ed, and she was my advisor until this semester. They are people I aspire to be like to just have this love for learning and just to keep on learning not only for students, but love to continue their development in the profession, and the one lady is like you are going to be a great teacher and she also does the placement for practicum so she would always put me with a teacher she could see me being like, so the first teacher she put me with was phenomenal, and I learned so much from her, and I wish I could have absorbed more, and she has been such a proponent in helping to develop my teaching style. And the other one, she cares about my education and how I'm doing, and helped me plan my schedule my last two years of school, and they just really care about me on a deeper level than just the classroom.

Tiffany had a discussion with a professor outside of class that made an impression on her:

My biomedical ethics professor, we had to write a paper about whatever we wanted, any topic we had talked about in class and I didn't know what I was going to write about, and I had an idea and I wanted to bounce it off him, and I ended up being in his office for an hour and we didn't even talk about what I went in there to talk about. He was just asking me how I was enjoying the class and what do you think about this and that, and so he and I got to those bigger topics, but I think other than that, most professors expect you to come and ask them a question about what is going to be on the next test, or why did I get a B on this paper, not tell me what you believe in. But that was a nice conversation, and just to see that some professors do take an interest in you beyond just how well you are or are not doing in their class.

Stacey has had limited interactions with professors and the few she has are not very meaningful:

I haven't had the relationship with any faculty to sit down and have an in-depth religious conversation. I don't really talk to professors outside of class, except for my advisor in anthropology. He has been my advisor for a couple of years, but our conversations are limited to what classes I am going to take. He asks me how

I am doing in life outside of classes when he advises me, but those conversations are fairly superficial.

Finally, Steve talked about his experience going to visit one of his philosophy professors during his office hours:

I tried to create an open dialogue with my Philosophy of Japan professor, and he gave me the impression that he is someone that likes to lecture outside the class as well as in. It was a complete one way dialogue. I would be thinking of something that I really wanted to say but there was no break in his dialogue to allow for it. I learned to accept it, but yea for me the bread and butter is an exchange, feeding off of each other's ideas, so I'd say at this university, I haven't met anyone that has given me the same effect as the other people [outside of the university] I have met.

*Interactions with friends.*

While not very often, student participants did have spiritual interactions occurred between friends, most often in the form of casual discussions. Some participants have one or two close friends that they could talk to, but typically students' spiritual lives were a private matter and didn't come up during the course of everyday conversation. Participants discussed their desire to talk about spiritual issues more often, but felt that other students were not comfortable talking about their spiritual life, were not interested, or they were afraid of offending others. The amount of friends students could talk to about spiritual issues was dependent on their connection to a community that shared their common values and beliefs. Christian students tend to have more friends with whom they can talk to about spiritual concerns than did some of the wellness of mindfulness seekers. Erik talked about the positive impact friends in his Bible study have had on him:

They just gave me direction, and encouragement, and grace, and truth, and were loving me for who I was, and understanding I did mess up, and I was learning, but also giving me truth from God, telling me areas that needed to be worked on. Through that I just had a real desire to know God and live for God, a purpose for

God, and slowly I've gotten my faith stronger, to the point I am now leading the Bible study and doing the same thing for other guys.

Although Rachel has Christian friends through Campus Crusade for Christ she can talk to, she has noticed that once she has had a conversation with her non-Christian friends and shared her beliefs, they tend to shy away from further spiritual conversations:

Some of my friends just avoid the subject. I think sometimes they feel uncomfortable. I think a lot of it is that I shared with them what I believe, and they just don't want to make a decision, they don't want the rules, they are just here to have a good time, so they don't want anyone saying, well, what about this? I'm taking Arabic and I have some Muslim friends, but we don't talk about religion.

Q: Why do you think that is?

I don't know, I think because we have this idea that it is a touchy subject, and it probably isn't, and it would probably be cool to talk about it, but I think there is that stigma that Christians and Muslims don't get along, so I think we just avoid it, but yea, so we don't talk about it a whole lot.

Julie talked about some of the challenges with having spiritual conversations with friends. She discussed the differences she felt talking with younger students at Christian camp and her friends at the university:

I think it is different there because I was their camp counselor, and I think they looked up to me and that helped. I was a role model to them, and I think I could talk to them and explore things more with them when they are at camp, and if they are coming to a church camp it's pretty much definite they are a Christian. There are some younger women in the chapter that I have more meaningful conversations with, and I feel more comfortable than having those conversations with my really close friends. Religion is really personal and it is hard to touch on it with someone, and you don't want to make your really close friends feel uncomfortable, so I guess I'm more timid to do it with my close friends but I still do it.

Student participants talked about the tendency to associate with others like themselves, and as a result, many of the participants could not recall relationships or meaningful

conversations with students who held different views. Julie, a Christian who lives in a sorority, speaks to not having any friends who hold spiritual beliefs different from her own:

I don't really have friends from different religions, and I think that is because we, as people, identify with people we were raised similarly to, and I think religion plays a huge role in how you were raised, even if you are not a Christian but were raised in the church, you identify with people who were raised similarly, so I don't have interactions with people from other religions, and I don't understand it. It's hard to be friends with someone when you don't understand a huge chunk of their life, like we have a girl in our house that is Jewish, and I don't know anything about Judaism so it is hard for me to identify with her.

John has found that he can access spiritual conversations easier via the internet than he can on campus:

On the internet, message boards, reading, occasionally talking about it with people, because apparently people find it rude to bring up their religion and question it, so I am trying to stray away from that. I don't know why they are entitled to that. People are entitled to question my political views so why can't I question your religion? I guess I am trying to respect their view, it is really easy to talk about all this through the internet.

Participants often characterized positive spiritual conversations as honest dialogue, free from judgment or an agenda. Tiffany discusses one of her friends that, although very religious, is someone she can talk to openly about her ongoing spiritual search:

Like the girl I lived with this summer, she is very much as Lutheran as Lutherans come, but she is the one who gives me the books I have read and is like, you should really read this, it has some interesting ideas in it, and just really into like finding what else is out there, so she knows for sure this really is what she thinks, doing some compare and contrast, so she is the extreme example of being open to things.

Steve met a friend while he was home for the summer that he could have real spiritual conversations with:

I met this guy in the summer of 2006, and my buddy was doing this door to door thing with the young democrats, and this guy was doing it with him, and my



buddy said hey, there is this guy over here who is saying a lot of the things you are talking about and you might be interested in talking to him, so I took the initiative and brought it up with him and this guy was like a walking encyclopedia for this stuff, he just knew so much more than me, so we formed a bond based on that and had lots of talks, and discussions, and philosophical discourses, and I learned a lot from him. There wasn't a time where I ever felt inferior, I just felt like it was this mutual exchange, which I didn't really get with most of the other people I talk to about philosophy and mysticism.

Some of the participants had girlfriends or boyfriends that influenced their spiritual life.

However, for some students, talking to their significant other about spiritual matters was not plausible because they did not share their same level of interest in having spiritual conversations.

Kelly shared her boyfriend's lack of interest on the topic:

I've said, let's go to church and he is like ok, he is really chill and goes with the flow, I make most of the decisions. I feel like he used to be a really passionate person and he changed because of a lot of bad situations going on and that makes me really sad.

Steve also highlights this relational dynamic:

She [his girlfriend] is not really receptive to it and I respect that, once in a while I will poke and prod but I don't expect to get anything, she doesn't really think about this stuff, which is fine with me. She is a Catholic and was raised Catholic, so she has a spirituality, but in terms of my philosophical meanderings, there isn't a common ground.

*Interactions with pastors and university administration.*

Only a few participants noted spiritual conversations with pastors or university administration. I highlight these interactions because they contribute to an understanding of what constitutes a positive spiritual interaction. Robert talks about his experience with his supervisor as a resident advisor:

When I was an RA, the one thing I really liked was the one-on-one meetings, where you meet with your hall director for 30 minutes to an hour, and though a lot of it was business, there was always that 10-15 min at the beginning or the end

where you just talk about how you are doing, and that was very therapeutic to me because sometimes it feels like it is all jumbled here [points to his head] and having it come out is good.

Barbara talks about her conversations with some of the staff in the common ministry house, which provides religious programming for college students. The facility is not owned or operated by the university but is located central to campus:

It was nice to talk to someone who wasn't judging you, they were just open and had advice to give you, they didn't have an ulterior motive, or an agenda, it was just how can I help you and you don't normally see that when it comes to religion. Typically, if you are talking to a pastor they are trying to get you to convert or to do something, but with her she was just like I have all these resources what do you want to talk about, she was very helpful.

James discusses his conversations with a pastor in town:

I talked to a pastor at the Baptist church, he listens to me, but he doesn't believe what I think. He has a Ph.D. in religious studies, so it is nice to talk to someone like that who can refute what I say with religious stuff, but at the same time I can still present a point where he can say I don't believe that because of this but at the same time he doesn't have anything that would say otherwise except that he has read enough documents to know it is not that way.

*Interactions with a mentor.*

Mentors play an important role in the lives of young adults as they provide support, inspiration, and encouragement (Parks, 2000). Parks describes the role of a good mentor:

Good mentors help to anchor the promise of the future. As young adults are beginning to think critically about self and the world, mentors give them crucial forms of recognition, support, and challenge...Mentors care about your sole...good mentors know that all knowledge has a moral dimension, and learning that matters is ultimately a spiritual, transforming activity, intimately linked with the whole of life. (p. 128)

Only a few students report having a mentor figure in their life, and the descriptions of these relationships are helpful in understanding the kinds of interaction that supports students in their

spiritual journeys. However, it was surprising to me that only one student's mentor was directly associated with the university. No other student mentioned having a faculty or an administrator that acted as a mentor to them. Mentors were often friends, a student that was a couple of years older, or a family member. Tiffany talks about her roommate from the summer as being a mentor to her because of the way she was open, accepting, and also challenging:

It would be my roommate from this summer, and it is funny because she is younger than me so she doesn't fit the mentor picture, but I have never met anyone who is so open with things, and so willing to accept other things, and yet so strong in what she believes in, so I know if I ever have an issue come up she will be really good about it, and no matter what I say she will never get mad about it. I have had some radical ideas from time to time and she has been very open, and will listen to what I have to say, and will ask some exploratory questions, like ok why do you think this, what do you think about this and this, and it is nice to know there is someone I can go to who won't judge what I say. They are just happy you are thinking about it, like you are on the right track, and maybe what you conclude is not what I conclude, but it's nice to see you trying, or if I'm not trying, it just nice to see you happy.

Students involved in a religious group, like Campus Crusade for Christ, typically had a formal structure in place that provided the student with a mentor, and this had a powerful impact on the student's experience. Erik talked about his mentor in Campus Crusade for Christ:

It's the guy on staff with Crusade. He is a full time staffer. He is 26 or 27. He would call himself a resource when he can provide encouragement or challenges or direction in life if I need help he can help to direct me in the right direction and teaching me about God and giving me grace and helping me to forgive myself and to understand God more.

Q: What do you mean by give you grace?

Giving grace means he is still going to be my friend and love me even though I mess up my Christian faith, I am not perfect, I am a sinful being. and I am going to mess up, and him giving me grace is him saying, I know you are messing up but I still love you, I still know you are trying, and you are a child of God, and I am still going to love you for that even though you are messing up.

Abigail's mentor is her high school advisor:

Back home I would say my advisor/teacher in high school. She got me involved with the school and religion came up one day and we were talking about it, and she really helped me in high school, and just keeping up with my faith and just talking with me and every time I go home. I visit with her and we have long conversations, and I email with her and I look to her as a mentor, and I admire her for what she does, she is helping people, and getting involved with her church, and putting on performances in less fortunate areas.

Steve does not have a mentor but spoke of his desire to have one:

One of the books that really inspired me was *Condensed Chaos*, and it's about a particular school of magic called chaos magic, and it is a kind of make your own reality philosophy, and the author says at one point, this can be very liberating for some people, but at the same time there is the danger for someone who tends towards flight of fancy or dependency oriented thoughts, they can get themselves into deep trouble, because it is a self help program. You have to be mindful every step of the way, and you have to be intuitive enough to not only let books help you out, but let yourself kind of guide you and that was a conflict for me. As opposed to say the relational program, you have some sort of guru or the presence of someone there to kind of aid you along. I didn't really have that, so that created a problem.

### *Community*

The community variable in the social climate category is different than the community in the general environment category. In the latter, community referred to the general community in which the university was situated. Here, community refers to being a member of a social network. Belonging to a community of support is an important factor for student success. Supportive peer groups which share similar interests are instrumental in helping students deal effectively with academic and social challenges (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates 2005). Some participants belong to a tight knit community with other students who share common spiritual values, beliefs, and goals. These tightly formed groups are a place where students often go for support and encouragement. These groups are also vehicles by which students engage the

university through demonstrations or various programming initiatives. The Christian faith-centered seekers were heavily involved in their community, and this involvement influenced their experience at the university. Christian participants were often leaders in these groups, led a Bible study, and choose to live in the residence halls so they could influence younger students. Their involvement included being a part of a leadership team, weekly Bible study meetings, one-on-one meetings with members of the Bible study, weekly meetings with their mentor, and sometimes mission trips.

Some groups also offer opportunities for service in the local community and abroad. Participants spoke more often of mission trips abroad, alternative spring break trips, or study abroad experiences that shaped their spiritual life. These experiences provided the student with exposure to new ideas, experience with different cultures, a connection to the larger world, and helped them see their place in that world as well as how they might positively contribute to the global community. Examples of these tightly knit groups would be Campus Crusade for Christ, the Baptist Student Union, and the Progressive Student Union and, to some degree, the Young Democrats and College Republicans. Some of the mindfulness seekers were involved with the Progressive Student Union and the Young Democrats. These groups were also places that the students could have discussions, find support, and be involved in social action based on their common goals. Robert talks about how close the students in the Progressive Student Union are:

We do everything together, one of them is my roommate, we eat together all the time, very community oriented group. It didn't include the graduate students so much last year, but at the end of the year we held a progressive conference, and that got me connected to those graduate students and really respecting them. Then at the end we had a dinner at their house and really got to be relieved that it was over and talk to each other, discussed, talked and debated about what we had seen there. And that was another very spiritual moment for me, I left that saying I am going to live very consciously, and with a motive of influencing change.

John, an atheist, also mentioned the Progressive Student Union when discussing the recent changes he has made in his social networks due to his newly found passion in social change:

Until four or five months ago, I didn't have anyone I could really talk to. The people I was around, they are still my friends, but the people I am with now really do care about these things because I am surrounding myself with progressives, and the progressive student union, and young democrats, and even some college republicans. I have changed my social network...then I didn't care about it either, it's only been recently I have started to care about all of this, making a difference, and thinking about religion, and all these questions of the world.

Other groups are less involved and, while students share some common interests, they may be less active or visible on campus and may offer fewer programs. Examples are the Hillel Jewish Student group. Stacey, who was raised an atheist, describes her journey to find a community and how she arrived at Hillel:

A couple of my good friends my sophomore year were very Christian, and I went to church with them, and when I did it was enjoyable, but I felt really out of place, like I didn't belong there, even though they were very friendly and welcoming people, I just didn't feel like I fit in and like I shouldn't be there. When I started going to Hillel, it just felt right, and even though I haven't had a Bar Mitzvah, and don't know anything about the religion, people there consider me Jewish. So they considered me Jewish from day one, I had a more welcoming and secure experience with Hillel.

Another example is a discussion group at the common ministry house. Mary talks about finding her community through the common ministry house. Through their activities, she went to New Orleans to help rebuild and to France to explore more about Taze worship:

My friend just asked if I would go to dinner and discussion with her at the house, and my friend stopped coming, and I started going a lot more. I liked the openness, everyone was open minded and cynical, and I am cynical too...one of my favorite things to talk about is religion. I like to know what other people think and what their beliefs are.

Through this discussion group, she has learned to accept who she is, what she believes, and she know it is ok to question her own beliefs:

I felt like that wasn't ok to feel that way [that Jesus was not the son of God]. I think he is a teacher, and he was really in touch with God, and the Son of God doesn't have to be literal, I don't think that much in the bible is that literal, we are all children of God, and that could mean other things, that doesn't mean that was God himself, I don't believe that he, I believe he was really in touch with God, and just like any one of us can be in touch with God, and there is God within us, I don't know. The other belief that I wrestled with was, is he God? And I think we are all a part of God, I've just become a lot more confident and my intuition feeling about subjects, I don't like the phrase, to be a Christian you have to believe that Jesus is the son of God, there is no explanation, there are a lot of grey areas, like what does that mean? And the common ministry house was somewhere I felt safe asking those questions.

Spiritually impactful interactions can also occur within the context of university sponsored events. I asked Robert where he was able to interact with people that were from different backgrounds and had different beliefs than his own:

I went on the leadership retreat and for the first time I was able to engage with people of other multicultural groups. I never felt like I was able to approach these people in their groups because to me it seemed like they always grouped together, and then looking at it from their perspective, heck, people of Caucasian ethnicity seem to always group together too, so anyway, the way they designed retreat was to encourage interaction between this hugely diverse group of people. We are talking diversity of sexuality, ethnicity, disability, everyone was there and for the first time I felt like I was comfortably able to talk with anyone I wanted to.

Several of the participants struggled to find their place in a community, and because they did not identify with any particular religion or spiritual tradition, they did not have a place to go for support. Students who were not involved in a group had few, if any, friends they could talk to about their spiritual life. Barbara documents her struggle to find a place to belong when she wasn't religious but wasn't an atheist:

I went to the common ministry house my sophomore year, and the lady there gave me the book, finding your religion and it was great, and it was nice to talk to someone about my doubts, and what I am doing here, and I couldn't talk to my parents, or my sister, so she was great. The problem was, there was not a support group. I think there is an atheist and agnostic group, and I was like, I'm not there, but I'm not a Christian, but what else is there, there is not an in-between, the ministry house had a little group that explored religion, but it just sort of fizzled out.

George is one of the many participants who did not have other students to discuss spiritual matters with:

Generally, just kept it all in my head. I don't have a lot of people to talk to about that kind of stuff, I guess I have had some conversations with my dad about it and what he thinks, he is more spiritual than I am but doesn't belong to any one religion, but that's it, it's mostly in my head.

Kelly talks about inviting her friends to the Unitarian church where she has gone just a couple of times due to a lack of transportation and being too busy with work:

When I was interested in the Unitarian church I mentioned it to my friends, and I was like hey guys, do you want to check this out with me, it looks like a really cool place and are accepting of different people and beliefs, which is why I like it, they are really accepting, anyone can go there, you can believe in God or not believe in God. They have a moment of silence where you can pray, or meditate or just do whatever feels natural to you.

Although she has been to the Unitarian church, she feels in limbo, and this has impacted her ability to find a community:

I don't want to be in limbo for the rest of my life. I want to find a place, a community that can encourage my spirituality, which I think the Unitarian church might be for me. I just haven't been getting there, I haven't been putting a lot of effort into my spiritual life lately, I've just been dealing with my individual spirituality through the things I have been studying, and who I am as a person, but I definitely want to find a niche that I feel comfortable in one day.

Mary's spoke about her experience exploring different churches, and describes her idea of an open community:



I have been to a lot of churches, and liked their messages too, so it's like, I was kind of against churches more when I came here because I got tired of how a lot of churches' congregations, it just felt like everyone thought the same thing because that's what they were told. I was a part of a youth group in high school that a lot of my friends went to, and there was a bible study group, and I was the cynical one there too, I guess it's like opened my heart more to churches, seeing how good churches are, not in just the aspect that you should go to church because that is the right thing to do. I guess I like the more open mindedness and the feeling you get from a church, the congregation, the people in it, sometimes it feels like people are hiding things, like they just want you to see their good side, and a lot of churches are like that, and I don't like that, like that fakeness. A lot of people here show their humility, and to me that is a big aspect of Christianity.

The social climate of the university environment is important in shaping how student participants in understood themselves and others. Positive and negative interactions occurred in interpersonal interactions, while only positive experiences were reported within communities. Both types of these interactions contribute to how students see the spiritual climate of the campus.

### External Influences

Forces outside of the university environment also affect the students' experiences at the university. These external influences consisted of cultural pressures, big life events, and family relationships. It is important to keep in mind that, as students progress in their education and spiritual journey, they are going home periodically, talking with family, watching the news, traveling, and experiencing American culture. These relationships and interactions have an impact on how students experience the university and their spiritual development.

### *Cultural Pressures*

Participants spoke of a variety of ways their spiritual beliefs and outlook on religion were influenced by forces outside the university. One example would be politics. Students who were liberal recognized that their view of religion was often shaped by the way the media presented

religious issues. Several students described seeing televangelists, politicians, and political debates which caused them to view religion more negatively. They perceived religion as more conservative, right-winged, and close-minded. Because of the attention religion often receives in news or political media coverage, their views of an American culture dominated by Christians was reinforced. This in turn contributed to their feeling of being a minority on campus. John discusses how non-religious people in American are marginalized:

Politically in America I think atheists, there has been a recent movement in fighting back only because we've, it sounds odd to say this, but we have been oppressed. I think they [atheists] are not free to voice what they want to say, and not being struck down by religious radicals for example, and if they were more tolerant things would be great, but I don't think they are tolerant. It is written in a lot of sacred books, I don't know what you would call them, Bibles and Korans, on a literal level that is what it says, but then someone who is religious would tell you it is symbolic and metaphorical, but some people take that literally and that's when people who are judged to be evil and in their cross hairs, that includes atheists and homosexuals and whatnot and I don't believe that is right and of course if they didn't believe that then in a sense they would be believing in their religion so that is what they have to believe...isn't it? I'm not sure.

Robert talked about watching an event unfold in his hometown that caught a lot of media attention when a local church burned some books:

And in New Mexico at about the same time, there was a Harry Potter book burning by a right winged Christian group in a city south of mine, and that was another setback where I thought I could not be a part of this, because I really disagree with censorship and that kind of burning, so all these incidents adding up made me realize it [organized religion] was not my thing.

Patricia talked about a more general cultural pressure she felt in high school to belong to a certain religion, even though she didn't identify with a specific spiritual tradition:

It was a battle. Religion is tuff because people would still ask what religion are you? And it is still a sense of belonging and fitting in, and if I told people that I don't believe in religion then their parents wouldn't want their kids hanging out

with me, so I would usually say I was baptized Catholic, but I'm not super religious just to I could fit in, but not lie to myself.

### *Big Life Events*

Many student participants were greatly impacted by major events in their life. Every student did not elaborate on the details, rather they alluded to them. Some of these events were near death experiences: someone close dying, family illness, dealing with traumatic injury, and the divorce of parents. Patricia's boyfriend was murdered while camping just a few days after our interview. Erik's nephew died of sudden death syndrome just a few days before we met. He talked about how this death had impacted him:

It made me ask a lot of questions. I think, there were some questions I knew the answers for, but it was like why would God give my sister a child and then take it away so quickly? This is so much pain, why would you do that? Then I heard my sister say that I am glad I had him for a week, I wish I could have had him longer, but I'm glad I had him for a week, and I was like wow she can say that the day that he died. She was happy for the opportunity to have him for a week.

Q: So do you feel like you have been able to answer that question of why?

God had a purpose for it. A teacher once described it like this, our lives are like a beautiful tapestry you hang on a wall, and God can see the design, and the weaving, and the work that is going into it. We see the backside, the tangle and mess, and no design, but trusting God and knowing that he has a purpose, he didn't make this thing happen, sin entered the world and death happened, he died because of sin. I would say God can use this horrible thing for good though, and I have seen parts of that in the strength of my family, and the spiritual strength, and the showing of emotion that I hadn't seen and talking about spiritual things, and by questioning. It's giving us answers, and making us stronger, and instead of being apathetic about our faith, and being a lot more stronger, and saying God is present and working around us, and God is crying just as much as we are, and knowing that God can use it for good, but he is crying right along with us, for our heart and our pain, but knowing that my nephew is in heaven, he is ok, and we are the ones that are hurting. It's going to be with us the rest of our lives, something we will never forget.

Julie thought that she had cancer and talked about dealing with the news:

I was like why God me? And I was really hysterical and mad at God. And they didn't want to biopsy because it would leave cancerous cells along the track. I went to an ear nose throat specialist who said if you do a use small feed it won't leave cancer cells on the track, so they did the biopsy, and it wasn't cancer, the tech just jumped to conclusions, so that whole thing took my faith and boggled it and threw it around. I had a lot of people praying for me about it and I thought the prayer had healed me, because I am a big believer in the power of prayer, and I'm not sure anymore...when you look back on experiences it is much different, I'm not sure anymore if it does, but I would still believe it did, but I'm like I don't know, I was younger. I don't know if it was a mistake or if prayer had actually healed me. So I don't know, at the time I did, and now I just don't know, I'm in between, so that is how that impacted me. It really strengthened my faith because at the time I really thought that is what happened, and sometimes I still think that, and then I'm like no, you have your good days and your bad days.

Tiffany had some difficult things happen with her family and didn't have anyone to talk to:

There have been some things that have happened since I have been here that have tested my faith, just things that have happened with my family, and with myself, and not having that religious outlet, or spiritual outlet, whatever you want to call it, kind of brought me further and further away from traditional religion.

Other students had big events impact them as well. James' father had a stroke and Tiffany, Kelly, and Mary all talked about dealing with their parents going through a divorce. Students are trying to incorporate these events into their life at school and make sense of how it fits with their philosophy on life while attempting to explain why bad things happen in the world.

### *Family*

Student participants' families also impact their spiritual life while at college. Some students have very supportive families who have encouraged their student even if they have decided to break away from the religion in which they were raised. Other participants feel they cannot talk to their parents about the spiritual changes they have been experiencing because of fear of their parent's reactions. A couple of students have told their parents they didn't believe in

God anymore, and the parents challenged them on their new spiritual pursuit. Barbara talks about her parent's reaction to the news that she was Buddhist:

I called my parents up last year and finally had decided I was going to be a Buddhist, and it clicked, and I had read so many books about it, and I was like this is it, this resonates, and I told them, and my sister started crying, and my dad was like, you know they chant for no reason right, and I was like, what? And my mom was like, I'm going to pray for you, so that's my family. I lived with my parents this past summer and they tried to bribe me to go to church, and they aren't respectful of my beliefs, and my dad and I are constantly fighting about it, we are both very stubborn. He calls it a cult, and like he has had a more open mind lately, but they keep thinking that I am going to come back to the faith, and when I come home they hold hands praying around the dinner table which is a new thing, we didn't do that growing up, I won't do it.

Some student participants have parents that are against religion and had a difficult time being supportive when the student began to explore their spirituality more. Abigail had challenges talking about her Christian faith with her father who is not religious:

My dad is so anti-religion. I think he believes in a higher power and that's about it. He calls my church the crazy house and bashes it a lot, so just being patient with them, and listening to what they have to say, and when they do criticize other people I correct them, just because they do go to church doesn't make them a bad person. I've gotten to the point where I tell my dad to just stop talking about it, and I just tell him they may be different, but they are still human and they have feelings, and just because you believe in something else, it's not morally wrong what they believe in.

Stacey describes not being able to talk to her atheist parents about her new found spiritual life in Judaism:

I know that they both have negative ideas about religion. My dad has said multiple times that the one thing that got him disenfranchised with religion was the whole chosen people idea with Judaism. That idea is universal in almost every religion, so the conversations I have my parents are very brief. My parents will usually say something like I don't agree with religion for these reasons and that is where the conversations end. I can't explore my own religious ideas and spiritual ideas with them because they already have these deeply engrained negative perceptions with religion.

These examples demonstrate the wide range of relationships students have with their families which influence their experiences while attending college.

### Summary

The focus of this chapter was on organizing themes from data collected from 16 college students and two faculty members. The themes were presented according to an adaptation of Moos' (1979) Social-Ecological Framework (see figure 2). Meaningful excerpts from participants' interviews were utilized to honor the qualitative nature of this study and to provide thick, rich descriptions important to the transferability and reliability of these findings. The conclusions of the study and implications for practice, theory, and research are presented in chapter five.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the conclusions and implications of the study. The first section discusses three major conclusions as well as implications for practice related to these conclusions. Subsequent sections discuss implications for theory and research, limitations, and contributions of the study. The chapter concludes with my reflecting on the study's findings.

#### Conclusions of the Study

The analysis in chapter four was organized as a series of themes related to the analytical framework derived from Moos (1979). Based on this analysis, the major conclusions of the study are:

1. Participants entered the university environment as a certain type of spiritual seeker, which influenced how they perceived and engaged: (a) the general community, (b) the campus climate, (c) other students, (d) the classroom, and (e) social groups.
2. Participants struggled to integrate their spiritual life with a campus climate and curriculum that emphasized a rational, empirical, modern, and scientific epistemology. As a result, participants lacked an understanding of how to fulfill their passions or purpose after graduation.
3. Participants did not engage in authentic dialogue with much frequency due to a campus culture and societal norms that do not foster authentic dialogue. As a result, they often felt like minorities on campus and lacked mentoring relationships associated with the university. These conclusions are discussed in the following sections, along with implications for practice.

### *Perceptions and Engagement*

Participants entered the university environment with their own experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and personalities and as a type of spiritual seeker. As I interviewed students and listened to their stories, I observed interesting and significant differences when comparing different spiritual seeker types. For all student participants, entering college represented a time where they could break away from their parents and establish their own spiritual practices. Consistent with Cherry et al.'s (2001) findings, after arriving at the university, their spiritual practices became much more diverse and pluralistic. Many of the non-faith-centered seeking participants had a background with religion prior to entering college, and for them, this meant not attending a church anymore. College did not cause this decrease in religiosity per se, but college was the opportunity to make life changes the participant had been thinking about prior to arriving to the campus. There were consistent differences between faith-centered and the other three types of spiritual seekers. These differences were most striking in their perceptions of the general community, the campus climate, of other students, and the classroom.

#### *General community.*

By and large, faith-centered seekers perceived the general community as a secular and diverse environment. Several faith-centered seekers commented on being exposed to new ideas and perspectives that challenged their beliefs, ways of knowing, and their worldview. The multi-religious, wellness, and mindfulness seekers commented on the high number of churches in the city, the lack of diversity, and the pervasive Christian culture. These participants noticed the lack of places to worship for non-Christians, such as Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews. As they explored their own spiritual life, many of these participants felt this lack of spiritual diversity inhibited their ability to seek out opportunities for spiritual interaction.



*Campus climate.*

All participants spoke to the mostly neutral stance of the university in relation to religious and spiritual issues. However, faith-centered seekers perceived the campus climate as indifferent and, at times, hostile towards religion. Several faith-centered seekers described the environment as “dark” and one in which it was difficult to be a Christian. Participants who grounded their spiritual journey in a Christian tradition felt that living out their values was counter to the prevailing campus culture. These participants felt that the dominate culture was one that encouraged students to seek out their own personal happiness, satisfy their immediate needs, and believe whatever they wanted without much thought to life’s big questions. Non-faith-centered seekers perceived the campus climate as mostly Christian, and they often felt silenced and overwhelmed by the sheer number of large and vocal Christian student groups.

*Other students.*

Nearly all participants perceived the student body in three distinct groups. This took the form of dividing students into those who were religious, those who did not care, and those who were spiritual but not interested in religion. From our conversations, it seemed that students who were religious or spiritual felt they were the smallest group on campus and that the majority of students simply did not care about spiritual matters. Many participants viewed the average student on campus as apathetic, perhaps interested in spiritual questions, but not engaging in activities to pursue that interest. Faith-centered seekers felt there were a large number of students who were clearly anti-religious and were not interested in spiritual discussions from a religious perspective. The multi-religious, wellness, and mindfulness seekers saw most students as Christians. They admitted that not all students were “practicing” Christians, but the average student would label themselves Christian if asked. Non-faith-centered seekers saw the majority

of conversations through the student newspaper, demonstrations on campus, and poster and fliers around campus as being dominated by a Christian perspective. Many of these students felt somewhat disenfranchised because they did not adhere to a specific religious tradition and, as a result, there were a lack of inclusive opportunities to engage with others about their own spiritual journey.

*The classroom.*

From my conversations with participants, it was clear the classroom has a great potential for positively engaging students' spiritual development. However, for the most part, the classroom experiences of participants did not incorporate spiritual topics. Most classes did not cover topics related to ethics, values, meaning and purpose, or connection to a global community. Occasionally participants enrolled in a class which dealt with spiritual or religious topics and, depending on the ability of the faculty in these courses to facilitate balanced discussion, participants found these classroom interactions as beneficial to their spiritual development. Faith-centered seekers felt that professors were often anti-religious or, at least, anti-Christian. These students did not feel their views or perspectives were welcomed in class and did not speak up often in discussions that involved religious or spiritual topics. This anti-religious/Christian feeling in class was reinforced by non-Christian participants, as well as by the two professors I interviewed.

Professors take a wide variety of approaches when addressing spiritual topics. Participants felt that some professors avoid spirituality in the classroom all together, even when the class material related to spiritual themes. Others felt some professors take the opportunity to attack Christianity and invalidate any Christian perspective. Participants who had a professor that included a wide range of perspectives reported the most positive experiences in class, which

engaged the spiritual development of participants. These professors, while rare, shared their own views and encouraged students to incorporate their spiritual perspectives in class assignments, discussions, and tests.

*Social groups.*

Belonging to a supportive community is important for students' success in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This was true for participants in this study. Belonging to a social group that was spiritually supportive gave participants the opportunity to discuss spiritual topics in a safe environment. They were able to make friends who shared common views, passions, interests, and goals. These groups provided a spiritual outlet where students were given spiritual support, which they were not getting as part of their on-campus experience. Many of these student groups also provided opportunities for community service, social justice projects, mission trips, and alternative spring breaks, which engaged students in activities that were of spiritual importance to them. Faith-centered seekers had the most options to belong to a group in the form of religiously affiliated student groups. While there was only one group for Jewish, Hindu, or Muslim students on campus, there are over 15 different Christian based groups. Given Christian participants' propensity to view the university environment as hostile, it was no surprise to see how their groups acted as a refuge from the daily university experience.

Faith-centered seeking participants found opportunities for spiritual growth almost exclusively from involvement in off-campus religious student organizations. Despite feeling challenged by a campus climate and culture that these participants perceived as hostile, they continued in their spiritual development. The public university environment acted as a catalyst which propelled them further into involvement in their groups. At times it seemed to me as if faith-centered seekers saw the public university as antithetical to their values and beliefs.

Because they often felt their views were not welcome in class or as part of the larger campus discourse, a sort of “us vs. them” mentality existed, at least as far as their spiritual life was concerned.

Some non-faith-centered seekers connected with political groups on campus. Several of these participants were active in groups like the Progressive Student Union, Young Democrats, and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered Student Association. These often provided some of the same support networks and opportunities as did the faith-based groups. Participants who did not identify with a religious tradition, and who did not get involved with a political group, struggled to find a spiritual home. These students spoke about their desire to find their niche, a spiritually supportive community, and places to dialogue about spiritual issues. These participants were hopeful they would find a place to develop spiritually after graduation.

*Implications for practice.*

Given the diversity of spiritual expression amongst these participants, it is clear the university must consider the unique ways students will engage their spiritual life on and off-campus. With that in mind, the university can develop curriculum and activities that engage and foster spiritual development for students with a wide variety of spiritual perspectives. Student development professionals are tasked with creating co-curricular environments that enhance the holistic development of students (Braskamp et al, 2006); and yet, the spiritual development of the participants at this public university was neglected. The findings of this study suggest an immediate need for a comprehensive assessment of how the public university is addressing the spiritual development of its students.

Faculty seemed to have a significant potential for creating both positive and negative spiritual experiences for participants. These experiences are especially influential because they

affect how the student views the university's climate and culture. Participants benefited greatly from those classroom environments in which all students, regardless of their spiritual beliefs, felt welcomed and valued. Therefore, this assessment must include an understanding of how spiritual topics are engaged in the classroom.

The importance of belonging to a community that shares similar spiritual values cannot be understated. Participants who had found a spiritual place to belong had increased opportunities for service, friendship with peers, and mentoring relationships. These communities played an important role in supporting students in their spiritual development. Therefore, the university should also assess what communities exist on and off-campus for students interested in developing their spiritual life. Understanding what groups are available for students who do not belong to a specific religious tradition is especially important since these students are at a higher risk of not finding a spiritual community.

#### *Spiritual Integration with Campus and Curriculum*

Participants struggled to integrate their spiritual life with a campus climate and curriculum that emphasized a rational, empirical, modern, and scientific epistemology. Participants from all spiritual backgrounds talked about the difficulty in reconciling areas of their spiritual life with the modern and rational approach of the university. This was often described in terms of the origin or nature of the universe. Faith-centered seekers were challenged to reevaluate the creation story of their faith, as they took courses which taught evolution. Non-faith-centered seekers were often motivated by the desire to improve the human condition and improve the world's environment. This motivation was often connected to a value for human life, the sacredness of creation, and the belief that there had to be something "bigger out there" that was responsible for the wonder and awe they felt in nature. Participants' dreams, visions,

and hopes for their future, and the future of the world, were driven by emotions and beliefs connected with their spiritual journey. Their spiritual lens plays a significant role in how they see themselves and others. How participants react and respond to others and the degree to which they feel a connection and responsibility to the rest of the world is rooted in who they are spiritually. However, these spiritual beliefs, emotions, and ways of knowing were in constant tension with the rational, empirical, and modern way of approaching knowledge that participants encountered in the curriculum.

This tension supports the concerns of researchers and theorists regarding how the current educational approach separates, and fails to educate, both the minds and the hearts of students (Astin, 2004; Boyer, 1995; Dalton, 2001; Chickering et al., 2006; Marsden, 1994; Palmer, 1983, 1998; Wilshire, 1990). It also supports the notion that the emphasis on objective reality has had negative impacts. Parks (2000) describes the negative consequences of overemphasizing a modern approach to knowing,

This divorced the knowledge of the object that is known from its relationship to the subject who knows, thus diminishing the significance of emotion, intuition, the personal, the moral, and full engagement with the complexity emerging from the practice of lived experience, for all of these are difficult to apprehend empirically. Reason and knowledge, thus defined, are reduced to this processes that can be analyzed and replicated-in short, produced and controlled. (p. 160)

One apparent consequence of the participants' failure to integrate their spiritual life with the campus and curriculum was a diminished understanding of how to fulfill their passions or purpose after graduation. This is most unfortunate given that a central task of young adulthood, according to Parks (2000), is finding a place in the world of adult work. Parks describes this as discovering one's vocation,

Vocation conveys "calling" and meaningful purpose. It is a relational sensibility in which I recognize that what I do with my time, talents, and treasure is most

meaningfully conceived not as a matter of mere personal passion and preference but in relationship to the whole of life....Vocation is the place where the heart's deep gladness meets the world's deep hunger. (p. 148)

Most participants were aware of their passions in life, and most of passions had to do with helping other people, reducing pain and suffering in the world, and making the world a better place. However, most participants could not articulate how they were or would fulfill their passions or purpose after graduation. While they had a desire to help others and live a meaningful life, most participants lacked practical experiences, or role models, that would help them connect their passions with their quickly approaching post-graduation work life. Students connected to a spiritually supportive community had more structured opportunities to volunteer and help other people, but this was rarely connected to their academics or professors.

*Implications for practice.*

There are many ways that the public university can create an environment that is spiritually supportive and intentionally addresses the spiritual development of all students in and out of the classroom. One immediate step the university could take is to raise the profile of opportunities for study abroad, community service, alternative spring breaks, and service learning. Some of the participants had the opportunity to take part in these activities through an organization they were involved with. These types of experiences were transformational for the students, and were a major component of their spiritual development. Further, these transformational experiences impacted the students' choice of degree and helped them identify ways to use that degree after graduation.

There are many ways public institutions can integrate spiritual development of students in the curriculum and in co-curricular programs. Penn State University has the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center, the Eisenhower All-Faith Chapel, and a mediation chapel. The University of Wisconsin

has a student residence focused on exploring spirituality and religion. The University of California San Diego is home to the Center for Ethics and Spirituality. Over 40 faculty and student affairs staff from various universities attended a workshop on spirituality in conjunction with the 2006 Institute on College Student Values (Dalton, Eberhardt, & Crosby as cited in Dalton, et al., 2006). They identified a number of ways their campuses were addressing spiritual issues, such as designating space on campus for meditation and reflection; interfaith dialogue and interaction incorporating interfaith conversations, celebrations, study groups, living-learning groups, and worship; new administrative structures and titles, incorporating deans, coordinators of spiritual life, character development, centers for sport and spirituality, leadership and ethics, moral development, career and calling; and campus climate and ethos incorporating campus covenants. An exhaustive account of best practices is beyond the scope of this study. However, recent works have made comprehensive recommendations and documented promising practices of both public and private colleges and universities that are developing the whole student, including their spirituality (Braskamp et al., 2006; Chickering et al., 2006; Dalton et al., 2006; Parks, 2000). Any one of these resources would be a good starting point for campus-wide conversations on how to incorporate spirituality in the work of the university.

### *Lack of Authentic Dialogue*

In chapter three I conceptualized authentic dialogue through the lens of the phenomenological perspective. Dialogue is realized when each of the participants has in mind the other, and intends to establish a living mutual relationship (Craig & Muller, 2007). Parks (2000) discusses the nature of authentic dialogue: “Dialogue is not just talk. It is a way of being in conversation with others that involves a good deal of listening, desire to understand, and willingness to be affected-to be moved and informed, and to change one’s mind” (p. 142). She



goes on to say, “Genuine dialogue affects us and alters the trajectory of our becoming” (p. 204).

While participants did not use the term “authentic” to describe positive spiritual conversations, they spoke about the desire for personal interaction that was non-judgmental, open-minded, real, and free from ulterior motives. Chickering et al. (2006) believe that,

The quest for authenticity, spiritual growth, meaning, and purpose is strengthened through campus dialogue in which the experiences and beliefs of others are openly shared and critically examined....Lively campus discussions and debates about institutional values and moral issues encourage students to reflect on their meaning and relevance for students’ personal commitments and beliefs. (p. 278)

*A campus culture that does not foster authentic dialogue.*

Participants described their lives and other students’ lives as busy and hectic. They often felt as though they did not have as much time to devote to their spiritual life as they would like. They rarely had time to slow down, be still, and reflect on where they had been, where they were, and where they were headed in life. Participants were spread thin over multiple commitments to groups and organizations, their studies, friends, work, and family. Participants lacked experiences or spaces that brought these fragmented aspects of their life at college together. Chickering et al. (2006) believe this fragmentation is caused by the structure and content of college life. They write,

Managing time and establishing order and structure in their lives are among the most important survival skills every college student must master. It is far more than a scheduling problem; creating structure and a sense of wholeness and meaning out of so much disjointed activity is a task so relentless that it threatens to overwhelm students at times. (p.169)

Participants rarely engaged in authentic dialogue with professors. Only a few participants had such experiences, and they said they would like more. Demonstrations on campus by religious individuals or groups would usually spark negative feelings and argumentative debate. Those types of interactions did little to build a spiritually supportive environment. While individual

evangelical conversations with students were often less combative, participants typically viewed these conversations as laden with an agenda and therefore failed to see them as real opportunities for authentic spiritual dialogue. In summary, religious and spiritual displays by outside groups were somewhat commonplace on campus, but these failed to produce any kind of relational engagement with spiritual topics.

*Societal norms that do not promote authentic dialogue.*

Several participants commented on barriers to authentic dialogue that made it clear there were larger societal forces at work. Many students talked about the private nature of spiritual issues and felt that people were afraid to discuss spiritual topics for fear of offending someone. Many participants questioned the societal norms which made it acceptable to question someone's political beliefs, and yet made it unacceptable to question someone's spiritual beliefs. Because of both a campus climate and social norms that do not foster authentic dialogue, students rarely engaged in spiritually authentic dialogue while on campus.

All participants enjoyed discussing spiritual topics with other students and faculty, provided those conversations were authentic in nature. This implied that those engaged in the spiritual dialogue had an open mind, were non-judgmental, and were open to new ideas and perspectives. While spiritually authentic conversations were impactful, they were not commonplace in the university environment. Student participants involved in a group that served as a spiritual community had more opportunities for these types of exchanges than did those who were not involved in a spiritual community.

One by-product of this lack of authentic dialogue was that participants lacked mentors associated with the university. Mentors and mentoring environments are critical to students' spiritual development, and faculty play a critical role in the lives of students (Parks, 2000). It is

“The faculty-student relationship that forms the backbone of any educational institution, and it may be said that the true professor serves, inevitably, as a spiritual guide” (Parks, p. 166). Parks goes on to describe professors roll in leading students through authentic dialogue:

The encounter of student and teacher that serves a recomposing of truth at the level of ultimacy is a meeting of spirit with spirit....An educator-professor is one who leads out toward truth by professing his or her intuitions, apprehensions, and convictions of truth, in a manner that encourages dialogue with the emerging inner authority of the student. (p. 167)

For the handful of students with mentors, only one student had a professor who acted as a mentor. Often mentors were family or friends. Christian students involved in Christian student organizations usually had a formal program that provided mentors. These mentoring relationships included regular meetings and conversations where the mentor supported the student in their spiritual development while at college. Non-Christian students involved in student organizations occasionally talked about a mentor or role model. This was usually an upper-class student in the organization. The failure of this public university to capitalize on the opportunity for professors to act as mentors is a significant loss to both students and the institution.

Another apparent result of the lack of authentic dialogue about spiritual matters was that participants felt like minorities. Research has shown that, despite the large number of Christian organizations on a campus, Christian students can perceive themselves as minorities (Moran et al., 2007). This was the case in my study as well. Christian students perceived themselves as minorities because they were living out their faith in their daily lives. This meant going against the campus culture, which they perceived as encouraging students to do whatever satisfies their immediate needs, makes them happy, and to think about life in the short-term. This minority perception amongst religious students was also found in early pilot studies I conducted on the

same campus (Jones, 2003). This feeling of being a minority is additionally intriguing after hearing how non-Christian students described the perception of the campus as predominately Christian. What also surprised me is that non-Christian participants also viewed themselves as minorities. They saw themselves as students who were interested in deepening their spirituality, asking life's big questions, and being concerned with global issues. Because participants perceived other students as mostly apathetic on issues of spirituality, religion, politics, and social justice, they often felt out of place on campus. They felt that the average student on campus was simply not concerned with his or her spiritual life. Christian faith-centered seekers often felt attacked and marginalized by the campus culture, the curriculum, and by professors in the classroom. Non-Christian students often felt silenced, marginalized, and oppressed by the general Christian perspective of other students, and by the number of highly visible and vocal Christian student groups.

*Implications for practice.*

The way participants defined spirituality was varied and rich in depth. These definitions are important to understand so that faculty, staff, and students can create spiritual learning outcomes that transcend different religions. Therefore, this public university would be well served by starting a dialogue that explores the nature of spirituality and its place in the mission and goals of the university. This public university has at least one learning goal which is spiritual in nature, and this would be a natural place to begin the discussion. A campus-wide understanding of spirituality can also aid in the bringing together of multiple spiritual perspectives on common issues and values.

This coming together is especially important for the creation of authentic dialogue, which was something that was lacking in every aspect of the participants' experience at the university.

The faith-centered seekers and non-faith-centered seekers both had divergent perspectives on the campus and each other. These groups seem to have much in common, but rarely seemed to interact with one another. This study showed that students who consider themselves spiritual, but were not connected to a traditional religious tradition, lacked opportunity for a connection to a spiritual community. The opportunity for university sponsored dialogue on spiritual topics would provide an opportunity for those students who are not involved with a specific religion to join in a larger conversation they are currently unable to participate in. In addition, this dialogue may help diminish the feelings of being a minority on campus that participants reported. The university would clearly do well to create spaces and opportunities dedicated to authentic dialogue on spiritual issues between students and faculty.

This dialogue may also assist students in their search for ways to reconcile the tension they feel between the scientific, rational, modern way of knowing and their spiritual life, which includes the non-material. The university may start by looking at the work of the Fetzer Institute. Their work focuses on exploring spiritual concepts and practices to foster the rejoining between these two approaches to discovery and understanding.

#### Implications for Research and Theory

The findings of this study have implications for research and theory in student development. This study adds to the understanding of students' spiritual development (Anderson, 1994; Lee 2002a, 2002b; Fowler, 1982; Love et al., 2005; Parks, 2000); as well, it adds an important perspective from non-Christian students. It is clear that the spiritual identity of these participants is a large part of their core self-identity. This study also supports other research which has shown the important role the environment plays in student development (Kuh & Gonyea, 2005; Parks, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Of particular importance is the

notion that students require an environment that provides a balance of challenge and support (Sanford, 1966). Participants seemed to receive more challenge than support at this public university. This is particularly troublesome for those students who were unable to find a spiritually supportive community outside of the university environment.

In addition, this study made use of Dalton et al.'s (2006) spiritual seeker categories as a way to understand students' spirituality. These general categories proved to be extremely helpful in conceptualizing differences in how students responded to and perceived the university environment. Placing students into one of these nonexclusive spiritual seeker categories proved easier than attempting to identify which stage of development a student was in according to the faith development models of Fowler (1981) or Parks (2000).

This study reinforces the evidence that students' spiritual lives and practices are increasingly pluralistic, optional, diverse, and complex (Cherry et al., 2001; Chickering et al., 2006; Dalton et al., 2006). It is necessary to account for this diversity as research continues to explore students' spiritual development.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

Questions still remain regarding students' educational experience. How do faith-centered seekers develop differently at a public institution compared to a private university? How do student development professionals engage in and promote spiritually meaningful dialogue with students and faculty? What connections are made between the curriculum and co-curriculum to allow students to develop spiritually? How can a large public university provide students with mentors? Further research could explore the experience of the different spiritual seeker types longitudinally, as well as across different institutional types. These are important questions to be answered as university campuses attempt to engage students in their spiritual development.

### Limitations of the Study

This study attempted to understand the spiritual lives and experiences of 16 student participants at one four-year public research university. Their experiences are further shaped by their own religious and spiritual background, their families, and their relationships and experiences during college. The participants in this study volunteered, and therefore the sample group self-selected to be involved in this research. Further, students who agreed to be part of this research were individuals who had an expressed interest in spirituality and had persisted in college. Voices of students who withdrew from the university or who were not interested in spirituality were not heard. In addition, the participants do not represent a sample that is racially and ethnically diverse. The size of the sample and the lack of diversity limit the generalizability of this study. However, the design of this qualitative study did not intend that the findings would be generalizable to all university settings. While many public universities may find similar themes in their student populations and campus climate, the intent of this study was to explore, and accurately represent, the meaning of participants' spiritual lives while attending a public university.

### Contributions of the Study

One of the primary strengths of this study is that it included the perspectives of non-Christian students. This was one of the major deficiencies of previous research outlined in the review of the literature (Hartley, 2004). Voices were heard from students who described themselves as spiritual but not religious, atheist, agnostic, Universalist, Jewish, Buddhist, and spiritually searching, as well as Christians.

Another important strength of this research is the depth and scope of the stories and narratives of these participants. The 16 participants have provided narratives essential to

understanding their spiritual lives before entering college, as well as how their spiritual lives have continued to develop while enrolled in the public university. Their spiritual beliefs and worldview shape who they are and who they are becoming, as well as how they perceive and interact with other students, faculty, and the university.

Previous studies have failed to include these diverse perspectives when exploring students' spiritual development (Hartley, 2004). In studies of this nature, spiritual yet non-religious students are rarely given a voice. By including both religious and non-religious participants, this study deepens our understanding of the spiritual experiences of students. In so doing, we are challenged to expand our notions of spirituality and explore ways to serve all students more holistically.

### Reflections

In the course of my own work at a public university, I have noticed how frequently rhetoric about the transformative experience of a college education is used in speeches and recruitment material. However, as I spoke with the students in this study I had to reassess the university's role in that transformation. These were students who were clearly passionate about life, helping others, their spiritual development and making a difference in the world. Yet, generally speaking, this public university did not play a significant role in the spiritual life of participants. This can be said if one thinks of the university advancing its learning outcomes primarily through faculty, the curriculum, and co-curricular activities and programs. Few examples were given by participants that indicated the university was intentionally addressing or encouraging their spiritual development. Aside from the occasional class which dealt with spiritual topics, a professor who facilitated a good discussion, guest speaker, or instance of community service, there was little evidence the university was invested in participants' spiritual



life. There was a lack of university-sponsored activities that were perceived as spiritually engaging and, for those that were, the student bore the responsibility to seek out those activities in order to participate. However, if the university is conceived in more general terms (as all activities which a student encounters while attending college), then more can be said about the university's impact on students' spiritual development. This impact is more unintentional in nature, and is not directly controlled by the university. Participants' spiritual lives were impacted by the campus climate, their perceptions of other students, conversations with students or faculty, discussions in class, participation in student organizations, and by being exposed to different perspectives. Even if these influences were perceived as hostile, indifferent, or negative, they still played a role in the spiritual life of participants. These influences are fairly standard however, as they would likely be experienced by a college student attending any college or university in the United States. They do not represent intentional efforts by the university to engage with the spiritual development of its students. This would seem to support Marsden's (1994) assertion that religious and spiritual matters have largely been pushed to the margins of the academy.

Participants occasionally spoke of taking part in community service, although I was surprised by the number of participants who had not done any community service while in college. There was clearly a disconnect between what they wanted their lives to be about (usually more reflective and some amount of serving others) and the reality of their busy and hectic life at school. Nearly all students hoped to figure out how to connect their spiritual life with the real world after graduation. It saddened me that few had been presented with or taken opportunities to live out their desires while in college, or at the very least dialogue with faculty and staff about those desires, but even that experience was missing.

Participants in the study were actively searching for ways to deepen their spiritual life. Some felt they had successfully found ways to do this through formal activities outside of the typical university environments. A few participants struggled to find a spiritual place on campus and, as a result, were somewhat frustrated with the lack of opportunities to discuss spiritual topics. These participants often looked to more general experiences, such as yoga, music, art, the outdoors, or even drug use as outlets for their spirituality. Often, these participants had hopes they would develop their spiritual life after they graduated and moved to a larger city. Only a handful of students had found their living groups, participation in campus demonstrations, classes, or interactions with faculty to be spiritually engaging. I was struck by the reality that religious students (or at least their view points) seemed to be marginalized on campus, and students who were spiritual but not religious were in some ways invisible. Neither group of these students' desires for spiritual engagement were being intentionally addressed by the university. At our public university, like many others, we have programs which encourage the appreciation of diversity. Only recently has the idea of religious diversity began to be considered in this programming. However, the key question which seems unasked of students is, to what end do we appreciate that diversity? I think if we can help students ask and dialogue about the "why" of their education we will strike a chord in their spiritual life and authentic spiritual dialogue may begin.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Guide

#### General Background

1. Tell me about your spiritual background growing up, right up to before you came to college.
2. How about now that you are in college? Has your spiritual life changed? How and why?

#### Broad Questions

1. Given these changes or developments, what do you think has impacted those change, what influenced you? [probe for academics, etc.]
2. What are your spiritual activities now?
3. What do you think about the university environment in regard to spiritual development—yours specifically, but also other students?
4. How do you relate to others around spirituality? [respect for those different, whom do you talk to, etc.]
5. At the point you are at now, in college, what would you say is your ultimate purpose in life? Has college environment influenced that?
6. Can you identify some times that you felt your spiritual/religious views were weakened or challenged? What about strengthened/encouraged?
7. How can you tell that as a university, the faculty, staff care about your ability to develop your sense of spirituality?

#### College Expectations

1. What role did expect the university to have in your spiritual development?
2. How about in discovering who you are as a person and your sense of purpose?
3. What kind of a role did you think this university would play in your spiritual life before you got to campus?

#### Academic Experiences

1. How have your academic experiences influenced your spirituality?
2. Can you describe your experiences in the classroom? Have those experiences shaped your spiritual life?
3. Have you ever studies abroad study abroad? How did that experience impact you?
4. Can you think of university programs you have attended which engaged your spiritual life?
5. What about community service

#### Other Experiences

1. Do you currently have a job? How has that impacted your spiritual life?

2. Are you involved in any leadership roles? How have those experiences shaped who you are?
3. What about any mission trips or service trips?
4. What other experiences at the university have shaped who you are spiritually?

### Goals & Aspirations

1. What are your career goals?  
What are you passionate about? How has that been shaped by attending this university?  
In what ways, if any, do you feel a sense of connectedness to the world?
2. How have your spiritual beliefs informed your degree choice or what you want to do after you graduate?

### Relationships

1. Describe your social groups and friends? What role do they play in your spiritual life?  
Who acts as a mentor to you? Describe the impact of that relationship in your life.  
Where have you lived on/off campus? What was that experience like?
2. Who do you go to talk to when you want to discuss spiritual matters? Why that person/persons?
3. Can you give some examples of where you engage in conversation with people who share your beliefs? What about with those who believe something quite different than you?
4. How would you say your circle of friends impacts your spiritual life? What about your classes or professors?

### Attitudes towards others

1. How do you go about approaching someone who holds different views than you, or is even hostile towards your beliefs? How has that changed since coming to college?

### Campus Climate

1. What do you think about the spiritual lives of other students on campus? Do you think other students are concerned about spiritual matters?
2. Do you feel that the university's environment encourages students to explore and develop their spiritually?
3. How is spirituality manifested on campus?

### Ethical Development

1. When you face decisions that require you to think about the ethics involved, how do you make that decision? What influences that decision?

### Divided Self

1. Do you feel like you can "bring" your spiritual life to campus?

2. Are there times when you separate that part of your life?

Other

1. What comes to mind when I say the following; spirituality, faith, religion?
2. Have those concepts changed while at college?

Appendix B  
Online Survey

1 Age

2 Where have you lived while at college? (check all that apply)

- Residence Halls
- Fraternity
- Sorority
- Off-campus

3 Current religious preference (mark one for you, your mother, and father)

	1 Yours	2 Father's	3 Mother's	N/A
Baptist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Buddhist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Church of Christ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eastern Orthodox	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Episcopalian	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hindu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Islamic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jewish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LDS (Mormon)			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lutheran			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Methodist			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Presbyterian			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quaker			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Roman Catholic			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seventh Day Adventist			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unitarian/Universalist			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
United Church of Christ/Congregational			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Christian			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Religion			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
None			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**4 Do you consider yourself a Born-Again Christian**

- Yes
- No

**5 Please indicate your ethnic background**

- White/Caucasian



- African American/Black
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian American/Asian
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Mexican American/Chicano
- Puerto Rican
- Other Latino
- Other

**6 For the activities below, indicate which ones you did during your time at college thus far. If you engaged in an activity frequently, mark 1. If you engaged in an activity occasionally but not frequently mark 2. Mark 3 (not at all) if you have not performed the activity during your time at COLLEGE.**

	1 Frequently	2 Occasionally	3 Not at all
Attended a religious service	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
Participated in organized demonstrations	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
Smoked cigarettes	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
Drank alcohol	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
Felt depressed	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
Performed volunteer work	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
Discussed Politics	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
Socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
Performed community service as part of a class	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
Discussed religion/spirituality in class	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3



1

2

3

8 Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age. We want the most accurate estimate of how you see yourself.

1	2	3	4	5
Highest 10%	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Lowest 10%

Academic ability

1

2

3

4

5

Compassion

1

2

3

4

5

Cooperativeness

1

2

3

4

5

Courage

1

2

3

4

5

Creativity

1

2

3

4

5

Forgiveness

1

2

3

4

5

Generosity

1

2

3

4

5

Kindness

1

2

3

4

5

Leadership Ability

1

2

3

4

5

Religiousness

1

2

3

4

5

Self-confidence

1

2

3

4

5

Self-understanding

1

2

3

4

5

Spirituality

1

2

3

4

5

Understanding of others

1 2 3 4 5

9 How would you characterize your political views? (mark one)

- Far Left
- Liberal
- Middle-of-the-road
- Conservative
- Far right

10 during your last year here at COLLEGE, how much time do you spend during a typical week doing the following activities?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
None Less than 1 hour 1-2 3-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 Over 20

Studying homework

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Socializing with friends

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Talking with teachers outside of class

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

exercise or sports

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Partying

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Working (for pay)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Volunteer work

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Student clubs/groups

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Watching TV

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Household duties

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
Reading for pleasure

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
Playing video games

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
Prayer/meditation

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

11 Is the time spent on any of the above activities a significant change from high school? Which ones and is it more or less now?

12 What is your major?

13 How important is it to you that COLLEGE:

1 2 3 4  
Essential Very Important Somewhat Important Not Important  
Helps you develop your ability to think critically

1 2 3 4  
Prepares you for employment after college

1 2 3 4  
Prepares you for graduate or advanced education

1 2 3 4  
Provides for your emotional development

1 2 3 4  
Helps you develop your personal values

1 2 3 4  
Enhances your self-understanding

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Prepares you for responsible citizenship

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Encourages personal expression of spirituality

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Respects diverse perspectives

1                       2                       3                       4

---

**14 Please indicate the importance to you personally of each of the following: (mark one for each item)**

1                      2                      3                      4  
Essential            Very Important      Somewhat Important      Not Important

---

Reducing pain and suffering in the world

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Attaining inner harmony

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Attaining wisdom

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Seeking out opportunities to help me grow spiritually

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Finding answers to the mysteries of life

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Becoming a more loving person

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Seeking to follow religious teachings in my everyday life

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Improving the human condition

1                       2                       3                       4

---

**15 Please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements: (mark one for each item)**

1                      2                      3                      4  
Agree Strongly      Agree Somewhat      Disagree Somewhat      Disagree Strongly

---

Love is at the root of all the great religions

<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
All life is interconnected			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
Believing in supernatural phenomena is foolish			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
We are all spiritual beings			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
It is futile to try to discover the purpose of existence			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
People can reach a higher spiritual plane of consciousness through meditation or prayer			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
The evil in this world seems to outweigh the good			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
Most people can grow spiritually without being religious			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
People who don't believe in God will be punished			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
Non-religious people can lead lives that are just as moral as those of religious believers			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
Pain and suffering are essential to becoming a better person			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
The universe arose by chance			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
In the future, science will be able to explain everything			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
While science can provide important information about the physical world, only religious can truly explain existence			
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

**16 For me, the relationship between science and religion is one of:  
(mark one)**

- Conflict; I consider myself to be on the side of religion.
- Conflict; I consider myself to be on the side of science.
- Independence; they refer to different aspects of reality.
- Collaboration; each can be used to help support the other.

**17 Do you pray?**

- Yes
- No (skip to answer #20)

**18 If yes, why do you pray? (mark one for each item)**

	1 Frequently	2 Occasionally	3 Not At All
For help in solving problems	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
To be in communion with God	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
To express gratitude	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
For emotional strength	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
For forgiveness	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
To relieve the suffering of others	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
For loved ones	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
For wisdom	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3
To praise God	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3

**19 How often do you engage in the following activities? (mark one for each item)**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6



	Daily	Several Times/Week	Once/Week	Monthly	Less Than Monthly	Not At All
Self-reflection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prayer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meditation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yoga, Tai Chi, or similar practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious singing/chanting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading sacred texts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other reading on religion/spirituality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**20 Please indicate the extent to which each of the following describes you: (mark on for each item)**

	1 To A Great Extent	2 To Some Extent	3 Not At All
Having an interest in spirituality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Believing in the sacredness of life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling unsettled about spiritual and religious matters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling good about the direction in which my life is headed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling a sense of connection with God/Higher Power that transcends my personal self	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling a strong connection to all humanity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling disillusioned with my religious upbringing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

1	2	3
<hr/>		
Having an interest in different religious traditions		
1	2	3
<hr/>		
Being committed to introducing people to my faith		
1	2	3
<hr/>		
Believing in the goodness of all people		
1	2	3
<hr/>		
Being thankful for all that has happened to me		
1	2	3
<hr/>		
Seeing each day, good or bad, as a gift		
1	2	3
<hr/>		
Believing in life after death		
1	2	3
<hr/>		
Feeling obligated to follow my parents' religious practices		
1	2	3

**21 Which of the following best characterizes your conception of or experience with God? (mark all that apply)**

- Universal Spirit
- Love
- Father-figure
- Mother-figure
- Teacher
- Part of me
- Divine Mystery
- Protector
- Creator
- Nature
- Supreme Being
- Judge
- Enlightenment
- None of the Above

**22 Have you ever had a spiritual experience while: (mark one for each item)**

1 Frequently	2 Occasionally	3 Not At All	N/A
In a house of worship			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Listening to beautiful music			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Viewing a great work of art			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participating in a musical or artistic performance			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging in athletics			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Witnessing the beauty and harmony of nature			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meditating			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Praying			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participating in a retreat			
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**23 Do you believe in God?**

- Yes
- Not sure
- No

**24 The ultimate spiritual quest for me is: (mark one)**

- To discover who I really am.
- To follow God's plan for me.
- To become a better person.
- To know my purpose in life.

- To make the world a better place.
- To know God.
- I do not consider myself to be on a spiritual quest.

**25 In what ways have the following experiences changed your religious/spiritual beliefs? (mark one for each item)**

	1 Strengthened	2 No Change	3 Weakened	N/A
New ideas encountered in classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Romantic relationship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal injury or illness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents' divorce or separation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Death of a close friend or family member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Natural disaster	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The events of September 11, 2001	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The war in Iraq	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**26 Please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements: (mark one for each item)**

	1 Agree Strongly	2 Agree Somewhat	3 Disagree Somewhat	4 Disagree Strongly
What happens in my life is determined by forces larger than myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whether or not there is a Supreme Being doesn't matter to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I gain spiritual strength by trusting in a Higher Power	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

It doesn't matter what I believe as long as I lead a moral life

1                       2                       3                       4

I have never felt a sense of sacredness

1                       2                       3                       4

I find religion to be personally helpful

1                       2                       3                       4

I know someone I can turn to for spiritual guidance

1                       2                       3                       4

I am uncomfortable discussing religious matters

1                       2                       3                       4

My spirituality is a source of joy

1                       2                       3                       4

It is difficult to reconcile the existence of a loving God with all the pain and suffering in the world

1                       2                       3                       4

I do not expect my religious convictions to change in the next few years

1                       2                       3                       4

To be truly religious, a person must accept all the teachings of his/her faith

1                       2                       3                       4

---

**27 How would you describe your current views about spiritual/religious matters? (mark all that apply)**

- Conflicted
- Secure
- Doubting
- Seeking
- Not Interested

---

**28 My spiritual/religious beliefs: (mark one for each item)**

1                      2                      3                      4  
Agree Strongly    Agree Somewhat    Disagree Somewhat    Disagree Strongly

Have helped me develop my identity

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Are one of the most important things in my life

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Give meaning/purpose to my life

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Help define the goals I set for myself

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Provide me with strength, support, and guidance

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Lie behind my whole approach to life

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Have been formed through much personal reflection and searching

1                       2                       3                       4

---

---

**29 How many of your close friends: (mark one for each item)**

1                      2                      3                      4  
All                      Most                      Some                      None

---

Share your religious/spiritual views?

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Are searching for meaning/purpose in life?

1                       2                       3                       4

---

Go to church/temple/other house of worship?

1                       2                       3                       4

---

---

**30 Please indicate the extent to which you engage in the following activities: (mark one for each item)**

1                      2                      3  
To A Great Extent                      To Some Extent                      Not At All

---

Searching for meaning/purpose in life

1                       2                       3

---

Trying to change things that are unfair in the world

1                       2                       3

---

Accepting others as they are

1 2 3  
Having discussions about the meaning of life with my friends

1 2 3  
Being honest in my relationships with others

1 2 3

**31 During the last year, please indicate how often you have: (mark one for each item)**

1 2 3  
Frequently Occasionally Not At All  
Participated in community food or clothing drives

1 2 3  
Helped friends with personal problems

1 2 3  
Donated money to charity

1 2 3  
Felt distant from God

1 2 3  
Struggled to understand evil, suffering, and death

1 2 3  
Questioned your religious/spiritual beliefs

1 2 3  
Felt loved by God

1 2 3  
Disagreed with your family about religious matters

1 2 3  
Spent time with people who share your religious views

1 2 3  
Felt angry with God

1 2 3  
Felt that your life is filled with stress and anxiety

1 2 3  
Been able to find meaning in times of hardship

1 2 3  
Expressed gratitude to others

1 2 3  
Felt at peace/centered

1 2 3  
Explored religion online

1 2 3  
Attended a class, workshop, or retreat on matters related to religion/spirituality

1 2 3

32 In addition to the survey you just took, this project consists of one-on-one interviews. If you are interested in discussing your spiritual experiences at COLLEGE please indicate your willingness below. If you are selected you will be contacted via the information you provide below. If no, you will not be contacted and your contact information will be destroyed. All interviewees will be given a monetary incentive for their time.

- Yes, I'm willing
- No thanks
- I'd like more information

33 Name

34 Email

35 Contact Phone

36 Your class standing in 07-08

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior



- Senior
- Graduate