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# Beyond "It Gets Better:" utilizing seminary student affairs professionals to support millennial seminarians through crises of faith

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*Boston University*

BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Thesis Project

**BEYOND “IT GETS BETTER:”  
UTILIZING SEMINARY STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS TO SUPPORT  
MILLENNIAL SEMINARIANS THROUGH CRISES OF FAITH**

by

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B.A., Belmont University, 2000  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

2018

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2018

Approved by

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and Practice

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my husband, Rev. Chad William Kidd, whose good humor, love, and care have seen me through many a crisis of faith.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**BEYOND “IT GETS BETTER:”  
UTILIZING SEMINARY STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS TO SUPPORT  
MILLENNIAL SEMINARIANS THROUGH CRISES OF FAITH  
ANASTASIA E. B. KIDD**

Boston University School of Theology, 2018

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**ABSTRACT**

Seminarians’ existential crises of faith are often-experienced but little-studied. Through surveys of Millennial MDiv students (n=30) and seminary Student Affairs and Student Services Professionals (SASSPs) (n=44), this study suggests crises of faith are fundamental to MDiv students’ spiritual formation, mirroring the pattern of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory model (TLT). TLT also undergirds secular Student Affairs, where SASSPs regularly provide co-curricular “student learning” support. This study recommends training seminary SASSPs to be similarly-utilized within theological education, which would require resources for professional development from both their institutions and the Association of Theological Schools. Implications for multi-cultural theological education are also discussed.

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### **List of Abbreviations (In Alphabetical Order)**

AAHE	American Association for Higher Education Organization
ACPA	American College Personnel Association
ATS	Association of Theological Schools Accrediting Agency
CAS	Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education
GPA	Grade Point Average
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual Persons
MDiv	Master of Divinity Degree Program
MTS	Master of Theological Studies Program
NASPA	Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education Organization
NODA	National Orientation Directors Association
SASSP	Student Affairs and Student Services Professionals
SPAN	Student Personnel Administrative Network
SWB	Spiritual Well Being Scale
TLT	Transformative Learning Theory
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles campus
UK	United Kingdom
VP	Vice President

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Motivation for This Study in Two Acts**

#### *Act One: My Own Crisis of Faith*

I lost God at a Chili's restaurant. It was December 2001, and I was in my first semester of seminary at an urban university far away from my home in the rural South. The past three months had been a wash of new experiences: riding (and often getting lost) on public transportation, paying an exorbitant price for a 300-square-foot studio apartment without air conditioning, and making new friends from a wider diversity of people and theological viewpoints than I had previously known existed, given my rather homogenous upbringing. And to top it off, the entire country was reeling from its experience of 9/11, which happened during my first week of seminary coursework. This added an urgency to my interest in studying theology; however, for the first time in my life, I also began to entertain doubts about the enterprise of religion itself, which had bred extremism capable of such violence.

I had no time or energy to consider the cumulative effect of these many changes on my psyche, since my graduate theological education was rigorously academic and preoccupied every waking moment. I was new to the field, and each of my courses that semester – Introductions to Hebrew Bible, Church History, and Philosophical Theology – offered readings that confounded my

understanding of my Christian heritage. Scriptures I had considered holy writ became filled with contradictions I had previously glossed over with eyes of the faithful. The historical Christian church of which I learned was often more politically than spiritually motivated, and its own history of violence against “infidels” was atrocious. Theological truths I held were once considered heresy before they came back into fashion, undermining for me the very idea of “truth.” These things I encountered in the classroom had me off-balance spiritually. Yet I did not even realize they were having an effect on me until that evening at Chili’s.

My husband and I had started seminary at the same time, and were studying for our final exam in Hebrew Bible, which was three days away. It was “date night,” so out to eat we went, albeit with textbooks and notes in hand. We worked as we ate in our own private study group. Between bites I suddenly had an urge to cry, and as tears fell into my French fries I asked my husband, “So, what if none of this is real? If there are all these problems and contradictions, who’s to say there’s even a God. What’s the point?” We put away our books and papers and had a much-longer conversation than the waitress likely wanted us to have. Nothing was resolved, nor would it be for years as I continued to wrestle with questions of faith and doubt. Some of my seminary peers, who I learned were going through similar existential crises, left seminary for other endeavors. Some lost their faith entirely and became staunchly atheistic and/or religiously unpracticed. I learned that the phrase “you lose your faith in seminary” has become a cliché because it is sometimes true.

I finished my seminary degree still dutifully attending church, and even pursuing ordination in a Christian denomination, but without a deep well of personal faith from which to draw. I felt it difficult to preach with integrity, or to pray with others as anything more than an exercise in comfort. With time, continued study, and lots of conversations with others, my crisis of faith receded into a belief system that looks much different than that of my childhood. It favors wonder over explanations, humility over dogmatism, and historical context over once-and-for-all-time interpretations. I now once again consider myself a person of faith, and this satisfies my need for honesty and authenticity as I work in the world as a religious leader. But the time spent in theological crisis will always be a defining era of my life, both crucial and painful.

*Act Two: From the View of a Seminary Administrator*

For over a decade now, I have served in the Admissions Office of the same seminary where I earned my own degree. My role has been to help incoming students discern their first steps into theological higher education. With regularity, I have noticed a few students returning to my office in tears, typically a few months into classes each fall, often threatening to leave the seminary. Citing a variety of personal or theological reasons, they fear they have made a mistake entering theological education. As an administrator, initially I was concerned with keeping them because of the institution's retention statistics. However, as I listened I became interested to hear the patterns within their stories. I noticed

how these mirrored my own journey through seminary. I had empathy for them, remembering my own unmoored feeling during my first year. I recalled the loneliness, anxiety, and apathy toward study that were hallmarks of my own faith crisis, even as I heard these same and other characteristics from the students crying on my office couch. I wondered whether my experience was more universal than I had imagined, and wanted to figure out how to help others navigate better than I had.

As I sat listening to these crying students, myself a non-faculty with no formal knowledge of pedagogy, I sensed that the “seminary crisis of faith” was a teaching moment for which I was untrained. Yet I knew I wanted more for these seminarians than the “it gets better” platitude I was offering. After all, that was a lie. Sometimes students’ humpty-dumpty childhood faith never got put back together again. For many of my own friends, atheism was a valid conclusion they reached by the end of theological study. Indeed, this is how they reconciled their crises of faith, by determining not to have any. Yet the seminary’s goal was never to undermine students’ faith, but rather to challenge them to look critically at it, so that they might be prepared to face a complex and ambiguous world as a religious leader.

The seminary faculty I came to know personally were, by and large, people of faith themselves, and they lived this out in both belief and practice. Their scholarship and pedagogy necessarily problematized many students’ simplistic inbuilt faith, but these faculty also hoped that students would deepen

their spiritual formation as a feature of the overall degree program. After all, “growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity,”<sup>1</sup> was an explicit element of the accreditation standards for seminaries through their Association of Theological Schools (ATS) agency, and something the faculty took seriously. Yet, these same faculty seemed to struggle with exactly how to implement pastoral and spiritual formation for the seminary’s students.

I worked as an administrator on the seminary’s Curriculum Review Steering Committee for five years as the faculty launched a new Master of Divinity program curriculum within the institution. There I overheard rich conversations about the need to help students integrate classroom learning into their personal lives, especially with regard to spirituality. Courses were created specifically to bridge that gap, allowing individual faculty to define their own spiritual practices and then teach them from a place of authenticity that otherwise could not be pedagogically prescribed. The school exponentially grew its spiritual formation opportunities as it hired a full-time Spiritual Life Coordinator to serve as a co-curricular program leader and informal chaplain for student spiritual life on campus. The seminary’s chapel space was renovated to reflect the changing needs of a pluralistic student body. Optional “spiritual companioning” small groups were created to give first-year students the ability to opt into cohorts where the conversation revolved explicitly around one’s faith journey. With these

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<sup>1</sup> Association of Theological Schools, *Degree Program Standards* (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools, 2015), 1.



innovations, many more resources arose than had been in place when I attended seminary. However, at least anecdotally, it seemed that students were sharing with me their existential feelings and fears with the same frequency as ever. Speaking to my colleagues at other seminaries, I soon found that this was not only a function of my own institution.

When I spoke to Student Services and Admissions peers at other schools, I learned they had comparable stories of witnessing crises of faith in their students. One colleague, a Director of Admissions who also serves a church as its part-time Senior Minister, offered by email:<sup>2</sup>

I have this student now, and I can tell the call on his life is strong. He would make a great pastor. Charismatic, smart, organized, heart for social justice – this is exactly the kind of kid we want to graduate from here. He'd run the type of church I'd like to go to. But he's already ready to quit because Moses didn't write the Pentateuch and now he thinks everything anyone ever taught him about the bible was crap. I have no idea how to convince him otherwise. He's probably going to go on and be a great CEO, but the church is going to miss out.

I heard this theme of “not knowing what to do” repeatedly from administrative colleagues at other institutions. They frequently encountered students having theological crises, yet had no formal training on how to support them. Like me, they could see the problem, but had no systemic means to address it. One Registrar colleague quipped, “Even if I knew what to do, the

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<sup>2</sup> This person has asked to remain anonymous. I am reprinting his words with his permission. Anonymous Director of Admissions, e-mail message to author, October 23, 2016.

faculty would never want me to do it,"<sup>3</sup> inferring the issues of professional roles, expectations, and political hierarchy between staff and administration.

Seminary administrators are often "on the front lines" of student experience by virtue of their positions. Students go through them to change courses, withdraw, or when they have financial needs. This puts these administrators in intimate contact with students in crisis. Also, students, whether not understanding the professional boundaries, or not caring about them, sometimes unload their burdens on patient yet underprepared administrators. However, in many seminaries, staff are not meant to work with students beyond their stated administrative roles, and such interactions with students in crisis yield a conundrum: work with the student beyond the purview of their current position, or try to redirect the student to faculty, who themselves may not have time or feel prepared to work with students in this way.

Though it was a comfort to learn that these same problems arose at other institutions, it was also more evidence that student crises of faith are pervasive and should be studied more closely. This seemed to me an opportunity for transformation in two parts: one, to improve seminary support for student crises of faith, and also to improve professional training for non-faculty seminary administrators who often encounter these students in need. These two things

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<sup>3</sup> This person has asked to remain anonymous. I am using her words with permission. Anonymous Registrar, conversation with author, April 5, 2017.

together could then become transformational for seminary education more generally, especially in terms of student spiritual and pastoral formation.

### **Scope of This Study**

My own experience, first as a seminary student and then as a non-faculty administrator, raised in me the question of why some students graduate from seminary having had their faith undermined during the course of theological study. This is not the goal of theological higher education from either the perspective of seminary faculty or these students. So, how can seminaries train religious leaders to have crises of faith constructively, as part of their educational experience, with the goal of integrative learning and deepened faith? And how might non-faculty administrators at these schools like myself, who often encounter students in crisis, be better prepared to do so? If seminary education were able to answer these two questions, in what ways might it benefit theological education as a whole for the 21<sup>st</sup> century context? These were the three central questions that began the current study, and they demanded literature research into a number of intersecting fields.

I soon found that what I called student “crises of faith” rarely had been studied directly, yet the fields of educational learning theory, student development, and secular student affairs all addressed this same concept by different names. I was introduced to the work of Jack Mezirow and Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), and I finally had a language – disorienting

dilemmas, challenging assumptions, perspective transformation – that put structure around the seemingly chaotic experience of seminarians’ crises of faith. Mezirow’s work in transformative adult education has influenced the field of secular curriculum development for years, encouraging models of learning that include strategies of student growth pertinent for both inside and beyond the classroom.<sup>4</sup> Similar to the basic premise of TLT, the widely-cited student development theory of Nevitt Sanford suggests that, for true learning to occur, an educational institution must both challenge students in their previously-held thinking and then support them when needs inevitably arise.<sup>5</sup> Challenge without support leads to student frustration and disengagement, but support without challenge leads to student complacency and undermines any real learning.

Both Mezirow’s TLT and Sanford’s “Challenge and Support Theory” suggest that the careful balance of pushing students toward uncertainty, then supporting them as they reintegrate their worldview, is the entire educational enterprise, and is not limited to the classroom experience. Though students may first encounter information during their formal hours of course instruction, they ruminate, discuss with others, and generally work through their learning stages outside the classroom as well. The secular field of student affairs, which has

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<sup>4</sup> Jane Fried and James E. Zull, *Transformative Learning Through Engagement: Student Affairs Practice as Experiential Pedagogy* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2012), 14-16.

<sup>5</sup> Nevitt Sanford, *Where Colleges Fail: A Study of the Student as a Person* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1967), 44-55.

focused on “student learning” as its mission over the past twenty years,<sup>6</sup> has developed strategies for creating programmatic academic partnerships between faculty members and student affairs and student services professionals to address student learning needs beyond the classroom. Similar partnerships are likely worth pursuing in theological higher education as well. However, there is very little research on seminary student affairs and student services personnel (SASSPs), their backgrounds, or their trajectory of professional development. Without this information, it is difficult to promote seminary SASSPs as partners in learning. Additionally, theological education is both similar and dissimilar to other disciplines of study. Its particularities must be understood for the current study to helpfully address crises of faith as an aspect of seminary life.

While students are faced with worldview-changing content in many disciplines, the majority of students in theological higher education are being trained as religious leaders, and eventually will be tasked with helping others make meaning in their own lives. In 2006 the Carnegie Foundation undertook a comprehensive study of seminary faculty and their pedagogical practices.

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<sup>6</sup> The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) published its seminal *Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* in 1996. Over time this has shifted the goals of student affairs as a field toward academic support, not just providing student services. American College Personnel Association, *Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: American College Personnel Association, 1996): accessed October 16, 2015, <http://www.myacpa.org/sites/default/files/ACPA%27s%20Student%20Learning%20Imperative.pdf>.

According to this study, entitled *Educating Clergy*,<sup>7</sup> seminarians must be trained in three different “apprenticeships”: “cognitive,” which they experience through classroom learning, “practical,” which occurs through contextual education, and “normative,” which is how professional identity is formed.<sup>8</sup> This third aspect of seminary learning can be shaped by educators, but is also shaped by a student’s own religious background and personal life of faith. The *Educating Clergy* study describes strategies that faculty employ to integrate cognitive, practical, and normative learning in the lives of their students, and these include both inside and beyond classroom practices.

Though the vast majority of the Carnegie study focuses on in-classroom and “*in-situ*” learning (such as contextual education), the authors also point to the importance of “institutional cohesion” in fostering successful seminary education.

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<sup>7</sup> As of 2017, the majority of seminarians enrolled in ATS-member schools were pursuing the Master of Divinity program, which typically tracks graduates toward some form of professional religious leadership. For some this may include ordination and an ecclesial placement, for others it may mean non-profit or social justice work, and still others may enter the religious academy and teach. So, throughout this project, the term “religious leadership” will mean a wide variety of professional roles. The fact that the Carnegie study focuses on congregational leaders, as evidenced by its title *Educating Clergy*, is problematic given the fact that not all MDiv students become clergy or work in traditional parish settings. Still, the study’s comprehensive review of MDiv curricula across theological education is significant, and helps delineate the fundamental pedagogical choices underlying seminary education within the last decade. Even as students prepare for a variety of religious leadership vocations, they are shaped by the same values and emphases of their MDiv programs.

<sup>8</sup> Charles R. Foster et al., *Educating Clergy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 6-13.

Institutional cohesion occurs when all levels of student experience work together under a shared educational mission. In this way, co-curricular offerings such as chapel and spiritual formation programming, student government, and community life events become part of the educational enterprise, and “contribute significantly to the integration and cohesion of student learning.”<sup>9</sup> Yet missional cohesion is also named by the *Educating Clergy* study a persistent challenge seminary professors face. The study states that, “the increasing fragmentation of academic disciplines, the diversity of student backgrounds and preparation, and the attempts in every seminary to meet, through a common academic program, multiple academic goals – all these factors have intensified the challenge in recent years. New technologies that provide opportunities for distance learning and virtual communities only make the challenge more complex.”<sup>10</sup> The Association of Theological Schools accrediting agency reflects similarly on the particular challenges facing theological education today, naming specifically

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<sup>9</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 379.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

changing and shrinking denominations,<sup>11</sup> an increasingly diverse student body,<sup>12</sup> and the pressures from increased online learning.<sup>13</sup>

Chapter two of this study will explore further, by way of literature review, the lessons learned from the intersecting fields of educational learning theory, student development theory, secular student affairs research, and the particular pedagogy of theological higher education. But even within this short overview, themes for study emerge. The themes guiding the current study include:

- 1) There is a lack of research on seminary student “crises of faith.”

Understanding them could allow educators to improve the normative aspect of theological higher education, which is imperative to forming effective religious leaders.

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<sup>11</sup> Dan Aleshire, interview by Luis Lugo, *The North American Religious Landscape: Emerging Trends for Theological Education*, accessed October 14, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/76159146>.

<sup>12</sup> Association of Theological Schools, *Folio: Diversity in Theological Education* (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools, 2002), 1-45, accessed October 12, 2017, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/diversity-in-theological-education-folio.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Eliza Smith Brown, “Accessible, Effective: How Online Theological Education is Shifting the Formation Model,” *Colloquy*, October 2016, accessed August 13, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/formation-online.pdf>.



- 2) Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory and Sanford's Challenge and Support Theory are useful theoretical frameworks for understanding the crisis of faith phenomena, and secular student affairs professionals have used these for years to address student existential crises in higher education.
- 3) The secular student affairs profession has embraced "student learning" as its focus for more than two decades. It has developed theories, research, and best practices of academic support to enhance student learning over this time, many of which are likely translatable to theological educational contexts.
- 4) Secular student affairs professional associations advocate for holistic education that marries faculty in-classroom instruction with co-curricular efforts by student services and student affairs professionals. This practice of shared mission could greatly contribute to "institutional cohesion" within seminaries, a concept proposed and promoted by Carnegie's *Educating Clergy* study.
- 5) Though secular student affairs practices have been studied widely and honed over time, adding to the professionalization of the field, student affairs and student services professionals (SASSPs) in seminaries

have not been the subject of much research. Therefore, it is unknown whether SASSPs could play co-curricular roles within theological higher education akin to those played by secular student affairs professionals in their contexts.

Beyond the literature review, this study attempts to address these five themes using quantitative research in the form of two surveys, one of current seminarians and the other of seminary SASSPs. Students were asked about their crisis of faith experiences, including their precipitating events, duration, and how or if they were reconciled. The hope is that this data would allow the extrapolation of best practices for supporting seminarians through crises of faith. A second survey queried SASSPs within theological higher education, gathering information about their educational backgrounds, vocational goals, job satisfaction, and experience with students undergoing crises of faith. By learning who SASSPs are, and by studying their professional role within their institutions, the data may suggest ways SASSPs could become valuable, co-curricular resources for supporting seminarians through their crises of faith.

## **Methodology**

Since this project focused on two distinct groups, two separate surveys were created and, after Internal Review Board approval, sent out – one to current seminary students (Appendix A) and one to SASSPs (Appendix B). All

respondents gave their informed consent to participate in this study. The data collected from these surveys was mostly quantitative, though several questions provided room for respondents to offer qualitative responses that captured their experience in their own words. Some questions in the two surveys were interrelated, allowing for comparison between the two groups. For example, seminarians were asked, “What precipitated your crisis of faith?” And SASSPs were asked first if they had ever encountered a student having a crisis of faith, and then, “What precipitated the student’s crisis of faith?” Answers to both of these questions were compared to determine whether SASSPs grasp the issues and concerns that underlie student crises of faith, or whether they were misidentifying them.

This research offers a glimpse of the rich data available to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the largest accrediting body of theological schools in the United States and Canada, should it choose to systemically research SASSPs as a distinct leadership group within theological higher education. A larger-scale study of SASSPs through ATS could further identify the particular professional development needs of this category of seminary personnel, while ATS’s influence over the field could encourage individual institutions to initiate professional growth supports for SASSPs as part of their staffing plans. Ultimately, the increased professionalization of SASSPs in theological higher education could serve to support institutions and their students in the midst of a rapidly changing culture of theological higher education.

### *Survey Creation and Dissemination*

Two surveys were used for this study, and both were created and distributed online through Boston University's Qualtrics data management software. The first survey was 60 questions in length, and was sent to all current Master of Divinity students at the Boston University School of Theology within the Millennial age range (anyone born in 1980 or afterward). This institution was chosen because it is where I work, and was given both the means and approval from the Academic Dean to contact its students. Of 102 possible Millennial MDiv students enrolled at Boston University School of Theology in the Spring 2017 semester, 31 responded (30% of the total population). One response was sufficiently incomplete to be thrown out of the data set, leaving a total N = 30. Though seminarians nationwide represent a variety of ages and degree programs, the internal statistics vary widely by school. Millennial-aged MDiv students are the most prevalent group of students in ATS-member institutions.<sup>14</sup> Studying only this subset of students was thought to provide the greatest potential for generalization relevant to ATS-member contexts.

The second survey of SASSPs was sent to 135 student services and student affairs personnel (SASSPs) employed by ATS-accredited seminaries of the Mainline Protestant denominational variety. Of the 135 SASSPs solicited, 45

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<sup>14</sup> Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables," accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/institutional-data/annual-data-tables/2016-2017-annual-data-tables.pdf>.

responded (33% of the total population). One response was insufficiently completed, and was removed from the data set, leaving the total participants at  $N = 44$ . This project chose to limit the SASSPs to those in Mainline Protestant, ATS-accredited institutions because Boston University School of Theology fits that same description. The hope was that comparison of the two surveys, the one of seminarians and the other of SASSPs, would be less confounded by theological differences by focusing on this one type of seminary, rather than including SASSPs from Catholic or Evangelical institutions, as well. The trade-off was that this certainly limited the research both in terms of the number of SASSP participants and, as will be seen by the data analysis, certain attributes of the respondents. It could be, for example, that SASSPs from Mainline Protestant, ATS-accredited schools encounter crises of faith within their communities more often, as compared to those in more theologically conservative or denominationally-driven educational placements. Further research would be necessary to determine whether the theological bent of an institution affects the frequency of crises of faith among its students. This study was content to examine both seminarians and SASSPs within the limited scope of Mainline Protestant, ATS-accredited institutions, as a starting place for further understanding the crisis of faith phenomenon.

## CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Student Formation and the Particular Pedagogy of Theological Education**

#### *A Very Brief History of Theological Higher Education in the United States*

At its onset, all higher education in colonial America began as theological education. Eight of the nine “pre-Revolutionary” college charters specify the training of Christian clergy as a specific aim of their curricula.<sup>15</sup> Describing these early institutions, educational historians John Brubacher and Willis Rudy state, “The desire of important religious denominations . . . for literate, college-trained clergy was probably the most important single factor explaining the founding of the colonial colleges.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, John Corrigan describes the centrality of religion within early education in this country saying, “colonial-era textbooks featured religion above all else, and although religion was treated as one of many cultural elements in nineteenth century textbooks, it remained centrally important to historical narratives [of the founding of the colonies].”<sup>17</sup> Former Harvard University President, Derek Bok, says of early educators’ goals, “they sought to

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<sup>15</sup> John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: History of American Colleges and Universities*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, eds. *Religious Intolerance in America: A Documentary History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 7.

discipline the mind and build the character of their students by means of a rigidly prescribed curriculum, a strict disciplinary code, and a concern for religion reinforced by compulsory attendance at chapel.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, a pattern of academic rigor, moral formation, and spiritual development emerged in colonial educational institutions.

However, as higher education developed in this country, it became imbued with a more secular character. The United States became its own independent nation, and core philosophies from Europe’s Age of Enlightenment (such as liberty, tolerance, and reason) formed the intellectual underpinnings of the country’s first organizing documents, the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. The Scientific Revolution and Industrialization followed closely behind, bringing innovations from German universities, particularly within the fields of science and philosophy, which celebrated empiricism and rationalism over faith-based learning.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, “freedom of thought” became paramount, and, for many educators, this began to mean “freedom from religion;” Brubacher and Rudy describe this early United States era saying, “Enlightenment thought insisted [that] it should be free of control by religious sects. The mind of man [*sic*] must be unfettered; it must be free to reason boldly, to create a rational order in

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<sup>18</sup> Derek Bok, *Higher Education in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 29.

<sup>19</sup> John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: History of American Colleges and Universities*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 14-15, 143.

which human happiness could be advanced. This was an era in which a powerful drive for the separation of Church and State was under way in many parts of the United States.”<sup>20</sup> Professors became more academically specialized, as opposed to the earlier colonial faculties that were meant to develop the whole student, mind, body, and soul.<sup>21</sup>

Religiously-affiliated institutions of learning were not immune to this seismic shift in the educational landscape brought on by the Enlightenment. The field of “theology,” initially a cornerstone of every college’s curricula, became an elective course.<sup>22</sup> Separate educational institutions for the sake of training clergy, such as seminaries and divinity schools, began to emerge either independent from or embedded within secular universities.<sup>23</sup> Most of these seminaries were affiliated with individual denominational bodies, or “parent churches,” which would oversee curricula and provide financial support for institutional upkeep.<sup>24</sup>

The “Great Awakening” was a religious movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that materialized, in part, as a reaction to the spread of Enlightenment’s secular rationalism. The Great Awakening brought about renewed religious fervor,

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<sup>20</sup> Brubacher and Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition*, 145.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-45.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Joanne Huiying Wang, “Christian Formation Within North American Protestant Christian Seminary Education” (PhD diss., Biola University, 2010), 84-85.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.



increased denominational membership particularly within more evangelical and conservative churches, and the advent of “Bible colleges” meant for the “quick and practical training for both clergy and laypersons in Christian service to accommodate the fast-growing church membership.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, theological higher education in the U.S. had lost its unified roots within all colonial colleges, and a variety of styles of theological education had emerged: religion departments in secular universities, theological schools<sup>26</sup> within secular universities, independent denominationally-affiliated theological schools, and Bible colleges. All of these had their individual curricular biases, emphases, and agendas. And today’s many institutions of theological education still bear these same ancestral flavors.

*Tension Between the Academic and Spiritual Aspects of Theological Higher Education*

Daniel Aleshire is the most recent former Director of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the accrediting agency of most seminaries in the U.S. and Canada. In a conference speech directed toward newly-appointed seminary faculty he captured the tension inherent in theological education

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<sup>25</sup> Wang, “Christian Formation,” 87-88.

<sup>26</sup> For a broader historical discussion of the differences between “seminaries,” “theological schools,” and “divinity schools,” see Glenn T. Miller, “Does A Secular Age Need the Seminary? Considerations on Alternative Forms of Ministerial Preparation,” *Theological Education* 46, no. 2 (2011): 47-59.

between two seemingly-competing learning goals. This tension remains as a legacy of Enlightenment philosophy's incorporation into theological education hundreds of years ago. Aleshire describes author David Kelsey's understanding of two different "grand traditions" of educational thought, one originating in the Greek concept of *paideia* and the other in "critical inquiry" as favored by Berlin's first research universities that arose during the Enlightenment.<sup>27</sup>

The Greek *paideia* educational model aimed to shape students' souls along with their minds, and was the preferred brand of learning in medieval Europe through the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>28</sup> Aleshire further described *paideia* to the gathered faculty saying, "In this educational model, you will succeed as a professor as your students learn the subject matter, but more importantly, as they are transformed as Christian human beings. They graduate both knowing the Christian story and being more mature and congruent Christians."<sup>29</sup> He contrasts

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel Aleshire, "The Work of Faculty and the Educational Goals of Theological Schools" (presentation, ATS Seminar for Newly Appointed Faculty in Theological Education, Pittsburgh, PA, October 2010), accessed October 12, 2017, [https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentation/documents/work-of-faculty-and-the-educational-goals-of-theological-education.pdf&sa=U&ved=0ahUKEwjDwLyj-77ZAhWiVt8KHZr\\_BTkQFggEMAA&client=internal-uds-cse&cx=005265030593256478552:wmpyt-fwyqe&usq=AOvVaw3IRNiM7nIO\\_uk\\_rs7IO5o-](https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentation/documents/work-of-faculty-and-the-educational-goals-of-theological-education.pdf&sa=U&ved=0ahUKEwjDwLyj-77ZAhWiVt8KHZr_BTkQFggEMAA&client=internal-uds-cse&cx=005265030593256478552:wmpyt-fwyqe&usq=AOvVaw3IRNiM7nIO_uk_rs7IO5o-).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

this model with Berlin's educational tradition of *Wissenschaft*,<sup>30</sup> where the foundational requirement of critical inquiry "limited room for truth derived from revelation or for any formation other than critical intellectual formation."<sup>31</sup> Within the Berlin model, pedagogical success meant "your students have the capacity to engage critically the subject matter, develop the ability to pursue truth in self-critical and disciplined ways, develop critical professional skills, and make a rational and coherent case for what they think is true."<sup>32</sup> Aleshire did not attempt to smooth over this tension for the seminary faculty at the gathering. To the contrary, he acknowledges that both the Greek and Berlin schools of thought are present within ATS's own educational guidelines and standards for the Master of Divinity degree, the largest degree program by enrollment in ATS schools.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, there is an inescapable tension between the academic and spiritual aspects of the seminary curriculum inherent in modern-day theological education. As mentioned previously, the Carnegie Foundation's *Educating Clergy* study offers three different dimensions of effective theological education, which are largely distinct from one another. These three "apprenticeships" are cognitive

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<sup>30</sup> William R. Myers, "Antecedents to a Hopeful Future: Challenges for the Theological Faculty," *Theological Education* 50, no. 1 (2015): 84-86.

<sup>31</sup> Aleshire, "The Work of Faculty."

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables."

(intellectual), practical (skills), and normative (spiritual identity formation).<sup>34</sup> The study determined, however, that the academic setting “clearly tilts the balance toward the cognitive.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, in seminary education intellectual learning through academic content dissemination is the most emphasized apprenticeship of the three. This imbalance between “knowing,” “doing,” and “being,”<sup>36</sup> may be felt even more acutely at seminaries embedded in university-based research institutions, such as the Boston University School of Theology from which the current study originates. At research universities, faculty feel the pressure of “publish or perish” guild demands for tenure and promotion while simultaneously remaining required by their ATS accrediting body to make sure students have curricular opportunities through which they can grow their personal faith life.<sup>37</sup> So, who is responsible for deciding what educational model is disseminated to students? Both research and common sense suggest that each seminary’s faculty members bear the most responsibility for shaping the educational curricula.

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<sup>34</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 6-13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Seminary professor Charles Wood helpfully summarizes the “three-aspect pattern” of theological education as “knowing” (cognitive), “doing” (practical), and “being” (normative). Charles M. Wood, “Knowing and Caring,” *Theological Education* 39, no. 1 (2003): 32.

<sup>37</sup> Association of Theological Schools, *Degree Program Standards* (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools, 2015), 3.

### *Seminary Faculty Shape the Curricula*

A much-discussed article by seminary professor Edward Farley states that faculty academic specialization is the pervasive organizing and influencing structure over all seminary curricula.<sup>38</sup> He says:

*The organization of faculties into specialty fields is more than a superficial strategy for the distribution of labor. It forms a large part of professors' identities, determining their basic cognitive commitments, guild loyalty, career-long agendas and perceptions of other fields. This specialization begins in graduate school, or even before . . . It has some trappings of a worldview. To be closely and cognitively focused on, for example, a text, a literature, a historical period or a social entity tends to make one see that object of study as a paradigm of reality.<sup>39</sup>*

If this is true, faculty, who have been formed for years within the academy in order to get to their current positions, would logically feel most at home with the first of the Carnegie Foundation's three dimensions of effective theological education: cognitive or intellectual apprenticeship.<sup>40</sup> Such work clearly happens within the classroom, facilitated by faculty who were professionally formed to do exactly this type of cognitive education.

But what of the second and third Carnegie Foundation dimensions of effective theological education: practical apprenticeship and spiritual identity formation? Practical apprenticeship of skills is typically covered by a seminary's

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<sup>38</sup> Edward Farley, "Why Seminaries Don't Change: A Reflection on Faculty Specialization," *Christian Century*, February 5-12, 1997, 133.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>40</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 5.

Contextual Education placement program. Coursework in this field, required by ATS accrediting standards for graduation from the MDiv,<sup>41</sup> allows students real-life ministry experience in a variety of settings, either ecclesial or non-ecclesial depending on the student's vocational discernment. Additionally, faculty in practical ministry fields such as Homiletics, Pastoral Care and Counseling, Administration, and the Liturgical Arts frequently devote class time to these actual practices, for example through preaching performance or role play counseling scenarios. But there is particular challenge with regard to the third "normative" dimension of theological education, forming students' spiritual identities, even though the work of preparing students for effective religious leadership demands this formation.<sup>42</sup>

Spiritual formation work is, in some ways, at odds with the cognitive educational enterprise itself. The *Educating Clergy* study describes this conflict helpfully, saying, "Analysis has been the golden key that opens the path of scientific advancement. Analytic thinking disengages the thinker from everyday contexts of meaning in order to take up the position of a distracted, skeptical observer. . . [but] the normative knowledge needed for grasping the significance of activities and viewpoints requires . . . being inside the situation, not looking at it

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<sup>41</sup> Association of Theological Schools, *Degree Program Standards* (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools, 2015), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 13.

from a distance.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, religious leaders will not be objective observers in their professional lives, and yet their formation takes place in seminaries where the curriculum is strongly influenced by the “purely objective”<sup>44</sup> post-Enlightenment religious academy, as well as faculty emphasis on cognitive formation.

Seminary faculty, then, have the difficult task of facilitating curriculum for spiritual formation even if this was not part of their own professional training. In 2015, two-thirds of all seminary professors teaching in ATS member seminaries had graduated, collectively, from only 23 institutions’ doctoral programs, most of which could be described as teaching in Berlin’s *Wissenschaft* model.<sup>45</sup> Faculty members need not be ordained or even self-professed religious people to function within the theological academy, at least as it is expressed in most Mainline Protestant University-based seminaries. And even in cases where faculty feel comfortable facilitating spiritual formation as part of the classroom experience, there may not be enough time to do so. There is demand to cover

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<sup>43</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, *The Heart of Higher Education, A Call to Renewal: Transforming the Academy Through Collegial Conversations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 66-68.

<sup>45</sup> Myers, “Hopeful Future,” 87-88.

more course background material than in decades past, leaving less time for the necessarily unhurried and personal process of student spiritual formation.<sup>46</sup>

This pressure to take more class time teaching the basics is due in part to changes in seminary student backgrounds. Generationally, Millennial students were raised by the largely non-religious Baby Boomers, and often arrive to seminary only loosely formed in a particular church tradition, if at all.<sup>47</sup> Thus, they are often uninformed around basic theological concepts or scriptural stories. Just as religious affiliations continue to shift in the United States, so do seminarians' vocational plans. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) provides historical enrollment data for its member seminaries over the decades. In 1969 79.5% of all enrollees in ATS member schools were pursuing either the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) or Bachelor of Theology (B.Th.) degree, both of which prepared people for traditional ordained parish ministry.<sup>48</sup> According to ATS's "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables," only 41% of students enrolled in member schools were

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<sup>46</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 289.

<sup>47</sup> This is described by sociologist of U.S. religious life, Nancy Ammerman, who points to the generational roots of the decline in Christian ecclesial membership during the 20th century's second half through today. Baby Boomers, coming of age during the 60's and 70's, attended church less frequently than their parents, those of the Greatest Generation, had done; and the children of Boomers, Generation X and Millennials, attend in even lower rates, with fewer still claiming denominational membership. Nancy T. Ammerman, "America's Changing Religious and Cultural Landscape and its Implications for Theological Education," *Theological Education* 49, no. 1 (2014): 28-29.

<sup>48</sup> Marvin J. Taylor, ed., *Fact Book on Theological Education 1975-76* (Vandalia, OH: Association of Theological Schools, 1976), 3.



pursuing the MDiv.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the MDiv is no longer assumed to be preparation only for pastoral ministry contexts. In fact, in 2016 only 51% of ATS member schools' MDiv graduates named ordained pastoral ministry as their vocational goal.<sup>50</sup> Thus, while classroom discussions in previous decades could focus primarily on the ecclesial context, that can no longer be assumed. The wide variety among seminary students' backgrounds often require faculty to teach foundational concepts to "level the playing field" between them. Add to these issues the long-overdue and good pressure felt in many seminary faculties to diversify & decolonize course topics, materials, and philosophical viewpoints so that they include those of historically-underrepresented populations (non-white, non-male, non-Western), and the classroom becomes less and less likely to have time to be the central place to enact that third, normative apprenticeship dimension of effective theological education, spiritual identity formation.

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<sup>49</sup> Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables."

<sup>50</sup> Jo Ann Deasy, "How 2016 Graduates are Faring," *Colloquy*, November 2016, 4, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/how-graduates-are-faring.pdf>. And Packard N. Brown, "Where Else Can They Go, and What Else Can They Do? Guiding MDiv Graduates into Fields Other Than Congregational Ministry," *Colloquy*, May 2017, 1, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/where-else-can-they-go.pdf>.

*Spiritual Formation and Multi-Cultural Theological Education*

The problem of normative student formation, specifically the kind of spiritual development described as fundamental to the theological education enterprise,<sup>51</sup> is a difficult one to require seminary faculty to achieve within their limited classroom instructional hours. The *Educating Clergy* study revealed a wide variety of means by which seminaries provide beyond-the-classroom space and resources for students to cultivate their spiritual lives aside their academic preparation, saying, “Indeed, we found much more variation in ways of cultivating spiritual practice than we did in approaches to classroom teaching.”<sup>52</sup> Yet from this variety of approaches three predominant strategies for student spiritual formation emerged: “community worship, programs using small groups and peers in spiritual formation, and programs of individual spiritual formation.”<sup>53</sup>

Most seminaries provide some sort of regularly-scheduled community worship service.<sup>54</sup> At some schools, the liturgy is well-attended, central to community life, and integrated with the classroom experience; while worship other places is described by the Carnegie study as “almost tangential,” with low

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<sup>51</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 5-10.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Edwin Chr. Van Driel, “Online Theological Education: Three Undertheorized Issues,” *Theological Education* 50, no. 1 (2015): 73-74.

attendance and no apparent link to the community's culture or curricula.<sup>55</sup> One institutional characteristic in particular seemed to influence which of these two directions a seminary's community worship leaned: the denominational makeup of the people therein.<sup>56</sup> Religiously homogenous populations of students, faculty, and staff had a "shared identity [which] provides a common theological and ecclesiastical heritage within which the intensive deepening of liturgical practice unfolds. There is no debate about which denomination's order of worship should be used in a given week, whether nonliturgical worship styles should be given a higher profile, or whether the services are becoming 'too Christian' [for] the interreligious world."<sup>57</sup> Denominational consistency within a seminary community can also help when developing small group peer spiritual formation opportunities, as the student cohorts likely share theological viewpoints or religious practices derived from their common tradition.<sup>58</sup> Having a principal denominational background within the student body also allows the seminary to outsource some of its formational requirements to ecclesiastical entities, such as ordination boards.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 274.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 283-284.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

Yet, the ability to develop spiritual formation opportunities to satisfy the normative apprenticeship requirement of theological education must not rest on an institutions' ability to maintain religious uniformity. Today, very few seminaries could claim a completely homogenous student body or faculty, or, likely, would even want to. A diverse collection of people and voices enriches theological education, especially as preparation for the multi-cultural and pluralistic 21<sup>st</sup> century religious landscape.<sup>60</sup> The ATS accrediting agency has seen steady growth among non-white and international students, with students of color now making up 41% of ATS member schools' overall enrollment.<sup>61</sup> As the U.S. anticipates the year 2040, when people of color are expected to become the majority of this country's population, seminary educators are wrestling with the call to reflect multi-cultural research and pedagogy within the historically-white European theological academy.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape: Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow," *Pew Research Forum*, May 12, 2015, accessed October 23, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

<sup>61</sup> Eliza Smith Brown and Chris Meinzer, "New Data Reveal Stable Enrollment but Shifting Trends at ATS Member Schools," *Colloquy*, March 2017, accessed October 21, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/new-data-reveal-stable-enrollment.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> The Association of Theological Schools' Committee on Race and Ethnicity enacted a four-year, 40-school consultation initiative entitled "Preparing for 2040" through 2015. The aims of this project were to create resources for all ATS schools in three areas: setting their own institutional diversity and inclusion goals, helping schools think "critically and theologically" about ethnic/racial diversity, and provide practical steps schools can take on issues related to racial/ethnic diversity. See "Committee on Race and Ethnicity," Association of Theological

The *Educating Clergy* study shares bell hooks' expertise about multi-cultural classroom pedagogy that respects diverse peoples. She says, "There must be a 'complex recognition of the uniqueness' of each student and the range of experience and knowledge that students together bring to a teacher's intentions for their learning. The challenge for faculty occurs in the quest 'to create spaces in the classroom' where all students can be heard because they sense they are 'free to speak' to the questions and issues of the day, because they know 'their presence will be recognized and valued.'"<sup>63</sup> Other faculty similarly point to the need to take individual student experience and backgrounds seriously within theological education, rather than assuming what one educator described as a "'color-blind' or 'a-cultural' posture that will shield [differences] rather than help [students] appreciate and learn from the experience [of diversity]."<sup>64</sup> Indeed, these inclinations toward subjective pedagogy, shaped by

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Schools, accessed October 23, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/resources/current-initiatives/committee-on-race-and-ethnicity>. And Lisa Kern, "Personal Reflections on Diversity Gathering and Lessons We've Learned," *Colloquy*, March 31, 2015, accessed October 23, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/personal-reflections-on-core-consultation.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 57.

<sup>64</sup> Julia M. Speller, "Increasing Diversity in Theological School: A Reflection," in *Folio: Diversity in Theological Education* (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools, 2002), accessed October 23, 2017, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/diversity-in-theological-education-folio.pdf>.

the students themselves, have become markers of “integrative education,” a concept championed by popular educational theorist Parker Palmer.

The ultimate goal of Palmer’s integrative education model is for each student’s inner life, understood as beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and spirituality, to become integrated into their outer life, or how they engage the world.<sup>65</sup> This is very akin to the goals of normative apprenticeship described in the *Educating Clergy* study. Palmer believes that “authentic vocation,” the realization of what a person was born to be, comes from striking a balance between one’s external roles and one’s internal nature.<sup>66</sup> In other words, it is the purpose of education to help each student figure out their unique innate traits and live into them as a calling. This harkens to the oft-heard quote from the great pastor and theological educator Howard Thurman who offered, “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” It is likely that many seminary educators would resonate with this as the goal of theological education.

Palmer describes this concept further by explaining his experience of holding his young granddaughter and noticing, even as a baby, that she had certain innate traits:

*She did not show up as raw material to be shaped into whatever image the world might want her to take. She arrived with her own gifted form, with the shape of her own sacred soul. Biblical faith calls it the image of*

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<sup>65</sup> Palmer and Zajonc, *Heart of Higher Education*, 6-15.

<sup>66</sup> Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 9.

*God in which we were all created. Thomas Merton calls it the true self. Quakers call it the inner light, or “that of God” in every person. The humanist tradition calls it identity and integrity. No matter what you call it, it is a pearl of great price . . . In families, schools, work-places, and religious communities, we are trained away from true self toward images of acceptability; under social pressures like racism and sexism our original shape is deformed beyond recognition; and we, ourselves, driven by fear, too often betray our true self to gain the approval of others.<sup>67</sup>*

Palmer advocates pedagogical practices based on his model of integrative education, which are meant to help draw a student’s most inner self into the learning space. These practices include allowing emotions and subjective thought to be used in the classroom as valid points of analysis,<sup>68</sup> using class time for quiet personal contemplative reflection,<sup>69</sup> and the professor’s need to create safe, hospitable classroom spaces where discussion can be open and honest.<sup>70</sup> Palmer’s pedagogy reveals his hope that every individual (both students and their teachers) participate fully as co-learners in the classroom, rather than treating students as passive recipients of knowledge from the lectures of a faculty expert,<sup>71</sup> described by Freire as the “banking” model of education.<sup>72</sup> These ideas

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<sup>67</sup> Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 11-12.

<sup>68</sup> Palmer and Zajonc, *Heart of Higher Education*, 70-75.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-115.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-16, 128-148.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-93, 101.

<sup>72</sup> Freire is critical of the “banking” model of education where students are assumed to be empty vessels, or “banks,” into which faculty deposit their

mirror closely the previous words of bell hooks in her quest for multi-culturally integrative theological education. They also resonate with the words of Mary Hess who promotes using secular adult education frameworks in the seminary space. Hess's description of learning environments draws on Palmer's more relational model of pedagogy when she says:

*How might we "make manifest" [in students] a tradition always in formation? . . . We can "make manifest" by helping our students to learn by feeling and doing as well as through ideation. Focusing on tacit knowing means that we move from a teacher-centered stance to a learning-centered one that aligns well with adult learning frameworks. In a world in which our knowledge is neither static nor objectivist, we must rest that much more deeply on relational frames.<sup>73</sup>*

Elsewhere Hess states that faculty members need to "get out of the way sufficiently to allow learners to engage the central topic; to create an environment in which direct relationship and direct engagement with the subject is possible."<sup>74</sup> Perhaps this is especially pertinent advice within *theological* education, advises seminary professor Edwin Chr. van Driel, given that its focus is, ultimately, about helping students get to know God, "so the object of theological schooling is never at the teacher's disposal in the way the teacher-centered model assumes it to

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scholarship. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 71-86.

<sup>73</sup> Mary Hess, "Learning Amidst Transforming Traditions," *Theological Education* 49, no. 1 (2014): 13-15.

<sup>74</sup> It is interesting to note that Hess' preference for learner-centered educational endeavors makes her a strong proponent of online theological education. Mary Hess, "What Difference Does It Make? Digital Technology in the Theological Classroom," *Theological Education* 41, no. 1 (2005): 81.



be.”<sup>75</sup> Here again, the uniqueness of the task of theological education is brought to mind, as is the tension inherent in situating such education within a *Wissenschaft*-flavored academy.

Finally, Palmer and his writing partner Arthur Zajonc argue for educators to tackle with their students “messy” problems, the kinds of problems that arise in society every day, not just within classical texts.<sup>76</sup> Palmer criticizes traditional higher education for asking students to engage “artifacts that have currency in professional journals, not with lived social facts. That kind of education can yield measurable and graded outcomes that lead to a college degree . . . But that kind of education does not prepare students well for the world beyond the academy.”<sup>77</sup> Here Palmer’s admonition harkens back again to the *Educating Clergy* study, which speaks of the need for seminaries to prepare their students for real-world encounters:

*The meaning of God for their professional practice becomes an inescapable issue for every clergyperson. And effective engagement with congregants is impossible without the ability to interpret situations effectively. Clergy are asked to make sense of complex situations in light of the commitments and values that define their identity and that of the religious tradition for which they stand. For many of these traditions, this identity is carried in classic texts, defining rituals and customs. [However, a] purely theoretical knowledge of these matters, although important, is rarely enough to enable rabbis, priests, or ministers to carry out their functions. They are routinely called on to cast light on those practical or*

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<sup>75</sup> Van Driel, “Online Theological Education,” 71.

<sup>76</sup> Palmer and Zajonc, *Heart of Higher Education*, 36-37.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

*“existential” matters, often personal but frequently also public, that purely technical knowledge cannot address.*<sup>78</sup>

It could be argued that the work of multi-cultural pedagogy in theological education is itself the work of spiritual formation.<sup>79</sup> After all, every student entering seminary brings a spiritual and cultural backstory. These vary individually in terms of human diversities, educational background, religious or spiritual formation, economic status, and in a host of other ways. While the theological academy has assumed homogeneity in its past, it can no longer do so, nor should it try to, given the diverse world in which it functions today. Palmer’s “integrative education” is appropriate for both multi-cultural and spiritual formation purposes, as well as for classroom and co-curricular settings. It advocates the incorporation of spirituality, emotion, and individual backgrounds in the work of the classroom, and urges educators to direct their teaching toward the important problems of today to capture students’ imaginations and maximize their engagement.

Palmer’s work aligns closely with the findings from a study of multi-cultural theological education undertaken more than a decade ago at Fuller Theological

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<sup>78</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 9.

<sup>79</sup> Some educators have already made this claim within secular adult higher education. See Elizabeth J. Tisdell and Derise E. Tolliver, “Claiming a Sacred Face: The Role of Spirituality and Cultural Identity in Transformative Adult Higher Education,” *Journal of Transformative Education* 1, no. 4 (October 2003): 368-392.

Seminary (FTS), a culturally diverse, University-based seminary near Los Angeles, California. The survey of students attending FTS uncovered observations that the researchers believed could help improve multi-cultural theological education both at Fuller and other seminaries, as well. For example, out of 18 instructional methods listed on the survey, the most highly-favored by students were “professor applying lecture material to real-world issues” and “interaction with professor outside of class.”<sup>80</sup> The first preference speaks to students’ desire to engage classroom learning in just the way Palmer described, through real-world application. Students’ preference for beyond-the-classroom faculty interaction echoes Palmer’s emphasis on creating hospitable, safe spaces for dialogue.

However, the study also found that the FTS students, both Caucasians and students of color, felt that creating “safe spaces” for dialogue was a major challenge in their community. Speaking about racism as a difficult conversation topic, the study says, “both majority and racial/ethnic students ‘are afraid to engage in dialogue because they don’t want to be perceived as racists.’ This is exacerbated by the fact that ‘there is not enough time to work through a conversation to resolution’ in the classroom, and professors are seen as being too busy to offer mentoring relationships. Again, the result is the perception that

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<sup>80</sup> Cameron Lee, Candace Shields, and Kirsten Oh, “Theological Education in a Multicultural Environment: Empowerment or Disempowerment?,” *Theological Education* 43, no. 2 (2008): 97.

‘there is nowhere to have a safe conversation’ about issues of race, culture, and diversity.”<sup>81</sup> In addition to intimating the care with which one must teach thorny, complex issues, this quote also raises the issue of how time-consuming dialogue can be. The problem is that classroom hours are limited. For this reason, even those faculty members willing to engage real-world educational topics and personalized integrative pedagogies may find themselves unable to do so in the allotted classroom time.<sup>82</sup>

Palmer’s educational theories might be a means by which faculty bridge the spiritual formation gap often found in theological education, as well as address the need to become more multi-culturally supportive within the classroom. However, in-classroom hours do not provide ample time to fully develop students’ normative spiritual formation. When the vast majority of Palmer’s writings, as well as most articles and initiatives by other authors aimed at multi-cultural theological education,<sup>83</sup> focus specifically on traditional in-class

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<sup>81</sup> Lee, Shields, and Oh, “Empowerment or Disempowerment?,” 100.

<sup>82</sup> The constraints on seminary professors’ time were discussed further in the previous section of this study entitled, “Seminary Faculty Shape the Curricula.”

<sup>83</sup> See Association of Theological Schools, *Folio: Diversity in Theological Education* (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools, 2002), accessed October 12, 2017, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/diversity-in-theological-education-folio.pdf>. And Richard J. Mouw, “What’s Theological About Theological Education?” *Theological Education* 49, no. 1 (2014): 1-8. And Roy E. Barsness and Richard D. Kim, “A Pedagogy of Engagement for the Changing Character of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom,” *Theological Education* 49, no. 2 (2015): 89-106. And Deborah Gin,

pedagogy, something is missing. The *Educating Clergy* study found that spiritual formation practices offered by seminaries also take place beyond the classroom.<sup>84</sup> This is reinforced by the Fuller study, which discovered that students' conversations around real-world issues regularly moved from the classroom into the school's community life.<sup>85</sup> In other words, what happens in the seminary classroom does not, in fact, stay in the classroom. While classroom instruction remains paramount to student education, there is a lack of research on how theological education can be enhanced by co-curricular efforts taking place beyond traditional classroom instruction times. Research on co-curricular learning could particularly benefit both multi-cultural pedagogy and students' normative spiritual formation, since these are personal, time-consuming efforts.

#### *"Losing One's Faith" During Seminary Study*

In his memoir *Earthen Vessels*, former ATS President Daniel Aleshire recounts the efforts from the association's early years to identify the unique embodiments all seminary graduates should have. He writes:

*The analysis of the responses to hundreds of questions by thousands of people concluded that, at the most global level, people tend to assess the work of ministers and priests in terms of three broad questions: Do they truly love God? Do they relate with care and integrity to human beings?*

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"Does Our Understanding Lack Complexity? Faculty Perceptions on Multicultural Education," *Theological Education* 48, no. 1 (2013): 47-68.

<sup>84</sup> Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 274.

<sup>85</sup> Lee, Shields, and Oh, "Empowerment or Disempowerment?," 93.

*Do they have the knowledge and skills that the job requires? As best I can tell, these three questions continue to hold true. Not only do people tend to ask them, they tend to ask them in this order. If the answer to the first question is “no,” people don’t even proceed to the second or third questions. If they are convinced that a minister or priest does not know or love God, they have little interest in how well that person preaches, administers, counsels, or how much propositional theology or biblical content he or she knows.<sup>86</sup>*

Aleshire then goes on to clarify that the question of whether a religious leader loves God is not optional for theological education, but central, both in terms of the accrediting standards of theological schools and in the church.<sup>87</sup> And yet, how can seminaries teach their students the deeply personal experience of “loving God,” especially in an ecumenical setting that does not promote dogmatic truth. The former Academic Dean of Duke University’s Divinity School, Willie James Jennings, speaks to this conundrum, saying, “The academic imagination as we experience it at Duke can easily grasp the idea of cultivating a love of learning. More difficult to grasp is the idea of cultivating a desire for God. Far more difficult to accept is the idea that this is an inseparable twofold cultivation that has been torn asunder in our time.”<sup>88</sup> How might a theological school’s

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<sup>86</sup> Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 31.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>88</sup> Willie James Jennings, “Leclercq Among the Blue Devils: Assessing Theological Learning in the Modern University,” *Theological Education* 41, no. 2 (2006): 21-30.

“academic imagination” be put back together so students develop a desire for both rigorous theological inquiry and God?

The idea that one loses one’s faith in seminary has become a cliché – one that entire books have been written about,<sup>89</sup> as well as numerous blogs and online journals.<sup>90</sup> This argument even has been used by those opposed to theological education to validate anti-intellectualism within churches and their leadership.<sup>91</sup> But this issue is not only for divinity schools and university-based seminaries, but for more evangelical educational institutions, as well.

As mentioned, decreased denominationalism in the U.S. means that fewer young people are attending church. This means that more students than ever before are arriving to seminary without the formation of a particular religious tradition. Progressive students might arrive disengaged from an institutional church they imagine to be bigoted or irrelevant, and evangelical students may

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<sup>89</sup> See Ellie Roscher, ed., *Keeping the Faith in Seminary* (Minneapolis, MN: Avenida Books, 2012). And David Mathis and Jonathan Parnell, *How to Stay Christian in Seminary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

<sup>90</sup> Many blogs and online journals recount individuals’ feelings and personal experiences on this subject. For example: Chris Highland, “Seminary or Cemetery?,” *Patheos*, July 21, 2014, accessed October 21, 2017, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rationaldoubt/2014/07/seminary-or-cemetery/>. And Rod Dreher, “How Seminary Ruins One’s Faith,” *Beliefnet*, May 2010, accessed October 24, 2017, <http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/roddreher/2010/05/how-seminary-ruins-ones-faith.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Barbara Wheeler, “General Trends and Emerging Models Across Christian Denominations,” in *Religious Leadership: A Reference Handbook*, ed. Sharon Henderson Callahan (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 664.

worship regularly in non-denominational congregations formed less in creedal traditions than the charisma of individual founding pastors. Historian of theological schools and former seminary dean Glenn Miller offers a warning to religious educators on both sides of the liberal-conservative divide, saying:

*If the evangelical churches that I have served throughout my career often buried the gospel in the sentimentality of praise songs and pious phrases, the liberal churches I have also served buried it in cheap psychology and life adjustment. Both fell prey to American individualism as the hidden norm of theological thought. The term “my theology” is too often used as a substitute for hard thought about the substance of faith, given in Scripture and tradition and illumined by right reason. The fact that individualized religious reflection represents a particular person’s theology gives it no more status than would use of the terms “my physics,” or “my poetics.” If there is no content, nothing – no matter how thoughtfully considered – remains nothing.<sup>92</sup>*

As an evangelical himself, Miller might be critiqued as more concerned about “individualized religious reflection” than his liberal theological school faculty colleagues would be, but his point is well-taken. Seminaries should form students as part of the overarching Judeo-Christian tradition, not just separate from it or, worse, “beyond” it due to their plenteous academic knowledge. Daniel Aleshire recalls the words of a former professor colleague to his graduating students, “You have burned the bridges of naiveté, and there is no turning back.”<sup>93</sup> Going on, Aleshire implores seminary faculty to remember, “You invite students across the divide between the naïve faith that most of them bring to seminary and the

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<sup>92</sup> Miller, “Secular Age,” 55-56.

<sup>93</sup> Aleshire, “The Work of Faculty.”



critically informed faith that will provide the foundation for their future work in ministry.”<sup>94</sup>

More than a few seminarians from my own context have described over the years the act of translation that became necessary for them during or after seminary study. It goes like this. They encounter something in their private religious life, say a hymn with patriarchal language in their home church, and have to make the split-second decision whether to ignore their newly-formed, theologically-educated internal compass and sing the offending words, remain silent in protest, or re-word to their liking something they feel right singing aloud. They describe this “translation reflex” as a learned behavior. Prior to theological study the words of the hymn would have garnered from them nary a raised eyebrow. This is the result of “crossing the divide” and leaving naiveté, as described by Aleshire above.

This happens in other fields of study, as well. A student who goes to graduate school for cinema studies can no longer view movies as they did before. They necessarily now see them with the critical lens of their cinematographic and historical knowledge of film. This leads to increased understanding of the genre, but it can also lead to disengagement with films they once loved, which they now understand to be flawed. While they have grown in appreciation for movies in one way, they can no longer ignore the rough edits

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<sup>94</sup> Aleshire, “The Work of Faculty.”

and plot holes in films even if they are blockbuster successes enjoyed by millions.

Once theological education has made its students look critically at their faith traditions from every angle, it becomes difficult to reverse the reflexive cognitive action to do so. However, seminary graduates are tasked with leading communities where they may very well be the only one with this reflex, as the most theologically educated person there. As they practice their religious leadership, they may find themselves at odds with the theology imbedded in their traditions' oft-beloved liturgies, songs, or even scripture readings. This is certainly not the case for everyone who graduates from seminary study, and it is important to remember that at least half of Protestant churches are led by people without a graduate-level theological degree.<sup>95</sup> But many seminarians find it difficult to navigate their tradition once they have "crossed the divide" into greater theological awareness. Thus, the ability to minister is both enhanced, but also complicated, by students' theological learning.

Theological schools situate students' religious imaginations within the wider historical context of religious thought, teach them the ways religious communities have existed within or apart from the world, and make them think critically about the ways that tradition should be passed into the future. In all of these ways, students emerge realizing they are not creating their ministry from

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<sup>95</sup> Wheeler, "General Trends," 661.

whole cloth, but as part of a larger story. But if they also emerge unsure whether or not that story is “true,”<sup>96</sup> how can they lead, preach, and teach the tradition with authenticity?

## **The Importance of Crises of Faith in Theological Education**

### *Existential Crises of Faith Prepare People for Religious Leadership*

This literature review has thus far focused on the unique enterprise of theological education; the perennial tensions inherent between the cognitive, practical, and normative aspects of seminary study; and the fact that these tensions have grown even more acute with the increasing multi-cultural diversity happening in many theological schools today. While faculty expertise in classroom education is central to helping students move cognitively beyond their religious naiveté and into a fuller understanding of faith, it can also cause disillusion with the students’ traditions and previously-held religious beliefs.

What happens when classroom learning conflicts with a student’s faith traditions, political viewpoints, or moral compass? In many ways, this is what education is meant at its core to do – to introduce a student to new and mind-

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<sup>96</sup> I recognize the danger in promoting the concept of religious “truth” in a context such as this. By using the word “truth” here, I am not asserting that there is a singular belief in one cohesive, “capital T” religious Truth to which all seminarians should aspire. Rather, the hope is that whatever truth a student distills from their tradition, holy writ, experience, reason, and studies would feel real enough to them to sustain authentic ministry or vocation.

expanding ideas, and help them wrestle with their meaning and application in the world. However, in theological education the material is not neutral or objective. When the traditional beliefs with which students enter seminary are laid bare by critical inquiry, it sometimes plunges them into “crises of faith.”

By “crisis of faith” I mean a season of theological limbo when previously held truths are deeply questioned and no longer satisfy a person’s current uncertainties. Yet, at the same time, new truths have not yet been found, resulting in a feeling of being untethered. The concept of a crisis of faith is nothing new in the field of philosophical theology. The writings of Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard popularized “Existentialism” in the early-to-mid 1800s. He was critical of the ways in which he believed the institutional church coddled bourgeois Christians with mollifying theology that boiled religious living down to a matter of blind faith.<sup>97</sup> Kierkegaard asked questions about life’s meaning and source, and landed on a form of Christian agnosticism that named God, if existent, as the ultimately unknowable “other” from humanity.<sup>98</sup> Later philosophers took up Kierkegaard’s thoughts and furthered them, notably Martin Heidegger, whose 1927 *Being and Time* explored the existentialist concern of the

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<sup>97</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith: An Introduction to His Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 17-25.

<sup>98</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 37-54.

phenomenology and ontology of humanity's "being" in the world.<sup>99</sup> Philosopher Paul Tillich would later ask similar ontological questions in his *Systematic Theology*, written in three volumes during the 1950s, after witnessing the devastation of World War II.<sup>100</sup> By the 1960s, the "death of God" movement, which relied on Friedrich Nietzsche's agnostic philosophy, once again harkened back to Kierkegaard's existentialist thought.<sup>101</sup> Since then various human and natural disasters have provided continued fodder for "theothanatology," and the ways religious people have either ignored or been complicit in global atrocities has engendered heavy critique of institutionalized religion, notably from "New Atheists," such as Christopher Hitchens<sup>102</sup> and Richard Dawkins.<sup>103</sup> Thus, Kierkegaard's existential concerns have not subsided, but continue to underpin current philosophical thought. Kierkegaard historian George Pattison offers, "Even if Kierkegaard's account of faith does turn out to be flawed (as, perhaps,

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<sup>99</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), 19-30.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 192-204. And Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 59-96.

<sup>101</sup> Pattison, *Kierkegaard*, 1.

<sup>102</sup> Of his many books and essays, see especially Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2007).

<sup>103</sup> Dawkins is similarly prolific to Hitchens, but a work that focuses on his atheism is Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008).

all accounts of faith must be), his posing of the question retains something of its urgency and freshness, since the religious crisis which he pinpoints, a crisis also illuminated by Nietzsche's account of nihilism, is still very much with us, perhaps more than ever before."<sup>104</sup>

Pattison wrote that quote two decades ago, but it is no less true today. Those who are training to be 21<sup>st</sup> century religious leaders face questions like climate change, the complications of technology-fueled globalism, religiously-motivated terrorism and violence, and upticks in xenophobia and nationalism endangering longstanding cooperative political enterprises such as the European Union and United Nations. They will face these global problems along with the local concerns of their communities, such as poverty and homelessness, racism and homophobia, pastoral care and mental illness, not to mention all the administrative minutiae that pester pastoral leaders. (A minister friend once quipped that he can sit by the hospital bed of dying parishioners and never doubt God as much as he does in church business meetings.)

With all of these pressures and "big questions" to address, it is right for theological education to make students wrestle with ontological reality and existential meaning as part of their training so they will know how to wrestle with it authentically and faithfully as a religious leader. Daniel Aleshire, former ATS President, in an address entitled "The WHY of Theological Education," speaks of

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<sup>104</sup> Pattison, *Kierkegaard*, 13.

the necessity of training religious leaders for the hardest, most soul-wrenching occasions, such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, which occurred in Connecticut in 2012. His speech described the work of three seminary-trained pastors whose proximity to the school made them and their congregations first responders. Aleshire remarks:

*Congregations need leadership. Just as I can't imagine the community getting through a crisis like this one without congregations, I can't imagine congregations facing a time like this without leaders . . . [through their seminary study the three pastors] learned both how to think theologically and how to work pastorally. Their theological education introduced them to the hard questions of life, gave them counsel in the care of souls, and sharpened their sensitivities about the work of church in society . . . There is a correlation between effective and theologically articulate ministry and theological education . . . If life had no trauma and never posed hard questions of meaning, if everything always went well, if evil never had its sway, theological schools might not be so important. But in a world of hard questions, human longing, and senseless tragedy, the gifts of the well-learned Christian tradition are a non-negotiable.<sup>105</sup>*

It is not the seminary's job to keep their students from crises of faith, as they can help develop capacity for religious leadership, perhaps especially when difficult situations arise. But are the curricula of MDiv programs addressing students' crises of faith sufficiently to reinforce students' formation?

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<sup>105</sup> Daniel Aleshire, "The WHY of Theological Education" (presentation, ATS Student Personnel Administrators Network, Phoenix, AZ, April 2013), accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/the-why-of-theological-education.pdf>.

*Addressing Crises of Faith in the Seminary Curriculum*

If “crises of faith” are necessarily part of theological education, how are seminaries addressing them? Elliot Eisner, in a popular curricular theory, asserts that every educational institution teaches in three distinct ways. The “explicit curriculum” publically shows up on course syllabi.<sup>106</sup> The implicit, or “hidden curriculum,” is everything taught beyond the syllabi by the values portrayed by the institution and its rules, teacher preferences, the pedagogy of the courses, or even the setup of the building itself.<sup>107</sup> For example, a teacher’s tendency to choose male voices to answer questions in the classroom would be “hidden curriculum” teaching that men are more valued in their opinions than people of other genders. But there is a third curriculum in Eisner’s model, the “null curriculum,” or what is not taught at all within the school.<sup>108</sup> Eisner offers, “It is my thesis that what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach. I argue this position because ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives that one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation or problems.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 87-88.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-93.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*



I propose that in most seminaries students' "crises of faith" are relegated to either the implicit curriculum or the null curriculum, and that they are rarely treated as a central part of students' theological education. Crises of faith have broad-ranging implications for students' personal religious lives, spiritual formation, and vocational discernment. If crises of faith are only addressed peripherally or not at all within the seminary curricula, students who experience crises of faith do so in the vacuum of their own minds, supported only inasmuch as they are willing to reach out for help. Moreover, if a student finds their existential questions troubling or shameful, they may be less likely to seek help even from those close to them. Seminaries addressing student crises of faith directly, both through the explicit, classroom curricula and in implicit, co-curricular ways, may help students navigate them more openly, and with more support and institutional care. In turn, this may help students graduate with the kind of depth of capacity for leadership described by Aleshire in the previous section.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this study, after more than a dozen years in seminary administration, I have had many personal encounters with students going through crises of faith. Colleagues, students, and faculty with whom I have spoken about crises of faith corroborate their existence and prevalence as an issue for seminarians. Yet I have found very little research specifically on this topic within theological education. The current study is meant to help fill that gap within the literature, both to provide data with regard to frequency and characteristics of students' crises of faith, as well as research the

means by which seminarians reconcile their crises of faith. The hope is that this knowledge might encourage seminary educators to move student crises of faith into the explicit curricula of their schools, directly addressing them as central to the experience of theological education.

### *The Value of Crises of Faith*

Decades of research within psychology and educational theory suggest that crises of faith are helpful to human development and learning. A 1993 dissertation by Veronica Ton explored crises of faith in religious people from a psychological point of view. She mentions that faith crises often arise in early adulthood, and offers, “Psychologically, as the ego expands, its demands to embrace polarities become greater.”<sup>110</sup> Ton then lists a number of psychologists, Carl Jung the most recognized among them, who all credit crises of faith and their resultant psychic struggle as fundamentally important to a person’s psychological growth.<sup>111</sup>

Crises of faith are also talked about frequently in the context of secular learning theory, albeit by different names. The work of Jack Mezirow on Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) provides an excellent model for understanding how crises of faith function pedagogically. TLT also offers a

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<sup>110</sup> Veronica Ton, “Crisis of Faith and Reconciliation: A Psychological Exploration of Religion” (PhD diss., The Wright Institute, 1993), 203.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 35-46.

language – disorienting dilemmas, changing assumptions, perspective transformation – that puts structure around the seemingly-chaotic experience of seminarians' crises of faith.

### *Seminary Educators Can Learn from Transformative Learning Theory*

In 1978 Jack Mezirow's published a model of adult education that has since become the foundation of extensive scholarship,<sup>112</sup> a professional organization that holds regular international conferences,<sup>113</sup> and a peer-reviewed journal.<sup>114</sup> It is safe to say that this theory is well-known in the field of secular education. In fact, educational theorist and author Edward Taylor offers, "Since transformative learning emerged as an area of study in adult education it has received more attention than any other adult learning theory, and it continues to be of interest."<sup>115</sup> However, it is hard to find Mezirow or his intellectual progeny in

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<sup>112</sup> For a list of the many empirical research studies that have utilized the TLT educational theory over the past 35 years, see Edward W. Taylor, "Building Upon the Theoretical Debate: A Critical Review of the Empirical Studies of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory," *Adult Education Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1997): 34-50.

<sup>113</sup> "Transformative Learning Network," Transformative Learning Network, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://transformativelearning.ning.com/>.

<sup>114</sup> The Journal of Transformative Education began in 2003, and is published by Sage Publishing.

<sup>115</sup> Edward W. Taylor, "Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 285.

research on specifically theological higher education.<sup>116</sup> As mentioned before, it is also difficult to locate in books or articles within theological education scholarly mention of the crisis of faith phenomenon in seminarians, despite its anecdotally evidenced frequency. I submit that the arc of the Transformative Learning model mirrors the arc of theological education itself, and that TLT, as a well-researched and student-centered paradigm, is an excellent theoretical foundation for seminary educators hoping to help their students better navigate crises of faith.

Transformative learning is both communicative<sup>117</sup> and personalized to the student experience, just like Palmer's "integrative learning model" discussed in a previous section. TLT's goal is to change a student's basic assumptions, causing

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<sup>116</sup> There seems to be rather extensive research on TL in fields such as medicine, communications, and business, but there is very little within the field of theological education. Even *Religious Education*, the primary journal of those in the field of religious education and pedagogy, shows only a handful of articles (15 at last count) that cite Mezirow's work anywhere, and only about half of those go into much detail on the theory itself. It seems that TLT is simply not fully on the radar within the field of theological education. However, interestingly Parker Palmer, whose work shares much in common with the basic principles of TLT, is extensively cited (almost 4000 times) within *Religious Education*. Conversations about TLT would enhance the discussion, which is why this current study introduces TLT as a foundational theory of how to understand crises of faith within theological higher education.

<sup>117</sup> It has already been discussed that conversation-based, or "dialogical" models of learning are favored for multi-cultural education, and it is also possible that this kind of student-centric pedagogy is more effective for spiritual formation than teacher-centered models. See the "Spiritual Formation and Multi-Cultural Theological Education" section of this literature review.

doubt and critical reflection, which then leads to a shift in perspective.<sup>118</sup> Mezirow starts with the fundamental understanding that each adult learner brings to the classroom their own point of view, or “habits of mind,” which has been shaped by both cognitive and tangible experiences in their life. Some of these habits of mind may be individual beliefs unique to that person, influenced by one’s culture and family of origin.<sup>119</sup> However, a student’s habits of mind often include paradigms shared collectively by many people,<sup>120</sup> for example, the religious doctrines espoused by the church of their youth.

When Mezirow speaks of “disorienting dilemmas” he could be speaking of what was described earlier herein as a crisis of faith. Mezirow says of adult learners experiencing doubt arising from disorienting dilemmas, “In the absence of fixed truths and confronted with the often-rapid change in circumstances, we cannot fully trust what we know or believe. Interpretations and opinions that may have worked for us as children often do not as adults.”<sup>121</sup> This sounds like it could have been written about seminarians with preconceived notions of biblical inerrancy who learn, for example, that there are two different creation myths in the book of Genesis. Whether in a secular or theological learning environment,

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<sup>118</sup> Jack Mezirow, ed., *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 296-297.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

disorienting dilemmas/crises of faith function to draw students beyond their previously-held beliefs.

As we have seen in the work of Veronica Ton and her review of the psychological literature, crises of faith often occur at the onset of adulthood, as one experiences the world more fully and encounters things for which their childhood beliefs do not account.<sup>122</sup> This could mean that a student entering seminary straight from college may be more susceptible than their older peers for crises of faith, or may even arrive in the midst of one. Further research is needed to state whether this might be the case.

Mezirow describes students' "transformations in habits of mind" as either "epochal," meaning they happen suddenly and often in dramatic fashion, or "incremental," where a progression of small transformations culminates in a perspective shift.<sup>123</sup> There are both "objective" and "subjective" aspects to the transformative learning process, as well. According to Mezirow, "*Objective reframing* involves critical reflection on the assumptions of others encountered in a narrative or in task-oriented problem solving, as in 'action learning' . . . *subjective reframing* involves critical self-reflection of one's own assumptions."<sup>124</sup> Here again we see glimpses of the pattern of theological education, which asks

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<sup>122</sup> Ton, "Crisis of Faith," 203.

<sup>123</sup> Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, 21.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

seminarians to engage in both critical inquiry of the coursework (objective/cognitive) but also personal spiritual formation (subjective/normative).

There are different “phases of meaning-making,” or steps students take in their effort to reconcile a disorienting dilemma. Mezirow’s model offers the following ten-step process through which learners move toward transformed perspectives:

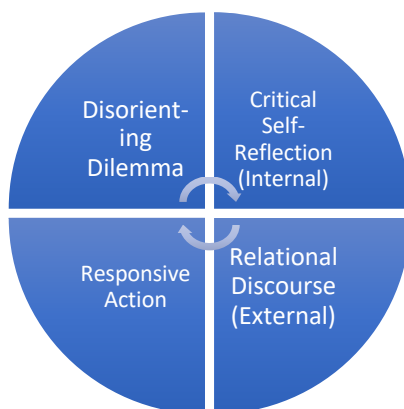
1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> This list in its entirety comes from Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, 22.

These ten steps can be distilled into four major movements: the central experience of a disorienting dilemma, a time of internal critical reflection, engagement in external relational discourse, and responsive action.<sup>126</sup> This is a cyclical process in that transformation is never “once and for always,” as disorienting dilemmas can constantly invite us to change perspectives. Meaning making in this way takes place throughout one’s lifetime. A diagram of the four central movements of the TLT cycle can be found pictured in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1. Four Central Movements of Transformative Learning Theory**



<sup>126</sup> Nate Cradit and Marc Hunsaker, “Leveraging Transformative Learning Theory to Promote Student Development in Times of Campus Crisis” (presentation, NASPA 2016 Annual Conference, Indianapolis, IN, March 12-16, 2016), accessed October 30, 2017, <https://www.slideshare.net/NateCradit/leveraging-transformative-learning-theory-to-promote-student-development-in-times-of-campus-crisis>.



TLT's phases of meaning-making closely mirror the journey of theological education. Though the stages flow from one another, they are not meant to be understood as a purely linear pattern. Students may move simultaneously in the various quadrants, and even experience multiple disorienting dilemmas at once.<sup>127</sup> The ten TLT steps move fluidly through cognitive thought and practical action, with students "trying on" new perspectives by living them in their daily lives. As discovered by Carnegie's *Educating Clergy* study, seminary education for religious leaders integrates classroom coursework, which is primarily cognitive in nature, with practical field education, where students learn in contexts such as local churches how to navigate "new roles and relationships" just as TLT's phases describes.

TLT and theological education both aim for learners to integrate their internal and external lives. John Dirkx, renowned TLT scholar, levels the critique that this educational theory has become so popular that the "transformative learning" moniker has been placed on any interesting new approaches to learning, while lacking the true theoretical discipline of the model.<sup>128</sup> I hope to avoid this offense herein. I am not suggesting that TLT is already extensively at

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<sup>127</sup> Joe F. Donaldson, "Fostering Transformative Learning in Leadership Development," in *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, ed. Jack Mezirow and Edward W. Taylor (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 74-75.

<sup>128</sup> John M. Dirkx, "Self-Formation and Transformative Learning: A Response to 'Calling Transformative Learning into Question: Some Mutinous Thoughts,' by Michael Newman," *Adult Education Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2012): 400.

work in theological education, since it seems from the literature that few theological educators are utilizing this theory. However, I do assert that seminary educators could learn from the TLT model as a means of achieving the goal of producing excellent religious leaders who are transformed both cognitively and spiritually by their learning, and have successfully navigated existential crisis as part of their theological education.

### *Emotions Inherent in Transformative Learning and Crises of Faith*

Transformative learning, like theological education, is not a neutral experience. Both can cause distress in the learner as the foundations of their previous beliefs are shaken. Initially, under Mezirow, TLT was concerned primarily with cognitive changes that occur during adult education. However, as the research on adult learning grew, TLT scholars began to resonate with the work of psychologists such as Robert Kegan who emphasize the role of emotions within the learning process.<sup>129</sup> Kegan suggests that negative emotions are foundational to learning, as when infants experience “separation anxiety” in distinguishing themselves from a parent.<sup>130</sup> Negative emotions do not always produce transformation, though. They can also cause people to move back into previous, familiar patterns of thinking to escape the discomfort of the learning

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<sup>129</sup> Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 4.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-85.

itself.<sup>131</sup> What can educators do to help students avoid retreat in the face of emotional discomfort and instead move forward into transformation?

Psychotherapist and educator Larry Green helpfully describes the movement between a disorienting dilemma and transformation (labeled herein as the “crisis of faith”) as a “liminal zone.”<sup>132</sup> He believes this is an existential moment of choice: “Do I make the leap of faith [to transformation] or stay with what has served me up to this point?”<sup>133</sup> Green suggests that excellent mentoring and teaching is an important part of helping students make the decision to move forward rather than backward. He likens this “liminal zone” to the rites of passage in traditional and aboriginal cultures,<sup>134</sup> which make a path through which their people navigate challenging transitions. He says:

*These rites communicate: “Others have been here before you and others will follow.” Moreover, there is a communal aspect to those rites that reassure the transforming individual that their community continues to support them and will recognize and affirm their new way of being. With*

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<sup>131</sup> Larry Green, “Transformative Learning: A Passage Through the Liminal Zone,” in *Psychoanalysis and Education: Minding a Gap*, ed. Alan Bainbridge and Linden West (London: Karnac Books, 2012), 212.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-213.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>134</sup> One should be sensitive to cultural appropriation when imagining crises of faith within theological education as a rite of passage. The motifs of initiation, progression, and transformation can be useful descriptions of the process by which someone experiences a crisis of faith, as can the resources of a mentor/guide to “journey” alongside the person in crisis. However, non-native people should not try to appropriate actual historical rituals to which they do not belong culturally. Here I am using “rite of passage” language metaphorically.

*these supports, the individual is more likely to experience the confidence to exercise their agency and see the process all the way through.*<sup>135</sup>

So, even when negative emotions arise within them, the person undergoing a rite of passage feels supported in their movement forward toward transformation. This is an excellent metaphor for crises of faith in theological education. Seminaries could use it both in terms of preparing students to experience crises of faith as part of their learning, and to prepare those around them (educators, as well as friends, family, and ecclesial leaders) to support them.

When students' emotions arise in the context of the classroom or in the community life of the school, this experience can be distressing for teachers as well as fellow students.<sup>136</sup> Today, most research on TLT agrees that schools and educators must notice when students' emotions arise in institutional settings, as these are cues to their experience of learning.<sup>137</sup> This work is "messy," and demands that institutions provide means by which student emotions can be expressed as part of the curriculum or co-curriculum. John Dirkx has explored in

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<sup>135</sup> Green, "Liminal Zone," 214.

<sup>136</sup> John M. Dirkx, "The Meaning and Role of Emotions in Adult Learning," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2008, no. 120 (Winter 2008): 8.

<sup>137</sup> M. Carolyn Clark and John M. Dirkx, "The Emotional Self in Adult Learning," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2008, no.120 (2008): 90-91.

his writings the emotional dimensions of adult transformative learning,<sup>138</sup> and offers:

*It is a little disheartening to have to explicitly draw attention to the critical role of emotions in the processes of learning and meaning making. Unfortunately, the more integrated and holistic perspectives [on pedagogy] . . . are not widely shared within the field. We have a ways to go before educators recognize emotions in adult learning, especially so-called negative emotions, as something other than a barrier or challenge to effective learning experiences, something to get off one's chest before real learning can occur.*<sup>139</sup>

Dirkx goes on to discuss the role of emotions in helping adult learners work with one another in authentic dialogue across difference. Educators may perceive classroom outbursts, community disturbances, and online arguments between students as incidents to quash for the sake of institutional harmony. However, this distaste for emotion within the educational environment, Dirkx suggests, suppresses the learning potential inherent in these episodes.<sup>140</sup>

As just one example of many writings on the importance of students' emotions, educational theorist Jude Walker recently explored the magnitude of

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<sup>138</sup> See as examples: John M. Dirkx, ed., *Adult Learning and the Emotional Self* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008). And John M. Dirkx, "The Power of Feelings: Emotion, Imagination, and the Construction of Meaning in Adult Learning," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2001, no. 89 (Spring 2001): 63-72. And John M. Dirkx, "Engaging Emotions in Adult Learning: A Jungian Perspective on Emotion and Transformative Learning," *New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education* 2006, no. 109 (Spring 2006): 15-26.

<sup>139</sup> Clark and Dirkx, "The Emotional Self," 91.

<sup>140</sup> Dirkx, "Meaning and Role," 11-15.

the emotion “shame” in learning.<sup>141</sup> Interestingly, she harkens back to the story of Adam and Eve as an archetypal example, because in that account, “the beginning of consciousness is marked by feelings of inferiority. After our fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, we become shamefully aware of our imperfections – our defectiveness on display for all to see. Shame – the most primal of emotions.”<sup>142</sup> Shame is just a starting point, says Walker, always attended by other emotions such as anger, anxiety, or hurt (here one can hear echoes of Robert Kegan’s work).<sup>143</sup> Shame can also be either externally or internally directed, and is sometimes mediated by a desire to shame others to disguise one’s own shame.<sup>144</sup> Walker goes on to say that the experience of shame can feel isolating, and cause a student to withdraw from their community in embarrassment.<sup>145</sup> “Because it immediately compels us to want to hide, run away, disappear, shut up, and shut out,” offers Walker, “shame is the loneliest of emotions.”<sup>146</sup> Here Green’s “rite of passage” imagery is once again helpful to

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<sup>141</sup> Jude Walker, “Shame and Transformation in the Theory and Practice of Adult Learning and Education,” *Journal of Transformative Education* 15, no. 4 (2017): 357-374.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 358-359.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 361-362.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

imagine a community's possible supportive response to students experiencing shame.<sup>147</sup>

Yet shame can also be a powerful impetus for change, a discomfort that leads toward individual transformation. It can, in other words, become a "disorienting dilemma." Adult education should be directed, says Walker, toward "courageously confronting one's inadequacies and admitting and revealing a lack of knowledge or competency; it is about facing shame head-on."<sup>148</sup> Walker believes this should be done, as all transformative learning should be, within a learning environment that encourages dialogue, hospitality, and respect for all involved in the conversation, what Walker describes as "pedagogically courageous spaces."<sup>149</sup> Yet she also acknowledges the painstaking amount of energy and effort required by both student and teachers to bring about such open and honest conversation.<sup>150</sup> It is far less time-consuming and emotionally uncomfortable to rely on traditional teacher-led, "banking" models of adult education, which is why most educators still do.

Dirkx suggests that faculty discomfort with emotions in the learning environment is rooted in the Enlightenment academy's preference for objective

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<sup>147</sup> Green, "Liminal Zone," 214.

<sup>148</sup> Walker, "Shame and Transformation," 368.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

scientific inquiry based on supposedly-neutral logic.<sup>151</sup> Parker Palmer goes a step further, calling this way of thinking “pedagogical fundamentalism,” and casting doubt on whether anything is ever able to be observed “objectively.”<sup>152</sup>

Palmer writes:

*Academics who want to factor out ‘subjective emotions’ in favor of data-based ‘objective knowledge’ will, at the same time, blithely ignore fifty years of research about the importance of attending to the emotions . . . the paired irony is that these academics ignore all the research-based knowledge we have on the role of emotions in learning largely because embracing the implications of that knowledge would take them out of their emotional comfort zones! . . . We who advocate for integrative education . . . [must weave] a sound defense for attending to the heart-mind connection, making it more difficult for orthodox academics to be dismissive of brain science, pedagogical reality, and simple common sense.<sup>153</sup>*

Dirkx and many others<sup>154</sup> have studied the value of emotions as part of adult education, and have concluded that transformative learning is inherently an emotional experience, an expansion of consciousness that leaves the student not just cognitively, but fundamentally changed.<sup>155</sup> There would be a significant shift

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<sup>151</sup> Dirkx, “Meaning and Role,” 11.

<sup>152</sup> Palmer and Zajonc, *Heart of Higher Education*, 66-68.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>154</sup> See John M. Dirkx, ed., *Adult Learning and the Emotional Self* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008). This book contains several chapters by various educational theorists discussing emotions as foundational for learning.

<sup>155</sup> This corresponds with another significant movement in adult education, the rise of contemplative learning practices, which will not be discussed in this project, but should be considered an excellent pedagogical resource for



in educational practice if this type of pedagogy became normalized within the academy. And while transformative learning experts believe the shift to be a good one, other educators have criticized the movement toward emotional, student-centered learning as too indulgent of students and their perceived needs.<sup>156</sup> This exposes a growing tension within higher education. For example, while some educators advocate for “trigger warnings” on emotionally difficult coursework, others feel that students should not be excused from emotionally difficult coursework, and that the limiting of free speech on campus also limits the free exchange of scholarship.<sup>157</sup> Though TLT could be accused of catering too closely to student needs, its intention is not to descend into silencing unpopular voices or avoiding emotionally difficult content; quite the contrary, in fact. TLT is

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curricular and co-curricular educators seeking to foster transformation in their students.

<sup>156</sup> Barb Holdcroft, “Student Incivility, Intimidation, and Entitlement in Academia,” *Academe*, May-June, 2014, accessed October 4, 2017, <https://www.aaup.org/article/student-incivility-intimidation-and-entitlement-academia#.WIFfsVQ-cUE>. And Daniel Mendelsohn, “How to Raise a Proper College Student,” *Town and Country*, August 2017, Accessed October 4, 2017, <http://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/a10208931/college-student-entitlement/>.

<sup>157</sup> Some recent articles from the Chronicle of Higher Education exploring this tension include Angela Shaw-Thornburg, “This is a Trigger Warning,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 16, 2014. And Peter Schmidt, “Speaker Beware: Student Demands Make Campus Speech a Minefield,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 29, 2016. And Beth McMurtrie, “U. of Chicago’s Free-Expression Letter Exposes Fault Lines on Campus,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 2, 2016. And Peter Schmidt, “A Faculty’s Stand on Trigger Warnings Stirs Fears Among Students,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 6, 2015.

perhaps better equipped than other pedagogies to expressly engage difficult conversations.<sup>158</sup>

### *Transformation Leads to Action*

Transformative learning is a “meaning making” process which fundamentally changes the learner and shapes their habits of living in the world.<sup>159</sup> The student, transformed by their education, may decide to take new actions in the world or to reaffirm previous patterns of action, albeit reinforced by their new perspectives. In this way Mezirow’s work is indebted to the social liberation theory of Paulo Freire, which introduced “conscientization” as awakening to the “fettters” of oppressive ideas and situations in social, economic, and political contexts, and then choosing to overcome these “with actions . . . directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting ‘the given.’”<sup>160</sup> With this philosophical underpinning, transformative learning is not just cognitive education, but is ultimately directed toward critical action in the world.

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<sup>158</sup> Several educators have written about their use of transformative learning theory to address thorny issues such as racism and climate change. See as examples: D. Scott Tharp, “Exploring First-Year College Students’ Cultural Competence,” *Journal of Transformative Education* 15, no. 3 (January 2017): 241-263. And Joseph C. Chen and Akilah R. Martin, “Role-Play Simulations as a Transformative Methodology in Environmental Education,” *Journal of Transformative Education* 13, no. 1 (November 2014): 85-102.

<sup>159</sup> Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, 24.

<sup>160</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 99.

Describing the goals of TLT, Mezirow offers, “Transformation Theory’s focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others – to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers.”<sup>161</sup> Thus, there is a practical result to transformative learning. This is a vital educational process that can truly transform individuals, and perhaps even the world, as was Freire’s goal. Transformative learning helps students search for their own truth in dialogue with and challenged by external realities, in the hopes they might then take substantive action for change.

Seminarians are ripe with transformative learning potential since their studies are at the intersection of religion, politics, and social justice. Scholars Williamson and Sandage have studied the psychological effects of theological education on seminarians.<sup>162</sup> They employed two psychometric tests, the Quest Scale,<sup>163</sup> which gauges participants’ comfort with existential thoughts, and the

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<sup>161</sup> Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, 8.

<sup>162</sup> Ian Todd Williamson and Steven J. Sandage, “Longitudinal Analyses of Religious and Spiritual Development Among Seminary Students,” *Mental Health, Religion, & Culture* 12, no. 8 (2009): 787-801.

<sup>163</sup> C. Daniel Batson and Patricia A. Schoenrade, “Measuring Religion as a Quest: Reliability Concerns,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 4 (1991): 430-447.

Spiritual Well-Being Scale,<sup>164</sup> which measures their overall sense of spiritual contentment.<sup>165</sup> The data they gathered suggests that most seminary contexts expose students to a “spiritual developmental process of leaving familiar attachments to explore new territory,” and that through the learning experience those students who show an increase in “questing” report a decreased sense of spiritual well-being.<sup>166</sup> “This internal conflict,” they offer, “may lead to spiritual growth and openness to new complexities if wisely managed . . . but these ‘dark nights of the soul’ can also involve temporary reductions in spiritual well-being.”<sup>167</sup> Such insight confirms a need for “managing” or supporting student crises of faith to promote an outcome of transformative learning.

### **Applying Lessons Learned from Secular Higher Education to Theological Education to Address Crises of Faith**

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<sup>164</sup> Rodger K. Bufford, Raymond F. Paloutzian, and Craig W. Ellison, “Norms for the Spiritual Well-Being Scale,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 56-70.

<sup>165</sup> These same two surveys will be employed in the current study to study Millennial MDiv seminarians.

<sup>166</sup> Williamson and Sandage, “Longitudinal Analyses,” 787-801.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 797.

### *Crises of Faith for Millennial Students*

Given the evidence that the Millennial generation reportedly lags behind others in the qualities of patience and problem solving,<sup>168</sup> Millennial students may be particularly susceptible to disengagement or retreat after encountering crises of faith. Many authors point to Millennials' facility and engagement with technology as a positive characteristic; however, some suggest this same quality has led to isolationism and a lack of empathy for others' needs.<sup>169</sup> Lending credence to this latter thought, longitudinal studies of changes in the dispositional empathy of college students over the past 30 years have showed significant declines, with the most pronounced shift downward occurring from 2000 onward.<sup>170</sup> While some authors note that every generation in its youth shows higher rates of narcissism than their elders,<sup>171</sup> it is likely that a generational shift

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<sup>168</sup> Helen W. Bland et al., "Stress Tolerance: New Challenges for Millennial College Students," *College Student Journal* 46, No. 2 (2012): 362-375.

<sup>169</sup> Nadine Dolby, "The Future of Empathy: Teaching the Millennial Generation," *Journal of College and Character* 15, no. 1 (January 2014): 39-44. And Ossiana Tepfenhart, "Generation Isolation: How Tech Advances Have Ruined Our Social Skills," *Elite Daily*, June 26, 2015. And Jean M. Twenge, W. Keith Campbell, and Elise C. Freeman, "Generational Differences in Young Adults' Life Goals, Concern for Others, and Civic Orientation, 1966-2009," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102, no. 5 (2012): 1045-1062.

<sup>170</sup> Sara H. Konrath, Edward O'Brien, and Courtney Hsing, "Changes in Dispositional Empathy in American College Students Over Time: A Meta-Analysis," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15, no. 2 (2011): 180-198.

<sup>171</sup> Brent W. Roberts, Grant Edmonds, and Emily Grijalva, "It is Developmental Me, Not Generation Me: Developmental Changes are More Important than Generational Changes in Narcissism – Commentary on Trzesniewski &

is at least somewhat responsible for this observable downturn in empathy, given that the first wave of Millennials (born in 1980) entered the higher education classroom in the early 2000s. Some worry about the emotional fragility of Millennials, nicknamed “Generation Me.”<sup>172</sup> While they are highly networked via social media, they have a tendency to disconnect from traditional institutions of stability such as marriage, home ownership, religious institutions, and political parties, and have lower social trust than previous generations.<sup>173</sup> Without these connections, and with the constant onslaught of media and stresses of young adulthood, Millennials have been suggested to be more susceptible to mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression.<sup>174</sup>

Research on Millennials suggests that they learn differently, as well. Lecture-heavy “banking model”<sup>175</sup> pedagogy, which has been a staple of 20<sup>th</sup> century seminary education, is growing increasingly inadequate and irrelevant to

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Donnellan (2010),” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5, no. 1 (2010): 97-102.

<sup>172</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 72-76.

<sup>173</sup> Jill D. McLeigh and Liepa V. Boberiene, “Young Adults in Conflict: Confident but Struggling, Networked but Disconnected,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 84, no. 6 (November 2014): 626.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. And Twenge, *Generation Me*, 104-136.

<sup>175</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 71-86.

the curiosities and technological expectations of the “always on” student.<sup>176</sup> While some studies challenge the assumption that Millennial students are as digitally-savvy and tech-expectant as they are often described,<sup>177</sup> it is still clear that today’s educators are concerned with innovations both inside and beyond the classroom, trying to engage this new generation of learners.

Efforts to reach “Generation Y”<sup>178</sup> have emerged in the recent literature of higher education. The fall 2013 volume of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* focused on Millennial student egos, concluding that “tradition and overregulation suppress Millennial students’ sense of self,” which leads to disengagement.<sup>179</sup> Yet others suggest that Millennials’ “sense of self” tends to be

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<sup>176</sup> Shekhar Murthy, “Academagogical Framework for Effective University Education - Promoting Millennial Centric Learning in Global Knowledge Society” (presentation, 2011 IEEE International Conference on Technology for Education, Madras, India, July 14-16, 2011). And Regina M. Bailey, “Square Pegs, Round Holes: An Exploration of Teaching Methods and Learning Styles of Millennial College Students” (PhD diss., Capella University, 2012), 16-40.

<sup>177</sup> C. A. Bowers, *The False Promises of the Digital Revolution: How Computers Transform Education, Work, and International Development in Ways that are Ecologically Unsustainable* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014). And Steven Watts, “‘Dilemmas’ and Humanities Education: Redefining Technology Literacy, Pedagogy, and Practice,” (master’s thesis, Utah State University, 2013). And Shahid Alvi, “Proceed with Caution: Technology Fetishism and the Millennial Generation,” *Interactive Technology and Smart Education* 8, No. 2 (2011): 135-144. And Christina Murray, *The Millennial Rumor: Understanding Millennial College Students’ Characteristics, Digital Media Technology Usage, and Assumptions at the University of Denver* (PhD diss., University of Denver, 2011).

<sup>178</sup> This is another name for the Millennial generation, as it follows the previous generational group, Generation X.

<sup>179</sup> Dave S. Knowlton and Kevin Jack Hagopian, eds., *From Entitlement to Entanglement: Affirming Millennial Students’ Egos in the Higher Education*

inflated, appearing more like narcissism than healthy self-confidence.<sup>180</sup> Noting this generation's often-lamented sense of entitlement, author Dave Knowlton believes that this same predisposition can be used to move students toward deeper engagement, though to do so teachers must break from traditional hierarchical models of the classroom to a more student-centered approach.<sup>181</sup> Author Marc Prensky, whose 2001 term "digital natives" has become synonymous with Millennials, agrees with Knowlton, and suggests a new vision in which educators begin not with their own expertise but with students' interests.<sup>182</sup> With these kinds of personalized, student-driven approaches gaining popularity,<sup>183</sup> it seems that qualities of a 21<sup>st</sup> century educator will need to include adaptability; emotional intelligence; the ability to listen carefully to, and then address, their students' needs; and a willingness to connect beyond the

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*Classroom*, New Directions for Teaching and Learning Series, Number 135 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 1.

<sup>180</sup> Twenge, *Generation Me*, 69-71.

<sup>181</sup> Dave S. Knowlton, "Navigating the Paradox of Student Ego," in *From Entitlement to Entanglement: Affirming Millennial Students' Egos in the Higher Education Classroom*, New Directions for Teaching and Learning Series, Number 135, ed. Dave S. Knowlton and Kevin Jack Hagopian (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 19-30.

<sup>182</sup> Marc R. Prensky, *From Digital Natives to Digital Wisdom: Hopeful Essays for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2012), 1-5.

<sup>183</sup> Kelly Ward, Lois Trautvetter, and Larry Braskamp, "Putting Students First: Creating a Climate of Support and Challenge," *Journal of College and Character* 6, No. 8 (November 2005), 2-3.



classroom. As shown above, Transformative Learning Theory encourages educators to use all these pedagogical practices.

However, TLT, beginning as it does with the uncomfortable emotions unleashed by disorienting dilemmas, should be employed carefully with the Millennial generation. If they are, as those above suggest, more susceptible to anxiety or depression, as well as more likely to disengage from traditional institutions they feel are not “worth their time,” schools must prepare to offer support for their Generation Y students as they move through TLT’s many phases of transformation. It is, in many ways, an issue of student resilience. Author Jean Twenge says in her book *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before*, that self-esteem practices of the childhood education that cultivated Generation Y created a kind of narcissistic fragility that has led Millennials to expect much more out of life than they will likely receive, and that this has led to rising levels of generational cynicism.<sup>184</sup>

Yet Millennial religious leaders are needed in the world, not only for their unique gifts and leadership abilities, but for their sheer numbers. Churches, especially, need younger clergy to contend with the wave of Baby Boomer retirements that will soon empty church pulpits.<sup>185</sup> Within a few years, Millennials

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<sup>184</sup> Twenge, *Generation Me*, 138-158.

<sup>185</sup> Charles Austin, “Get Set for Clergy Retirement Wave: Age, Perspectives Will Change the Face of the ELCA,” *Living Lutheran*, October 22, 2014, accessed

will be the largest generation in the workforce, tasked with leadership of complex 21<sup>st</sup> century problems. Julian Rotter, a psychologist who studied the rise of cynicism at the time of student unrest in the 1960s and 1970s, warned more than 40 years ago, “If feelings of external control, alienation and powerlessness continue to grow [in a generation], we may be heading for a society of dropouts – each person sitting back, watching the world go by.”<sup>186</sup> Twenge wryly offers the response, “Dr. Rotter, welcome to my world,” followed by the quintessential “cynical Millennial” closing argument: “Whatever.” Twenge’s tongue-in-cheek words reiterate the worry some leaders have when facing educational and institutional challenges introduced by the uniqueness of the Millennial generation.

How can graduate schools of theological education prepare these particular students well, taking special account of their desire for engaged, personalized pedagogy as well as their need for support through emotionally difficult learning? And how can this be done systematically when it takes so much more time and energy than the traditional “banking” model?<sup>187</sup> Theological education should look to secular higher education and its professionalization of the Student Affairs field as one helpful method of addressing gaps in student

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October 19, 2017, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2014/10/get-set-for-clergy-retirement-wave/>.

<sup>186</sup> Julian Rotter, “External Control and Internal Control,” *Psychology Today*, June 1971, 59.

<sup>187</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 71-86.

support. Student Affairs work takes place beyond the classroom, and may provide the additional support for transformative learning that faculty members either do not want to engage or have too little time to do.

### *Student Affairs as a Professional Field Dedicated to Holistic Learning*

Educators and administrators involved in theological higher education their whole professional lives may not realize that, within secular higher education, the field of student affairs has a history as long as the story of higher education itself. When colleges were first established and students (almost all men) began leaving home to attend them, intuitions of higher learning had to, by necessity, develop a “parental” model of student support, providing housing, meals, spiritual and moral formation, and discipline to keep students in line, run by the same faculty who taught the academic classes.<sup>188</sup> Things changed when the German research university arrived with its *Wissenschaft* bias toward objective learning. Influenced as it was by the “mind/body split of Descartes,” and with new faculty demands for academic specialization and research, it was at this time that colleges’ support for students began to diverge into two fields – academic affairs, run by the faculty, and student affairs, run by a “new kind of educator,” the student affairs professional, whose responsibility was literally everything beyond

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<sup>188</sup> Naijian Zhang, ed., *Rentz’s Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 2011), 17-18.

the in-classroom coursework.<sup>189</sup> Academic affairs focused on the curricula and cognitive learning, and was typically thought of as the primary goal of the institution; faculty cared little for the personal lives of students, as these were meant to be kept separate from what happened in the classroom.<sup>190</sup> From a faculty standpoint, then, student affairs was always secondary to academic learning in colleges. However, from a student point of view, student affairs remained central to the college experience. It was where all co-curricular learning (such as student community and spiritual life) and student services (like housing, food service, and health and wellness support) arose. And, realistically, colleges could not function well without both sets of professionals, faculty and student personnel.

In 1919 the first professional organization for non-faculty student personnel arose, tellingly called *The Conference of Deans and Advisors of Men*.<sup>191</sup> This group was a predecessor to today's largest international student affairs professional organization, the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (which goes by the acronym NASPA from a previous iteration of its name, and boasts over 15,000 members).<sup>192</sup> Since that time a number of other

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<sup>189</sup> Zhang, *Rentz's Student Affairs Practice*, 17-18.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>191</sup> "The History of NASPA," Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.naspa.org/about/history>.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

professional organizations for non-faculty school administrators in higher education have arisen, many focused on just one area of student affairs or student service practice.<sup>193</sup> Several peer-reviewed journals have developed copious research on best practices to promote maximized co-curricular student learning.<sup>194</sup> At its core, the field of student affairs has always valued holistic student education, and has worked toward a symbiosis of student life within and beyond the classroom.

Starting in 1937 with the publishing of *The American Council on Education's The Student Personnel Point of View*,<sup>195</sup> leaders in the student

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<sup>193</sup> For example, The National Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education; The Association of College and University Housing Officers International; The National Association for Campus Activities; The National Association for College Admissions Counseling; and The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, all of which hold annual conferences and provide publications to their members.

<sup>194</sup> Notable peer-reviewed student affairs journals include *College Student Affairs Journal* (published by Southern College Personnel Association), *New Directions in Student Services* (which ran from 1997 – 2014, published under Jossey-Bass/Wiley), *Journal of College and Character* (published by NASPA), *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* (published by NASPA), and *Journal of Student Development* (published by ACPA).

<sup>195</sup> At the time of this publication in 1937, the phrase “student personnel” described all non-faculty student-directed support professionals in higher education. Over time, as colleges and universities became more administratively complex and diversified their offerings to students, various areas of specialization arose. Today there is often a distinction between “student affairs” and “student services.” Student affairs tends to be its own institutional umbrella, with various offices underneath it supporting programmatic co-curricular learning in areas such as residence life, judicial affairs, service learning, multicultural affairs, and student activities. Student services, on the other hand, encompasses an array of mostly functional areas, such as academic advising and registration, admissions and recruitment, housing services, orientation, and career services. These areas

affairs field began to advocate philosophically for the education of the “whole student,” not just the cognitive mind.<sup>196</sup> The time of pervasive student unrest at colleges in the 1960s brought about a new approach to student affairs, and the “student development” model took precedence. Institutions began to once again emphasize that students’ learning occurs both inside and beyond the classroom.<sup>197</sup> Historian of student affairs Stanley Carpenter offers, “The merging of the goal of the academic and the ‘other’ education recognizes that, to the student, college is a seamless web of growth and development. All aspects of education are interdependent – one cannot be accomplished without the other being in place.”<sup>198</sup> However, within the student development model, the onus of

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also support overall student learning, which is why student services is often under the umbrella of academic affairs. However, within theological education, due to both the smaller size of seminaries and their organic development of professional roles outside of the structures of traditional higher education, the distinctions of “student affairs” and “student services” professionals are not as clear-cut. In fact, non-faculty administrators and staff in seminaries often function much more like the “student personnel” of yesteryear, taking on more generalist roles as needs arise. This is why, for the sake of clarity this study, I will often use “Student Affairs and Student Services Professionals” (SASSPs) to encompass all non-faculty student-facing personnel in the seminary administration and staff.

<sup>196</sup> Stanley Carpenter, “The Philosophical Heritage of Student Affairs,” in *Rentz’s Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Naijian Zhang (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 2011), 19.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

learning was put squarely on students' shoulders, and they were considered in control of what was truly learned during their college experience.<sup>199</sup>

This student-driven approach led to a sort of neutrality on the part of student affairs professionals, as students could take or leave extracurricular programming as they saw fit. Yet student affairs workers wanted students to attend their events, and began to incentivize participation with the promise of three F's: food, fun, and free stuff. It is no wonder, then, why student affairs as a field began to be stereotyped within institutions as "party people, babysitter, and balloon people."<sup>200</sup> Given this reputation, many faculty and administrators still balk at the idea of student affairs as part of an institution's overall educational mission,<sup>201</sup> despite student affairs' extensive professionalization as a field over the past few decades.

As part of its professionalization, the field of Student Affairs began to rely on the study of educational theory to undergird its work. One student

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<sup>199</sup> Carpenter, "Philosophical Heritage," 19.

<sup>200</sup> Gwen Dungy, "Campus Chasm," *Inside Higher Ed*, December 23, 2011, accessed September 29, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/12/23/essay-lack-understanding-between-academic-and-student-affairs>.

<sup>201</sup> Victor J. Arcelus, "If Student Affairs-Academic Affairs Collaboration is Such a Good Idea, Why Are There So Few Examples of These Partnerships in American Higher Education: Transforming Our Approach to Education: Cultivating Partnerships and Dialogue," in *Contested Issues in Student Affairs: Diverse Perspectives and Respectful Dialogue*, ed. Peter M. Magolda and Marcia B. Baxter (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2011), 61-74.

development model that gained popularity was the “Seven Vectors” model proposed by Arthur Chickering. This model theorized that students must go through seven stages on the way to identity formation, a process that includes the broader themes of content education, managing emotions, building mature relationships, and finding a purpose in life that has integrity with one’s values.<sup>202</sup> One can easily see the correspondence between Chickering’s model and both transformative (Mezirow) and integrative (Palmer) models of learning. With areas of student development outlined, student personnel could begin to monitor student progress at each level, assessing growth over time and allowing their findings to reinforce or change their programming strategies. The student affairs field has relied heavily on student assessment ever since.

By the mid-1990s the increasing diversity of students led student affairs to once again shift philosophically as a field, this time to a “student learning model,” which is still the primary standard of student affairs used today in higher education institutions.<sup>203</sup> This move was punctuated by several key publications. The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) published its seminal *Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* in 1996, stressing both “student learning and personal development” as “inextricably intertwined” in

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<sup>202</sup> Arthur Chickering, *Education and Identity* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1969), 5, 19.

<sup>203</sup> Carpenter, “Philosophical Heritage,” 21-23.



the process higher education.<sup>204</sup> Here, the move toward student learning invited student affairs professionals, as well as other university staff and faculty, to direct students toward co-curricular activities to enhance their learning, rather than remain neutral observers of student choices.<sup>205</sup> The student learning model demanded that student personnel train to become co-educators beside the faculty. The *Principles of Good Practice* standards were published in 1996 and provided the baseline for professional growth in the field.<sup>206</sup> This included engaging in professional development and education in order to become pedagogically and philosophically ready to engage students as co-curricular educators.

A decade later, ACPA and NASPA came together to reflect on all the student learning efforts to date, as well as how students themselves had changed since 1994. More diverse in myriad ways, and more regularly connected to home than ever before by social media and cell phones,<sup>207</sup> student affairs as a

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<sup>204</sup> American College Personnel Association, *Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: American College Personnel Association, 1996): accessed October 16, 2015, <http://www.myacpa.org/sites/default/files/ACPA%27s%20Student%20Learning%20Imperative.pdf>.

<sup>205</sup> Carpenter, "Philosophical Heritage," 22.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> Author and former Dean of Freshmen at Stanford University Julie Lythcott-Haims wrote a fascinating study of how "overparenting" has led to a generation of students unable to function well in the real world. Julie Lythcott-Haims, *How to*

field needed to double-down on its commitment to helping students prepare for adult, real-world responsibilities. ACPA and NASPA offered new best practice guidelines in their 2004 publications, the more philosophical and theoretical *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience*, and the workbook-like *Learning Reconsidered 2: Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience*.<sup>208</sup> Philosophically, *Learning Reconsidered* defined “student learning” as inextricable from “student development,” saying:

*We do not say learning and development because we do not want to suggest that learning and student development are fundamentally different things, or that one does, or could, occur without the other . . . Here we work to bring our terminology, and our way of understanding what student affairs professionals contribute to student outcomes, in line with the findings of current learning research and with our own empirical observations about how learning (as a complex integrated process) occurs among today’s students.*<sup>209</sup>

*Learning Reconsidered* uses Mezirow’s Transformative Learning as its foundational educational model, especially the “meaning making” process of student learning, saying, “Frames of reference – and therefore students’ stories – change with growth, emerging or fading in a non-linear way . . . The idea of transformative learning reinforces the root meaning of liberal education itself –

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*Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015).

<sup>208</sup> Richard P. Keeling, *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Washington, DC: NASPA/ACPA, 2004). And Richard P. Keeling, *Learning Reconsidered 2: Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2006).

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

freeing oneself from the constraints of a lack of knowledge and an excess of simplicity.”<sup>210</sup> The goal of “freeing” students from “excess simplicity” harkens back to Daniel Aleshire’s observation that theological education necessarily moves people beyond religious naiveté. It seems in this way secular student affairs as a field and theological education are both concerned with holistic student learning that moves students beyond the ideas with which they began their schooling.

The student affairs field has intentionally begun to integrate students’ spiritual development back into the holistic experience of student learning even at secular colleges. *Learning Reconsidered* says this about the process of meaning-making:

[Meaning making] comprises students’ efforts to comprehend the essence and significance of events, relationships, and learning; to gain a richer understanding of themselves in a larger context; and to experience a sense of wholeness . . . Some scholars refer to *meaning making processes as spiritual development* . . . [which] do not require religious belief or affiliation, though religion provides the structure and frame of reference through which some students experience and express their spiritual development.<sup>211</sup>

*Learning Reconsidered* advocates the same kind of exploration of students’ subjective inner lives as promoted not only within Mezirow’s TLT, but also as part of Parker Palmer’s “integrative learning.” Arthur Zajonc, who co-wrote with Palmer *The Heart of Higher Education*, describes his own experience

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<sup>210</sup> Keeling, *Learning Reconsidered*, 9.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

teaching at the intersection of objective learning and spirituality, saying, “Since the 1980s, I have sat across from some of Amherst College’s brightest students who, having mastered the philosophy and techniques of deconstruction advocated by Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, lamented the subsequent loss of meaning and sought ways to regain the value of the texts themselves and a purpose to their lives.”<sup>212</sup> Here he describes a phenomena confirmed by recent research, such as UCLA’s comprehensive study on college students’ spiritual lives, that showed students confess a hunger for spiritual growth while at university, but that their institutions hesitate to attempt to meet their need within classrooms.<sup>213</sup>

As discussed previously, some faculty can be squeamish to navigate emotional conversations in the classroom, as deeply-personal spiritual conversations tend to be. Others are perhaps uncomfortable about the idea given the longstanding academic bias separating the model of scientific inquiry and religion.<sup>214</sup> However, the “spirituality” that educators like Palmer and Zajonc promote as central to learning need not be religiously offensive.<sup>215</sup> By rooting conversations about spirituality in a student’s own experience of the world it

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<sup>212</sup> Palmer and Zajonc, *Heart of Higher Education*, 63.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-121.

creates an observed knowledge base, which does not demand any particular religious belief, or what Palmer and Zajonc call “cognitively-oriented spirituality.”<sup>216</sup> This is learning that is engaged in conversation about moral decision-making, everyday spiritual practices, contemplation and reflective meditation, and other lived experiences through which students have formed their spiritual self-knowledge. Though students may individually be religious, even holding dogmatic viewpoints, the energy in the educational conversation is geared toward expressing spiritual experience, and the personal beliefs and morals flowing from them. Students address their issues of ultimate concern as part of their subjective experience, not as objective “truth.” In this way, the conversation can happen with less anxiety about disrespecting others. This is the same manner of holistic spiritual engagement that secular student affairs professionals seek to develop in their students.

Student-centered, spiritually-open transformative learning necessitates facilitated work beyond the classroom’s time constraints. This is why ACPA and NASPA’s three central “student learning” documents (*Student Learning Imperative*, *Learning Reconsidered I*, and *Learning Considered II*) offer strategies for successful collaboration between faculty and non-faculty student personnel. The strategic steps include collaboratively designing institutional learning goals that integrate classroom content with holistic student development; providing

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<sup>216</sup> Palmer and Zajonc, *Heart of Higher Education*, 119-120.

resources for student personnel to train in the professional theories and best practices of student affairs; encouraging institutional leaders to understand student personnel as having their own valuable expertise with regard to student life and learning; and relying on frequent assessment to measure and continually fine-tune educational practices.<sup>217</sup> If the “new classroom” of student transformational learning is not, in fact, just a classroom, and if all members of an institution should be considered part of the learning community, then partnerships between faculty and student personnel must be an important means to offering students the most comprehensive support for their education and development. This is already happening in secular institutions, and should be considered by theological higher education, as well.

*Bridging the Historic Divide Between Faculty and Student Personnel for the sake of Holistic Student Development*

As described in the section above, the current philosophical definition of “learning” in the field of secular student affairs integrates academic content within the classroom with co-curricular holistic student development. This viewpoint is increasingly supported by advances in the fields of psychology and educational theory that point to the value of engaging students’ objective and subjective, cognitive and spiritual, and public and private sides for true transformation to

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<sup>217</sup> American College Personnel Association, *Student Learning Imperative*. And Keeling, *Learning Reconsidered*. And Keeling, *Learning Reconsidered 2*.

occur. Educators in both the academic and student affairs divisions have bridged those gaps through the kinds of collaborative partnerships described in *Learning Reconsidered*.<sup>218</sup> Research offers a number of best practices that encourage mutuality and cooperation between the academic affairs and student affairs units within higher education, and can be used to build partnerships.

In 1998, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), ACPA, and NASPA issued a joint report entitled *Powerful Partnerships*, which begins with a statement calling on collaboration between faculty members and student affairs professionals:

*Despite American higher education's success at providing collegiate education for an unprecedented number of people, the vision of equipping all our students with learning deep enough to meet the challenges of the post-industrial age provides us with a powerful incentive to do our work better. People collaborate when the job they face is too big, is too urgent, or requires too much knowledge for one person or group to do alone. Marshalling what we know about learning and applying it to the education of our students is just such a job. This report makes the case that only when everyone on campus – particularly academic affairs and student affairs staff – shares the responsibility for student learning will we be able to make significant progress in improving it.*<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Keeling, *Learning Reconsidered*, 19-20, 35.

<sup>219</sup> Joint Task Force on Student Learning, *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, June, 2, 1998): 1, accessed April 8, 2016, [http://www.myacpa.org/sites/default/files/taskforce\\_powerful\\_partnerships\\_a\\_shared\\_responsibility\\_for\\_learning.pdf](http://www.myacpa.org/sites/default/files/taskforce_powerful_partnerships_a_shared_responsibility_for_learning.pdf).

The report lists ten principles of learning that span several areas – pedagogy, curricula, learning environments, and assessment – and then provides examples of collaborative means by which the academic and student affairs personnel of some colleges already work together toward their achievement.<sup>220</sup> The report ends by directly addressing the many various stakeholders in higher education,<sup>221</sup> and predicts what they might need to successfully collaborate. For example, it invites administrative heads of institutions to rethink conventional organization models that silo areas of learning in favor of innovative structures that align all the resources of the institution toward missional education of its students.<sup>222</sup> It directs faculty, the “masters of cognitive studies” to develop educational practices and content that embody the school’s learning principles, and to deepen their involvement in their institutions’ community life for the sake of building meaningful learning relationships with staff and students alike.<sup>223</sup> Addressing student affairs professionals and general

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<sup>220</sup> Joint Task Force on Student Learning, *Powerful Partnerships*, 3-11.

<sup>221</sup> The *Powerful Partnerships* report lists the following constituencies within higher education: students, faculty, scholars of cognition, administrative leaders, student affairs professionals and other staff, alumni, governing boards, community supporters, accrediting agencies, professional associations, families, government agencies. The document ends with the recommendation that “all those involved in higher education, as professionals or as community supporters, view themselves as teachers, learners, and collaborators in service to learning.” Joint Task Force on Student Learning, *Powerful Partnerships*, 12.

<sup>222</sup> Joint Task Force on Student Learning, *Powerful Partnerships*, 11.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.



institutional staff, the report invites them to reach out to one another and to academic departments to develop educational programming.<sup>224</sup> The principles at work in all of these suggestions are increased communication between administrative heads, faculty members, and student affairs staff; willingness to experiment with new ideas; and the development of a sense of mutual respect between faculty members and student affairs personnel as co-educators working toward common institutional learning goals.

By the time *Learning Reconsidered* arrived, the *Powerful Partnerships* report had been in use for almost two decades, and the field of student affairs had noticed some barriers to collaboration between academic and student affairs areas. *Learning Reconsidered* sought to address these barriers, and has remained the foundational document for professional student affairs practice since then. It states that, foundationally, all campus educators, from both academic and student affairs areas, must realize their necessary interconnectedness for maximized student transformational learning, and must be pointed toward one shared goal: the mission of the institution.<sup>225</sup> Second, regular assessment of programs and methods must happen for all collaborative learning practices since assessment provides data on what is working and what

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<sup>224</sup> Joint Task Force on Student Learning, *Powerful Partnerships*, 11.

<sup>225</sup> Keeling, *Learning Reconsidered*, 19-23.

is not, and helps push these collaborations forward.<sup>226</sup> Third, and importantly, both faculty and non-faculty student personnel must receive ongoing training to participate in these partnerships.<sup>227</sup>

For collaborations to work, there must be mutual professional respect between institutions' academic and student affairs personnel. Student affairs leaders must not relegate faculty to the "ivory tower," or think of them as disconnected from the realities of student lives. And faculty must not consider student affairs leaders uneducated pseudo-professionals seeking to coddle students with feel-good programming. To achieve this mutuality, *Learning Reconsidered* advises training faculty on the extensive history and research on student learning that has professionalized the field of secular student affairs for almost a century.<sup>228</sup> Non-faculty student affairs and student services professionals (SASSPs) should be educated in these topics, as well, so they know their own field.

However, SASSPs cannot stop there. There is far more SASSPs must develop personally and professionally to live into the stated standards of the student affairs field. In 2003 the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) published the first "Blue Book," which named thirty areas

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<sup>226</sup> Keeling, *Learning Reconsidered*, 26-28.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-32.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-29.

of professional preparation, and with its ninth edition in 2015, the Blue Book now describes forty-four “CAS Standards” for professionalism in student affairs.<sup>229</sup> In 2009 the ACPA and NASPA jointly consolidated these CAS Standards with 19 documents they had produced, narrowing the information down to the ten core competency areas for SASSPs. To be excellent in the field, SASSPs must continue to grow professionally in the following ten core competency areas:

1. *Personal and Ethical Foundations* – maintaining integrity in one’s own life, work, wellness, and growth
2. *Values, Philosophy and History* – understanding the student affairs profession historically, philosophically, and in best practice
3. *Assessment, Evaluation, and Research* – ability to design and implement, using various methodologies, programs of assessment to inform excellent practice
4. *Law, Policy, and Governance* – knowledge of the policies and regulations that guide the student affairs field legally and within each institution
5. *Organizational and Human Resource* – skills for human resource management and organizational leadership
6. *Leadership* – reflects the professional identity and confidence to act as a leader in an institution “with or without positional authority”
7. *Social Justice and Inclusion* – having facility, in both knowledge and practice, with creating learning environments that promote social justice and inclusion of various human diversities; this includes anti-oppression training

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<sup>229</sup> Jennifer B. Wells, ed., *CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education*, 9th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015).

8. *Student Learning and Development* – understanding the various theoretical models of student learning and development used through the profession’s history and applying useful theories to the practice of student affairs
9. *Technology* – mastery of digital tools helpful for student learning, as well as leading efforts toward good digital citizenship in the educational community
10. *Advising and Supporting* – developing personal skills for active listening and boundary-aware nurture of students, managing crises, and partnering with other professionals for holistic support of learners.<sup>230</sup>

By developing these ten competency areas, SASSPs become valuable in their academic support of both students and faculty. They are both prepared to lead co-curricular educational programming themselves, and to resource faculty in their classroom endeavors. Most of all, *Learning Reconsidered* suggests that SASSPs must be given “agency” to work in a “proactive and collaborative manner with institutional partners to create the powerful learning environments for which [the *Learning Reconsidered*] report calls. To develop a sense of agency, student affairs professionals must possess cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and practical competence.”<sup>231</sup> To be sure, gone are the days when student affairs meant simply hosting pizza parties for students.

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<sup>230</sup> This list in its entirety was distilled from College Student Educators International (ACPA) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (Washington, D.C.: ACPA and NASPA, August, 2015), 12-15.

<sup>231</sup> Keeling, *Learning Reconsidered*, 29-30.

*Non-Faculty Student Affairs and Student Services Professionals within Theological Higher Education*

While the above shows the significant professionalization in the field of secular student affairs over time, SASSPs functioning within theological higher education have lagged behind. These SASSPs have not been held by the Association of Theological Schools accrediting agency (ATS) to the secular student affairs professional standards, and thus often do not have the needed agency to be considered co-educators in the transformative learning enterprise. This is an oversight, and perhaps a particularly costly one considering how seminaries could benefit from the same collaborative efforts that have been ongoing for decades in secular higher education between student and academic affairs professionals. This study proposes that student crises of faith is an area where such collaboration could be particularly rich. Seminary crises of faith seem to be ubiquitous-enough to warrant programmatic support. As opportunities for transformational learning, crises of faith could also bridge the academic (cognitive) and personal (normative/spiritual) aspects of student formation. However, only a fundamental shift in the way SASSPs are trained and valued within theological higher education could prompt a systemic change of this sort. That is why the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) accrediting agency would be an excellent leader in this effort.

Faced with the challenge of shrinking enrollments, ATS recently gathered a group of student services personnel tasked with enrollment management at

their seminaries to discuss retention best practices.<sup>232</sup> Their study found that student attrition occurs for many reasons, but that monitoring a student community closely helps identify students at risk of leaving, especially those missing classes or registering for fewer credits. ATS determined that in most cases the difference between attrition and retention is relational – for example, caring contact with a faculty member or administrator, or deepening connection with the seminary’s community life. This is particularly important in the first year of coursework. Research shows that most often seminarians who withdraw from school do so after completing 18 – 20 credits of coursework, which is typically during or immediately after their first year of study.<sup>233</sup> ATS reminds that, “bottom line, relationships matter, especially as they focus on student success and helping them get from Point A to Point B.”<sup>234</sup> This is buttressed by the work of educational theorist Vincent Tinto, which stresses early student engagement as an important factor leading to retention.<sup>235</sup>

But who should be responsible for providing students the relational and time-consuming support required to facilitate student learning and retention? As

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<sup>232</sup> Eliza Smith Brown, “Tending the Flock: Is Retention the Answer to Enrollment Declines?,” *Colloquy*, May 2014.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Vincent Tinto, “Student Retention: What’s Next?” (presentation, 2005 National Conference on Student Recruitment, Marketing, and Retention, Washington, D. C., July 27, 2005).

mentioned, faculty members, experts in their particular fields of study, are inundated with obligations of academic professional life.<sup>236</sup> Thus, some faculty may believe personalized student support to be beyond their responsibility or expertise. Still others may not value or see the need for such student supports, believing them to be distracting from the traditional corpus of learning, a means of unnecessary coddling,<sup>237</sup> akin to providing too much support in Sanford's "Challenge and Support" model. SASSPs in theological higher education could be professionalized as their secular counterparts are, and, in doing so, become crucial to the institution's educational mission<sup>238</sup> rather than simple functionaries for everyday policies and processes. By adopting a similar attitude toward SASSPs, seminaries may establish the human resources necessary to better support student formation beyond the classroom, and possibly reinvigorate the role of student affairs within their schools in the process.

And yet it is difficult to know whether such co-curricular partnerships already are happening because research on SASSPs in theological higher education is scarce. Seminary educational theory and research has to date

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<sup>236</sup> Frances Pearson and Robert L. Bowman, "The Faculty Role: Implications for Collaboration with Student Affairs," *College Student Affairs Journal* 19, no. 2 (2000): 30-34.

<sup>237</sup> Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, "The Coddling of the American Mind," *The Atlantic*, September 2015, accessed October 1, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/>.

<sup>238</sup> American College Personnel Association, *Student Learning Imperative*.

focused on professors and their teaching. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) offers numerous resources for its faculty including a peer-reviewed journal and conferences. Seminary professors are also supported by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion and its own journal writings and research. This is rightfully so, since faculty set the educational tone and curricula in most institutions of theological higher education.<sup>239</sup> Indeed, they are required to do so by ATS standards.<sup>240</sup> However, observing these many resources for faculty punctuates how few exist for another large population of seminary professionals, non-faculty staff and administrators. The one annual professional gathering for seminary SASSPs, the Student Personnel Administrative Network (SPAN), which is organized by the ATS, provides networking opportunities and some workshops, but its emphasis is more on everyday practice and policy administration, rather than educational theory.

Non-faculty staff and administrators are largely ignored as a distinct professional cohort within theological higher education. Two examples of ATS ignoring SASSPs are found within its publications *General Institutional Standards* and its yearly Annual Data Tables. The ATS Data Tables<sup>241</sup> are a statistical

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<sup>239</sup> Farley, "Why Seminaries Don't Change," 135.

<sup>240</sup> Association of Theological Schools Commission on Accrediting, *General Institutional Standards* (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools, April 2015), 13.

<sup>241</sup> For example, see previously referenced herein: Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables."



analysis of data gathered annually from all member schools. They cover a variety of areas, including institutional characteristics, student enrollment, and institutional fiscal wellbeing. ATS uses this data to show trends within theological education, and ultimately these trends direct initiatives and policies within the agency. Before 1988 ATS recorded numerical, demographic, and salary information for faculty, library, and non-faculty staff and administrative personnel at all its seminaries. However, between 1988 and 1990 ATS changed to an electronic computer system and instituted a new survey for annual institutional reporting. During this process ATS removed all demographic information about seminary non-faculty staff and administrative personnel from its data collection, though it still maintained these statistics for both faculty and students.<sup>242</sup> ATS began capturing only the financial impact of non-faculty staff and administrative personnel on institutional budgets, rather than any identifying information about them. Still today, the only section of the ATS annual data tables that deals with non-faculty seminary personnel is entitled, "Composition of the Faculty and Compensation of Personnel."<sup>243</sup> This section offers tables showing the race/ethnicity, rank, and gender of faculty, but only the compensation levels of

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<sup>242</sup> This began with ATS's 1990 Fact Book of institutional data, but still continues as of its most recent published iteration for 2016-17. See Gail Buchwalter King, ed., *Fact Book on Theological Education for the Academic Years 1988-89 and 1989-90: Selected Tables Based on 1988 Revision of ATS Annual Report Forms* (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools, 1990). And Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables."

<sup>243</sup> Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables."

non-faculty personnel. This is disheartening and short-sighted on the part of ATS, and speaks to undervaluing the importance of non-faculty seminary personnel in the overall mission of theological education.

ATS's *General Institutional Standards*<sup>244</sup> represent the foundational requirements of all seminaries seeking membership within the Association. This document introduces topics such as institutional integrity and learning curricula, authority and governance of an institution, and overall policies and procedures for effective seminary administration. The sections on Faculty<sup>245</sup> and Library<sup>246</sup> standards include information about professional responsibilities, and emphasize the training necessary to develop strong teachers and librarians. There is no equivalent section for non-faculty staff and administrators, though they are mentioned several times within the document itself. The Guidelines affirm that governing boards of seminaries should consult staff as one key constituency in the institution,<sup>247</sup> and that staff members should be numerous enough, diverse enough, and have resources enough to help fulfill the mission of the institution.<sup>248</sup> Yet there is no mention of the role of staff and administrators as part of the

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<sup>244</sup> Association of Theological Schools, *General Institutional Standards*, 1-32.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-15.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-12.

<sup>247</sup> Association of Theological Schools, *General Institutional Standards*, 22.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

seminary's educative goals, which are solely understood as the responsibility of "faculty, librarians, and students working together in an environment of mutual learning, respect, and engagement."<sup>249</sup> This is true even as the same document affirms that, "Scholarship occurs in a variety of contexts in the theological school. These include courses, independent study, the library, student and faculty interaction, congregational and field settings, and courses in universities and other graduate level institutions."<sup>250</sup> Here ATS has affirmed the co-curricular nature of theological education, which extends beyond the classroom to students' practical and normative formation. However, decades of research in secular student affairs suggests that ATS is short-sighted in not recognizing the unique role staff and administrators can play as part of the overall learning goals of the institution.

## **Conclusion**

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn from this lengthy literature review. Theological Education has struggled since its beginning with the holistic educational needs of seminarians. These students must be taught the content necessary to place themselves within the wider religious story, practical

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

experience to validate and hone their vocational discernment, and normative spiritual growth so they can lead from a place of authentic faith. The *Educating Clergy* study of seminaries shows that most place these first two aspects of student learning within the explicit curricula of seminary coursework, but tend to relegate normative spiritual formation to co-curricular opportunities, such as worship and small group peer discussions. Though the research on student crises of faith within theological education is limited, literature on other forms of integrative pedagogy suggests that students naturally encounter existential crises as part of learning. This makes sense because students bring not just their minds but their whole selves to their education, including their emotions and spirituality. Crises of faith can become positive aspects of theological education as they provide impetus for transformed thought and action.

“Subjective” aspects of learning (such as spiritual formation) do not align easily with the traditional “objective” critical inquiry values that have been the hallmark of higher education since the rise of the post-Enlightenment research university. As such, faculty are not necessarily prepared by their academic training to do the work of spiritual formation, especially because it deals heavily with student emotions and requires time-consuming personal attention. The field of theological education, very much shaped by the same critical inquiry bias of “objective learning,” is yet unlike other fields of study. Theological education at least partially fails its task if those they educate for religious leadership leave to lead institutions and tackle complex problems without a deep well of personal

faith from which to draw. Even those students who graduate seminary to pursue lay positions or serve within non-traditional ministry settings should have developed an ethical and spiritual backbone from which they can lead.

This is a particularly difficult educational undertaking nowadays, as students increasingly come to seminary from more diverse backgrounds and often yet unformed in a religious tradition. Millennials are the largest group currently in theological schools, and this generation has unique traits that suggest the traditional teacher-centric, lecture-based “banking” model of education is no longer enough to keep them engaged. Millennials want relevant, real-world education, and their diversity as a generation demands pedagogical changes that take student backgrounds seriously as “points of expertise.”<sup>251</sup>

Additionally, studies suggest that Millennials may be more susceptible to emotional distress or disengagement if confronted with learning that challenges their worldview. Traditional theological education often relegates student existential crises to the implicit “hidden” curriculum, or even “null” curriculum. Many seminaries spend little classroom time expressly helping students navigate their emotions as they encounter new learning that shakes their faith foundations. But to train this unique generation of students for religious leadership, especially to face the complex and pressing issues of today, theological educators must

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<sup>251</sup> Foster, *Educating Clergy*, 29-32. And Charles R. Foster, “Diversity in Theological Education,” *Theological Education* 38, no. 2 (2002): 29.

look to other educational models that integrate support for existential crisis into the explicit curriculum of the seminary.

Transformative Learning Theory provides a model by which theological educators can understand a student's movement through existential crises. Starting with a "disorienting dilemma," which is some new piece of information or experience that puts their existing perspectives into question, the student moves through a multi-step process of perspective transformation. Critical self-reflection, which often includes a strong emotional component, and relational discourse, where the student speaks with others and tries on new roles, gives way to responsive action in the world based on the student's transformed perspective. The epistemological shifts that happen in transformative learning mirror the learning process of theological education.

Students need particular support as they move through the liminal zone between first encountering a disorienting dilemma and reconciling it with a transformed perspective, lest they revert to prior thinking and not make it to transformation. In a seminary context, this could mean that a student who encounters difficult theological questions decides against religious leadership as a calling altogether because their faith is shaken. While that could, indeed, be the correct vocational choice for the student, institutional support could mean the difference between that student making a life-changing decision because it is the right one for them, or as a fear response to a crisis of faith. Yet the highly personalized, profoundly emotional support necessary for shepherding students

through crises of faith is time-consuming. As mentioned, it is also not necessarily part of faculty members' academic training.

Theological schools can take a page from the secular higher education playbook, which has researched student spiritual growth as a measure of their holistic formation alongside other vital but abstract qualities such as civic responsibility and multi-cultural competency. The field of secular student affairs has made supporting student learning its mission for decades, and now enjoys a significant body of research on best practices of student formation and academic support. This knowledge has raised the professionalism of student affairs and student services professionals (SASSPs) as a field. In many institutions, SASSPs have moved from being understood as functionaries providing simple administrative assistance to part of the educational team alongside faculty in support of student learning.

Student affairs and academic affairs departments collaborate around mission, goals, and programs for student learning at many secular institutions. This partnership provides missional guidance and established procedures, known by both faculty and SASSPs alike, for helping students through their learning and personal formation. This proactive, collaborative, holistic approach to student academic support could be worth emulating in theological higher education. Additionally, this professional development opportunity might be particularly welcome among SASSPs serving in seminary contexts, since they

have had very little attention paid to them as a working cohort within ATS institutions.

This study argues that a collaborative academic and student affairs approach to student crises of faith would be a good place to begin. It is an area that seems to be frequently encountered, but is not systemically addressed via the traditional seminary curriculum. Much could be done to normalize and proactively prepare students to experience existential crisis as part of their time in seminary. This would help students understand their crises of faith as helpful for theological learning and spiritual formation, not separate from it. It might be particularly helpful for seminary faculty and SASSPs to employ Green's image of existential crises as "rites of passage," or a journey through which each student must go as part of transformative theological education.<sup>252</sup>

The case for collaboration between the academic and student affairs departments of theological schools is made stronger by knowing who seminary SASSPs are. Since ATS statistics have not kept data on this group since 1990, there is no way to know if they are good potential partners in student learning, or if they even would be interested in such professional development. Similarly, research on Millennial students' crises of faith is necessary. Additional data would move the crisis of faith process from the realm of conjecture, and help

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<sup>252</sup> Green, "Liminal Zone," 214.



provide some initial best practices to encourage partnerships between seminary academic and student affairs areas to support student crises of faith.

## **CHAPTER THREE – STUDY OF MILLENNIAL MDiv SEMINARIANS**

### **Rationale for Surveying MDiv Seminarians**

As mentioned, the first survey of this project was of Millennial seminarians attending the Boston University School of Theology's Master of Divinity (MDiv) program. It would be a fair question to ask why one would study such a specific group of students. Why not broaden the research to include seminarians of any age or degree program? Limiting the data pool undoubtedly lowered both the study's sample size and the ability to extract generalizations for each and every seminary's student population. However, in exchange, the specificity of studying Millennial MDiv students allows this project particular insight into the largest group currently inhabiting ATS-member seminaries. As such, the immediate felt need to identify best practices of support for this distinctive group of students overrode the desire to be all-inclusive.

Research was focused on the Master of Divinity program for several reasons. First, the MDiv enjoys the largest enrollment of any single academic degree within ATS schools. According to ATS's "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables," out of 72,372 total students enrolled at ATS-member institutions there were 29,390 MDiv students (41%).<sup>253</sup> Since the Master of Divinity is the highest-

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<sup>253</sup> Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables."

enrolled degree within ATS schools (Table 3.1), understanding crises of faith among these students could yield support for the largest number of seminarians.

**Table 3.1. Total Enrollees of Each Degree Program at ATS Schools, 2016**

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Type of Degree Program	Number of Enrollees
<b>Basic Ministerial Leadership MDiv</b>	<b>29,390</b>
Basic Ministerial Leadership Non-MDiv	12,413
General Theological Studies	10,503
Advanced Ministerial Leadership	9,462
Advanced Theological Research	5,888
Certificate or Diploma	2,619
Special Unclassified	2,097
<b>Total Enrollees</b>	<b>72,372</b>
Source: Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables."	

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The MDiv is traditionally the first-level professional degree for those seeking to serve in a religious leadership capacity. For Christians, this might mean leadership within a local church or in a para-ecclesial setting such as

chaplains, global missions, or faith-based non-profit work. As a degree program meant to prepare one for ministry, MDiv graduates have the academic credentials most often used by Mainline Protestant denominations to fulfill the educational requirement for clergy ordination. For these reasons, I perceive MDiv students as likely to take personal faith seriously in their lives, and are thus attractive subjects for studying crises of faith.

However, just because one is prepared academically through the MDiv does not assure a clergy's personal faith formation. The ATS accreditation standards for the MDiv program require seminaries to "provide opportunities through which the student may grow in personal faith, emotional maturity, moral integrity, and public witness."<sup>254</sup> Even so, these developmental aspects of the program are up to each individual student to pursue and integrate into their personal faith lives. A study of crises of faith among this group of students could suggest either how well the institution is heeding its call to provide integrative formational experiences for its MDiv students, or how well the students are themselves integrating faith formation into their seminary study.

Finally, the MDiv's large enrollments and historical goal of training clergy often shape the overall academic culture of a seminary. Those schools with a majority of their students in the MDiv program may find their entire curriculum geared toward cultivating clergy for ecclesial settings, even if students earning

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<sup>254</sup> Association of Theological Schools, *Degree Program Standards*, 3.

this degree nowadays often pursue a wide variety of vocational outcomes<sup>255</sup>. The traditional MDiv curriculum, as described in the book *Educating Clergy*, demands pedagogy that helps shape “the pastoral, priestly, or rabbinic imagination,” which is defined as a way of interacting with the world that “integrates knowledge and skill, moral integrity, and religious commitment in the roles, relationships, and responsibilities [of] clergy practice.”<sup>256</sup>

To this end, the study suggests, “A significant part of every seminary student’s intellectual task is to come to grips with the meaning God will have for [their]<sup>257</sup> own life as well as for [their] future professional career. Clergy must interpret God, or at least the ‘God language’ of their traditions, to the laity in private or public need.”<sup>258</sup> Unlike other fields in which expertise rests on tangible skills or facility with information, religious leadership demands something more. In light of the world’s great need for effective religious leadership to help solve 21<sup>st</sup> century problems, I believe that there is something ethical at stake in training MDiv students well. This study aims to participate in that training by offering insight into MDiv students’ experiences of crises of faith, and what actions might support students’ normative identity formation as religious leaders.

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<sup>255</sup> Brown, “Where Else,” 1.

<sup>256</sup> Foster, *Educating Clergy*, 13.

<sup>257</sup> Replacing “his or her” language in published works with the collective and non-gendered singular “they” is more inclusive of human diversity.

<sup>258</sup> Foster, *Educating Clergy*, 4.

### Rationale for Surveying Millennial Students

Millennial students were the focus of this survey because they are the biggest generational age group currently enrolled in ATS member schools.<sup>259</sup> Approximately 57% of enrolled MDiv students are Millennials (Table 3.2). Again, like surveying the large MDiv student population, understanding crises of faith among this large age group could yield support for the greatest number of current seminarians.

**Table 3.2. Total Enrollees of MDiv Programs at ATS Schools by Age**

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<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Number of Enrolled Students</b>
Under 22 years of age	182
22 - 24	4072
25 - 29	8041
30-34	4815
<b>TOTAL MILLENNIAL ENROLEES</b>	<b>17,110</b>
35-39	3254

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<sup>259</sup> Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables."

40-49	4571
50 – 64	4335
65 and Over	371
Not reported	177
<b>TOTAL ENROLLEES OF ALL OTHER AGES</b>	<b>12,708</b>
Source: Association of Theological Schools, “2016-2017 Annual Data Tables.”	

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Millennials are the most racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse generation in the United States.<sup>260</sup> Their arrival on seminary campuses over the past decade has shaped the conversations happening in theological education in formative ways, including discussions around effective pedagogy for multicultural learners.<sup>261</sup> However, as the *Educating Clergy* study suggests, seminaries have

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<sup>260</sup> See U.S. Census Bureau, “Millennials Outnumber Baby Boomers and Are Far More Diverse, Census Bureau Reports,” *U.S. Census Bureau Newsroom* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, June 25, 2015), accessed January 7, 2018, <https://census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-113.html>. For a discussion of this data and its effect on American politics, see William H. Frey, “Diversity Defines the Millennial Generation,” *The Avenue*, Brookings Institute, June 28, 2016, accessed January 7, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2016/06/28/diversity-defines-the-millennial-generation/>.

<sup>261</sup> There are many books and articles that are part of the growing conversation around teaching multi-cultural millennials. See, for example, Fred A. Bonner, Aretha F. Marbley, and Mary F. Howard-Hamilton, eds., *Diverse Millennial Students in College: Implications for Faculty and Student Affairs* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2011). And Dan Berrett, “Teaching Newsletter: A Conversation at

been wrestling with human diversity issues for more than four decades, long before the Millennial Generation arrived in classrooms.<sup>262</sup> The ordination of women, the Civil Rights movement, the increase of international students, the Gay Rights movement and LGBTQIA<sup>263</sup> activism, and the decline of American denominationalism have all put pressures on the traditional white, male, Western philosophical underpinnings of classic seminary education. “When faculties become conscious of and begin to account for the expectations and experience of each new constituency in the student community,” offers the authors of *Educating Clergy*, “inherited and hegemonic patterns of teaching and learning are inevitably disrupted.”<sup>264</sup>

Yet many seminary institutions have been slow to respond to the call for increased attention to issues of diversity. Theological higher education has been historically slow to innovate its curricula with regard to changing societal

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Harvard, 9/28/17,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 28, 2017. For discussions focused within theological education, see Association of Theological Schools, *Folio*, 1-45.

<sup>262</sup> Foster, *Educating Clergy*, 54.

<sup>263</sup> LGBTQIA stands for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual.” These are categories for self-identifying the many varieties of sexual preferences, orientations, and gender identities that make up the diversity of those who are not part of the heterosexual, cisgender majority.

<sup>264</sup> Foster, *Educating Clergy*, 56.



culture.<sup>265</sup> This is one of the reasons the current survey focused on the special needs of Millennial students, and particularly the students of color among them, as they encounter crises of faith. Though small sample size precludes this study from universalizing its findings, the goal of the work remains to contribute to and further stoke the necessary conversation of aligning seminary student formation with 21<sup>st</sup> century student needs. There are another two decades before 2040, the ubiquitous date often cited as the year when the US will become majority non-Caucasian in racial and ethnic makeup. The more support seminaries can provide for its Millennial students, and particularly Millennial students of color, the better prepared they will be to remain relevant pedagogically for this inevitable shift in American culture.

Finally, the great hope and promise of Millennial seminarians' futures as religious leaders is their collective idealism, a trait often touted as fundamental to this generation. This characteristic makes them potentially gifted change-agents in the world. Millennial author David Burstein offers of his peers:

*Millennials have come of age on the cusp of a once-in-a-century revolution. We have the potential to be the greatest agents of change for the next sixty years . . . As an insider to the Millennial Generation, I've seen a tremendous amount of optimism and idealism, tempered by an appropriate if sometimes surprising amount of realism and pragmatism. Millennials have a passion for making a difference. But we also have*

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<sup>265</sup> Farley, "Why Seminaries Don't Change," 133. See also Deborah Gin's findings that white male seminary faculty are far more reticent to address diversity issues in the classroom than are their female colleagues and colleagues of color. Deborah Gin, "Does Our Understanding Lack Complexity? Faculty Perceptions on Multicultural Education," *Theological Education* 48, no. 1 (2013): 47-68.

*genuine interest in policy, process, and institutionbuilding [sic]. The mix of these ingredients will help make our long-term optimism sustainable.*<sup>266</sup>

While Burstein's perception of his generation might be criticized as myopically positive,<sup>267</sup> it is also true that, as the largest generation since the Boomers, Millennials by their sheer number will undoubtedly shape the next 60 or more years. For this reason, it is a generation worth studying and supporting, as investments in Millennials' future will help shape the future of all generations living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **Data Collected from the Survey of Millennial MDiv Seminarians<sup>268</sup>**

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<sup>266</sup> David D. Burstein, *Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation is Shaping Our World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), xviii.

<sup>267</sup> There is no shortage of criticism of characteristics of the Millennial generation. See the scathing example Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30)* (New York: Penguin, 2008). However, as Millennials' generational differences have become more understood, books and articles striking a balance between glorifying and disparaging them have arisen. See those by author Neil Howe, including Neil Howe, "Generation Snowflake: Really?," *Forbes*, April 27, 2017, accessed December 4, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/neilhowe/2017/04/27/generation-snowflake-really-part-1-of-3/#2762f0062914>. and Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Go to College: Strategies for a New Generation on Campus: Recruiting and Admissions, Campus Life, and the Classroom*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Great Falls, VA: LifeCourse Associates, 2007).

<sup>268</sup> Throughout the data analysis, all percentages were round to the nearest whole number. As such, in some instances the total of each area does not equal a perfect 100%.

The Qualtrics survey sent to Millennial MDiv seminarians at the Boston University School of Theology was made up of several different sections. After respondents read the initial disclosure form and provided a statement of consent, they encountered a section that captured personal demographics, including religious tradition, followed by educational background. Of the 30 people who completed the survey, 29 responded to this section.

#### *Gender and Sexual Orientation*

The gender and sexual orientation of the survey participants can be found in Table 3.3. Of the 29 respondents, 21 were female (72%), 7 were male (24%), and one student reported as gender non-conforming (3%). Four of the 29 (14%) self-identified as members of the LGBTQIA community.

**Table 3.3. Gender and Sexuality of Respondents (N=29)**

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<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	21	72%
Male	7	24%
Gender Non-Conforming	1	3%
LGBTQIA	4	14%

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Already the limitations of focusing on only one institutions' students arise. This is a much different gender breakdown than the overall student population enrolled in ATS-member seminaries where women make up only 29% of the MDiv population.<sup>269</sup> However, at the Boston University School of Theology women comprise 56% of the Millennial MDivs enrolled. In the Spring 2017 semester there were 57 women out of 102 total Millennial MDiv enrollees.

This comparatively high female enrollment makes sense given the ecumenical nature of the Boston University School of Theology and its historic support of women in ministry.<sup>270</sup> Still, it does potentially skew this data to have a disproportionate number of female respondents. One might argue that women, as an historically marginalized minority population in both theological education and denominational ordination,<sup>271</sup> may be more prone to crises of faith as they

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<sup>269</sup> Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables," accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/institutional-data/annual-data-tables/2016-2017-annual-data-tables.pdf>.

<sup>270</sup> Boston University School of Theology enrolled and graduated women early in its history, far before women's ordination became possible in many Mainline Protestant denominations. Graduates include the noted suffragette Rev. Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, who received her degree from BUSTH in 1886 and became one of the first female Methodist ministers in the United States. Today the seminary supports a very popular women's center, the Shaw Center, named after Rev. Dr. Shaw.

<sup>271</sup> A good number of books on this topic were written in the mid-1970s through 1990s as women began to "break stained glass ceilings" in ordained ministry. One excellent and comprehensive study is Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia M. Y. Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). Since that time, women have gained ground in some denominations. See Garlinda M. Burton, "Women Pastors Growing in Numbers," *United Methodist News*, March 20, 2014, accessed

navigate the tension between their vocational callings and the patriarchal nature of many churches. No studies have tested the link between gender and frequency of crisis of faith, and this may be a fruitful undertaking for another study. That said, the data collected via this survey remains particularly relevant to those who seek to support women as an underserved population within theological education. As mentioned, women make up only 29% of the MDiv population of all ATS-member schools;<sup>272</sup> however, they make up 51% of the overall population of the United States.<sup>273</sup> It is important for the future of religious leadership to include the voices of women, and helping women navigate their crises of faith may further encourage this underrepresented group to grow into that leadership.

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October 19, 2017, <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/women-pastors-growing-in-numbers>. However, women still remain underrepresented in overall ATS enrollments as compared to their percentage of the population in society. See Eliza Smith Brown, *Transitions: 2017 Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools, 2017), 8, accessed October 3, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/2017-Annual-Report.pdf>.

<sup>272</sup> Association of Theological Schools, “2016-2017 Annual Data Tables,” accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/institutional-data/annual-data-tables/2016-2017-annual-data-tables.pdf>.

<sup>273</sup> “U.S. and World Population Clock,” United States Department of Commerce, accessed October 3, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/popclock/>.

*Race, Ethnicity, and Country of Citizenship*

The 29 respondents were predominantly United States citizens, with only two students (7%) reporting citizenship elsewhere (South Korea and UK). The majority of students identified as Caucasian (69%) while 9 students (31%) were of other races and ethnicities. The full breakdown of race and ethnicity can be found in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4. Race, Ethnicity, and Citizenship of Respondents (N=29)**

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<b>Race or Ethnicity</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Caucasian/White	20	69%
African-American/Black	3	10%
Multi-Racial	3	10%
Asian-American/Asian	2	7%
Hispanic/Latinx	1	3%
Native American/American Indian	0	0%
<b>Country of Citizenship</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
United States	27	93%
South Korea	1	3%

United Kingdom	1	3%
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Unlike its gender statistics, the current study's percentages in this area are closer to those of all ATS-member schools, which reported in 2016 (Table 3.5) that 58% of the MDiv population was made up of domestic Caucasian students while 31% were non-Caucasian.<sup>274</sup>

**Table 3.5. ATS-member Schools 2016 Enrollment in MDiv by Race or Ethnic Group**

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<b>Race or Ethnicity</b>	<b># students enrolled in MDiv programs</b>	<b>Percentage of total ATS MDiv enrollment</b>
African-American/Black	4556	17%
Asian-American/Asian	2021	7%

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<sup>274</sup> Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables," accessed October 2, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/institutional-data/annual-data-tables/2016-2017-annual-data-tables.pdf>. I did not include "International Visa Holder" or "Race/Ethnicity Not Reported" in my calculations of the percentage of non-Caucasians in the MDiv program at ATS-member schools. Too often seminaries lump "non-domestic Caucasians" together to appear more diverse; however, this is reductionist with regard to the unique characteristics and needs of each racial/ethnic or citizenship group.

Caucasian/White	15,759	58%
Hispanic/Latinx	1564	6%
Native American/American Indian	141	.5%
International Visa Holders	1870	7%
Race/Ethnicity Not Reported	1491	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27,402</b>	
Source: Association of Theological Schools, "2016-2017 Annual Data Tables."		

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The number of non-US citizens who completed the Millennial MDiv student survey was too small (N=2) to gather any reliable data with regard to the differences between domestic and international student needs. For this reason, the current study will not suggest the effect of country of origin on student experiences of crises of faith, leaving it up to future researchers to do so. That said, there were still many findings with regard to race and ethnicity as the current study's statistical analysis unfolded. These will be discussed later in this chapter as they interact with other sections of the data, particularly those related to the crisis of faith experience.



### *Religious Affiliation*

This is another area where the makeup of the Boston University School of Theology student body undoubtedly affected the gathered data. It is an historically United Methodist seminary that actively recruits an ecumenical and interfaith community of learning. For this reason, it is unsurprising that 20 of the 29 respondents (69%) were affiliated with Mainline Protestant traditions. The other 9 respondents were a mix of other Christian traditions (14%), the Jewish faith (3%), and 4 were unaffiliated with any faith tradition whatsoever (14%). The full breakdown of religious affiliations can be found in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6. Denominational Affiliation of Respondents (N=29)**

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<b>Religious Affiliation</b>	<b># of survey respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of total respondents</b>
Mainline Protestant	20	69%
Unaffiliated with any faith tradition	4	14%
Non-denominational Christian	2	7%
Christian Science	1	3%
Pentecostal	1	3%
Jewish	1	3%

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Along with these statistics on religious affiliation, the current survey collected the students' post-seminary vocational plans as they existed at the beginning of their MDiv program. Thirteen of 29 people (45%) pointed toward Parish Ministry as their vocational plan at that time. This is, again, likely a reflection of the institution at which they are studying, which attracts many students with vocational plans outside the congregation or parish. While 71% of all students graduating from ATS-member schools in 2015 were planning to or already serving in an ecclesial context,<sup>275</sup> only 36% of those graduating from Boston University School of Theology planned to do so.<sup>276</sup> Table 3.7 shows the breakdown by vocational plans of all survey respondents.

**Table 3.7. Post-Seminary Vocational Plans of Respondents (N=29)**

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Vocational Plan	# of survey respondents	Percentage of total respondents
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<sup>275</sup> Association of Theological Schools, "2015 Annual Report," accessed October 5, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/2015-annual-report%20FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>276</sup> Association of Theological Schools, "Boston University School of Theology Graduating Student Questionnaire: 2015-2016 Profile of Participants" (Pittsburgh, PA: The Association of Theological Schools, 2016). I received permission to reference this typically confidential report.

Parish Ministry	13	45%
Chaplaincy	6	21%
Non-profit, Non-Governmental, or Faith-Based Organization	5	17%
Undecided	3	10%
Teaching/Professor at a College or University	2	7%

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As a point of comparison, the respondents were also asked whether their vocational plans had changed as a function of their time in seminary. Seven of them reported that they had changed plans (24%). This statistic will return later to interact with the sections of the data analysis having to do with the respondents' experience of crises of faith.

### **Questing and Spiritual Well-Being Scores**

Part of the current survey of Millennial MDiv students at Boston University School of Theology was a recreation of two brief measures of religiosity. The first, the 12-item Quest Scale (Appendix C), according to its authors, assesses one's "open-ended, active approach to existential questions" that resists

definitive answers.<sup>277</sup> The second measure, the 20-item Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Appendix D), tests one's perceived well-being both in relation to God and to the wider world; there is evidence that having a healthy spiritual life positively supports one's sense of overall well-being.<sup>278</sup> As mentioned previously in this study's literature review, scholars Ian Todd Williamson and Steven J. Sandage have used the Quest Scale and Spiritual Well-Being Scale together in their research of seminarians. They have found that the scores from these two measures are typically negatively correlated.<sup>279</sup> That is, when Questing scores rise, Spiritual Well-Being scores tend to fall. This research suggests that as students become more comfortable with the ambiguity of existential problems, that same ambiguity seems to put pressure on the inbuilt theologies they bring to their theological education. After all, every student entering seminary comes with some personal understanding of religious experience, whether deeply felt from a strong denominational upbringing or more tacitly known through indirect interactions with faith and its many lived traditions.

The current study compared the Quest and Spiritual Well-Being scores of all its respondents to test the relationship between the two scales with regard to

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<sup>277</sup> C. Daniel Batson and Patricia A. Schoenrade, "Measuring Religion as a Quest: Validity Concerns," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 4 (1991): 416.

<sup>278</sup> Bufford, Paloutzian, and Ellison, "Norms," 56.

<sup>279</sup> Williamson and Sandage, "Longitudinal Analyses," 787.

this population of students. Twenty-five of the 29 total survey respondents completed both scales. The average Quest score of N=25 was 75.96, out of a highest possible score of 108. The average overall (N=25) Spiritual Well-Being (SWB) score was 96.96 out of a highest possible score of 120, with 12 students in the “Moderate SWB” category (48%) and 13 in the “High SWB” category (52%). It is interesting to gauge the SWB average of those surveyed alongside the aggregate scores of other groups. The Manual for the SWB Scale includes descriptive statistics for many denominations, human groups, and flavors of faith.<sup>280</sup> Table 3.8 shows the comparison of the seminarians in the current surveyed population as compared to some of these other cohort samples.

**Table 3.8. Average Spiritual Well-Being Scores of Various Groups**

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<b>Type of Group</b>	<b>Number Studied</b>	<b>Average SWB Score</b>
Current Survey of Millennial MDiv Seminarians	25	96.96
United Methodists	32	99.09
Unitarians	45	82.81

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<sup>280</sup> Raymond F. Paloutzian and Craig W. Ellison, *Manual for the Spiritual Well-Being Scale* (LifeAdvance, 2009), accessed September 25, 2017, <http://www.lifeadvance.com/spiritual-well-being-scale.html>.

Evangelical Seminary Students	55	106.00
Evangelical College Students	50	104.26
Non-Christian College Students	17	70.47
Source: Paloutzian and Ellison, <i>Manual for the Spiritual Well-Being Scale</i> .		

Looking at the groups represented in Table 3.8, one can infer how SWB scores are affected by one's internal faith life. This puts this survey's average aggregate SWB score into better context. The respondents' 96.96 overall score is very akin to the average SWB score of the United Methodist group, which is 99.09. This makes sense given that, as reported above, 69% of the Millennial MDiv students surveyed were Mainline Protestant (20 out of N=25). Mainline Protestant groups show higher SWB scores than non-Christian groups, whose members show less well-being spiritually but presumably quest more when it comes to life's ambiguous existential problems.

Taken in aggregate form, the overall Questing and SWB scores offer little help in understanding the current survey's respondents. However, if broken into three separate groups determined by the length of time the seminarian had spent in the MDiv program, the Questing and SWB scores of the respondents interact

in the way predicted by Williamson and Sandage. Table 3.9 shows the average Questing and SWB scores of students in their first, second, and third year of the MDiv program. Figure 3.1 shows the negative correspondence of the two score types over time.

**Table 3.9. Questing and Spiritual Well-Being Scores Over Length of Time in the MDiv Program**

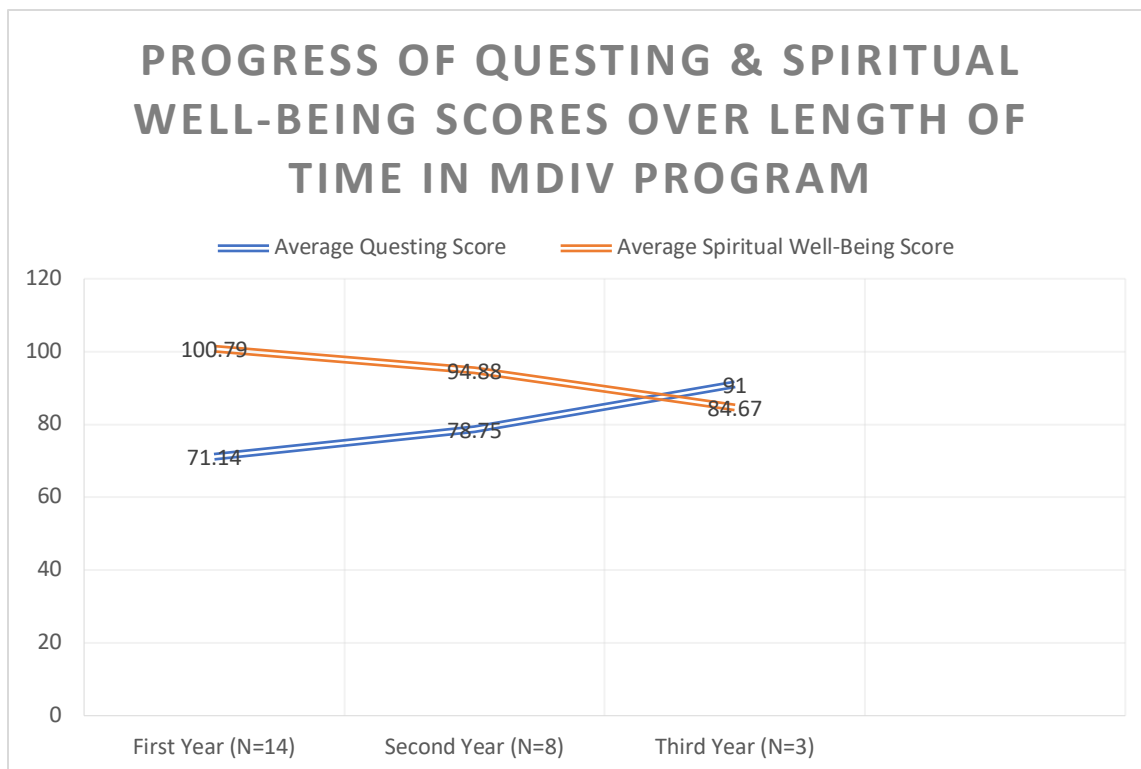
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<b>Year in the MDiv Program</b>	<b>Average Questing Score</b>	<b>Average Spiritual Well-Being Score</b>
First Year (N=14)	71.14	100.79
Second Year (N=8)	78.75	94.88
Third Year (N=3)	91	84.67

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**Figure 3.1. Progress of Questing and Spiritual Well-Being Scores Over Time**

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Separating the individual scores of each person surveyed on the Spiritual Well-Being scale allowed me to group the respondents into those with the highest and lowest SWB scores. When taken as two separate cohorts, comparing data of those who scored “High SWB” to those who scored “Moderate SWB” yielded results worth noting alongside these same peoples’ Questing scores. Table 3.10 reveals this comparison. The data reinforces once again that the higher the SWB score, the lower the Questing score.

**Table 3.10. Comparison of Quest Scale Scores by “Moderate” or “High” Spiritual Well-Being Scores**

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<b>Level of Spiritual Well-Being Score</b>	<b>Average Quest Scale Score</b>
Moderate SWB (n=12)	82.33
High SWB (n=15)	70.08
All Respondents, Overall (n=25)	75.96

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But how might a demographic factor such as race or ethnicity affect SWB or Questing scores? Table 3.11 shows such a breakdown, and reveals that among the Millennial MDiv seminarians surveyed, the Students of Color<sup>281</sup> (N=8) enjoyed higher SWB rates and lower Questing scores than their Caucasian counterparts (N=15).

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<sup>281</sup> A larger sample size would have allowed further enquiry into how each individual non-majority racial and ethnic groups score on the Quest and SWB scales. However, the sample size in this study was too small to do so. As such, I chose to group together the Students of Color who responded to the survey in order to create a cohort large enough for examination. I did this understanding the ethically problematic nature of researchers (particularly Caucasian researchers) to study Caucasians as one group over and against People of Color, as if that were a second homogenous group, which it is not. Still, I believe the data that emerges from separating Students of Color from their Caucasian counterparts in this study may help identify some of the unique experience and needs of this group, leading to further support, and it is thus worth doing. I encourage future research in this area with a larger and more representative sample size that could better honor the cultural differences and needs of each different race or ethnicity.

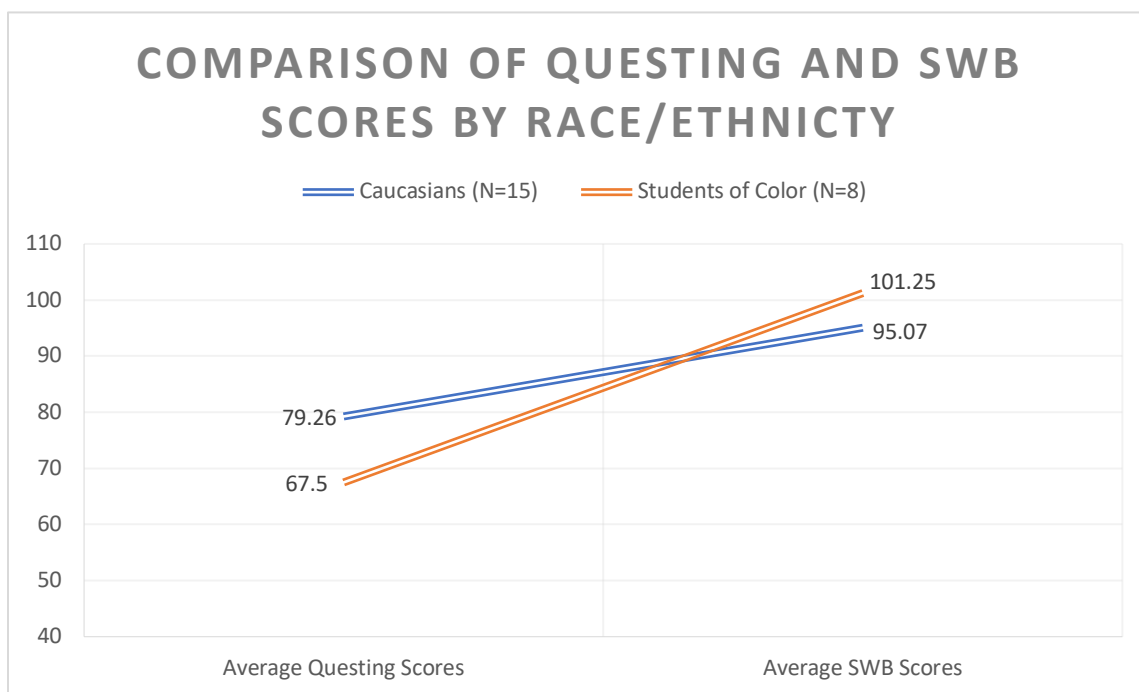
**Table 3.11. Questing and Spiritual Well-Being of Respondents by Race/Ethnicity**

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	Average Questing Scores	Average SWB Scores
Caucasians (N=15)	79.26	95.07
Students of Color (N=8)	67.5	101.25

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**Figure 3.2. Comparison of Average Questing and SWB Scores by Race/Ethnicity of Respondent**



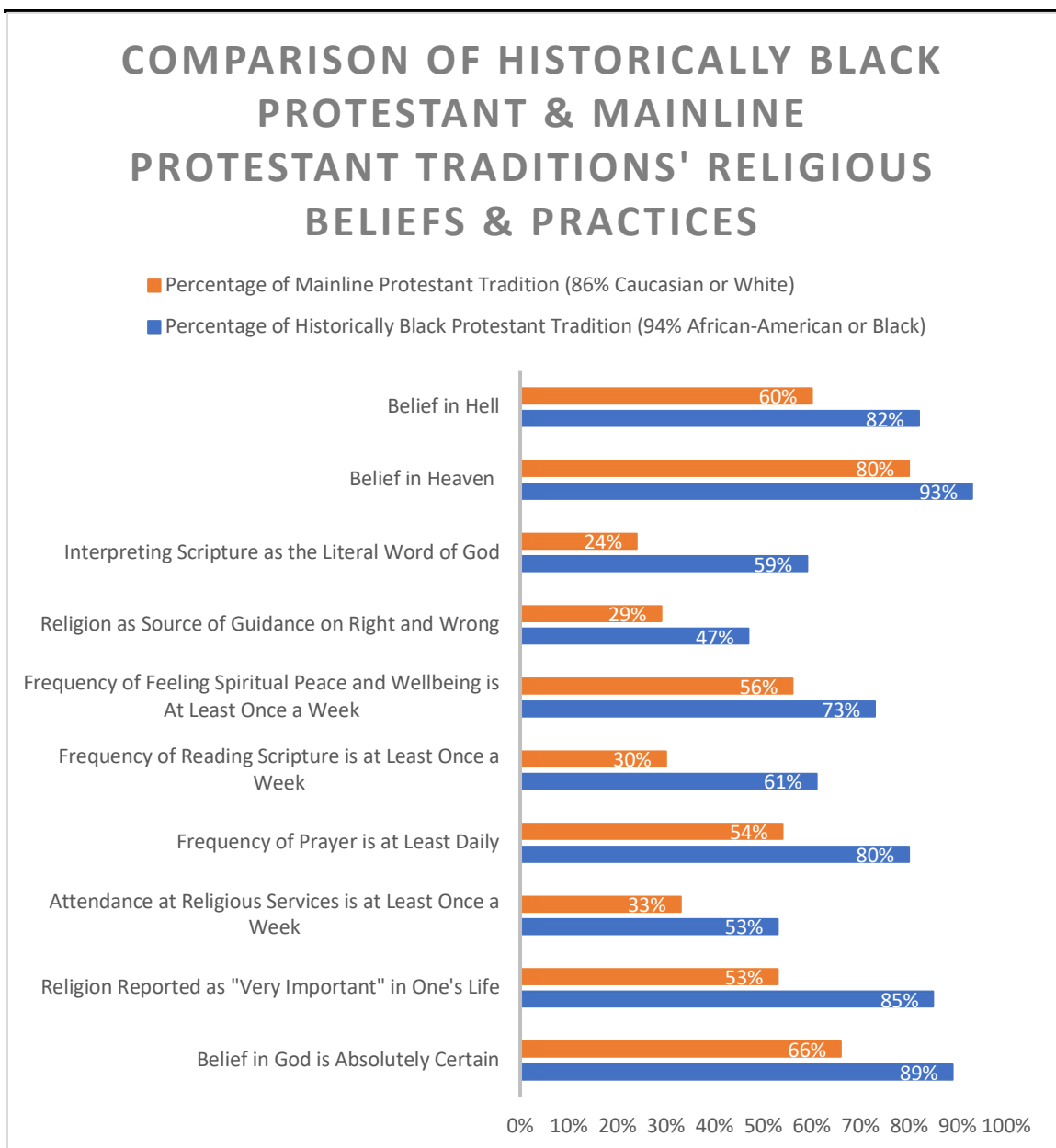
Research from the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life gives credence to an idea that may seem obvious, namely that people from different racial and ethnic cultures experience faith differently. For example, comparing the data sets from the Pew Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study for members of Mainline Protestant denominations (who are 86% Caucasian) and members of the Historically Black Protestant tradition (94% African-American or Black) shows considerable differences in the ways these two groups answered questions based on certain aspects of religious belief and the practices they

inform. Some highlights of these differences are represented in Figure 3.3. It is problematic to compare only these two cohorts, Caucasians and African-Americans, as other racial and ethnic groups' faith traditions are undoubtedly shaped in similar ways by their unique histories and cultures. However, the Pew data does not offer glimpses into primarily Latinx, Asian, or other religious traditions, as these racial and ethnic groups are spread more evenly through a variety of faith background in the United States.<sup>282</sup> Comparing the primarily Caucasian Mainline Protestant and the Historically Black Protestant traditions also offers, at least in part, theological continuity that may not exist if one compared, say, Protestants and Catholics. Given that both groups come from Protestant traditions, the comparison shown within Figure 3.3 is a particularly striking one.

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<sup>282</sup> Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2014), accessed October 7, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

**Figure 3.3. Differences of Religious Beliefs and Practices Between Mainline Protestant and Historically Black Protestant Traditions**



Source: Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study*.

The Pew Center data above shows that a higher percentage of respondents in the Historically Black Protestant tradition hold orthodox Christian views (e.g. absolute belief in God, Hell and Heaven, and the literal truth of the Bible) than do the majority-white Mainline Protestants. Similarly, those in the Historically Black Protestant cohort are more likely than white Mainline Protestants to practice their religious beliefs through behaviors such as regularly reading scripture, praying daily, and attending religious services once a week.

Interestingly, the Pew study asked a question akin to the goals of the SWB Scale. They tested the respondents' frequency of feeling a sense of "spiritual peace and wellbeing." Of those who responded, 73% of the Historically Black Protestant group said they experience that feeling weekly, while only 56% of Mainline Protestants claimed the same thing.<sup>283</sup> This one question is not, of course, equivalent to the full psychometric evaluation that the SWB Scale offers. However, on the basis of this particular question, the current study's finding that Millennial MDiv Students of Color had higher SWB rates and lower Questing scores than their Caucasian peers seems to be part of a wider trend.

From an overall standpoint, it is important to note that in all the data – Pew Center Religious Landscape Study and in the two Quest and SWB Scales undertaken in this study – comparing those surveyed when grouped by their race and ethnicity shows that this demographic factor has an influence on one's

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<sup>283</sup> Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study*.

religious life. This is important to note as we move to analyzing the section of this study that evaluated students' satisfaction with aspects of their seminary education, as well as their experiences of crises of faith. If race and ethnicity play a part in shaping how one lives their faith, then race and ethnicity likely also play a role in a student's experiences in seminary, including how they navigate crises of faith and the particular supports needed to emerge from them.

## **Student Experiences of Crises of Faith**

### *Overview of This Section of the Survey*

The survey described a crisis of faith in the following way:

*By crisis of faith we mean a season of theological limbo when previously held truths are deeply questioned and no longer satisfy a person's current uncertainties, and at the same time new truths have not yet been found, resulting in a feeling of being untethered. Some people navigate such turning points without crisis, but for others this is a disturbing and emotional experience. Many crises of faith result in a profound sense of confusion, fear, loss, anger, apathy toward studies or one's spiritual life, depression, and even physical or mental pain. Additionally, one can experience feelings of isolation from one's God, faith community, family, friends, or wider world. Crises of faith can be sudden or prolonged, and they happen to people of every faith tradition. They also arise frequently in the context of seminary education, where varieties of beliefs are introduced and challenged with regularity both within and outside of the classroom.<sup>284</sup>*

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<sup>284</sup> See the full Millennial MDiv survey in Appendix A. I crafted this definition of "crisis of faith" using anecdotal experience encountering students having them, as well as the overview of existential crisis literature in Ton, "Crisis of Faith."

A central goal of this study was to capture data about students' experiences of crises of faith during seminary, as this phenomenon has not been frequently the subject of quantitative research. To achieve this, three sets of survey questions were used in relationship with one another. The first dealt with the Millennial MDiv students' educational backgrounds and satisfaction with aspects of their current seminary education. A second set asked directly whether these students had experienced a crisis of faith, its duration, and the nature of its reconciliation, if that had occurred. A final set of questions examined the students' perceived support from the seminary as well as their desires for additional support. Taken together, the data from these three sets of questions offer a rich picture of the respondents' crises of faith, and put pressure on areas of curricular education and institutional support that could further resource seminarians to be resilient through existential crisis.

### *Educational Backgrounds of Students*

The students who responded to the survey, by virtue of their presence within the MDiv program at Boston University School of Theology, had met the admissions standards for masters-level work at the institution. This means they had all earned at least a 3.0 overall Grade Point Average (GPA) from an accredited undergraduate degree program, had positive letters of reference, and were solid academic performers thought by the seminary's Admissions Committee to be capable of rigorous graduate theological education. Still, only 4



of the 29 students surveyed (14%) held previous degrees in religion or theology. All four of these outliers majored in religion during their undergraduate programs. The others (N=25) came from a wide variety of undergraduate majors, particularly Humanities, but a few Science and Technology fields, as well. Yet, even without much formal academic background in theology or religion, as a whole, the group had achieved high grades in their seminary experience thus far. The overall GPA breakdown of those surveyed can be found in Table 3.12.

**Table 3.12. Overall Grade Point Average Within Current Seminary Program**

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<b>Current GPA Falls Within This Range</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
3.7 – 4.0	17
3.4 – 3.69	8
3.0 – 3.39	4
Under 3.0	0

---

As the table shows, more than half of those surveyed were, at least at that point in their studies, in line for Boston University's Latin honors (which fall within the 3.7 – 4.0 range) should they maintain their current GPA until graduation. Overall GPA was an important statistic to capture, as it assures any reported issues of dissatisfaction with the students' seminary experience are not

just backlash at the institution for receiving poor grades, since poor grades can be a function of either institutional deficiencies (e.g. lack of student support for research) or bad student behavior (e.g. not showing up to class). The fact that all respondents were doing well in their classes allows the collected data on seminary satisfaction to be understood as reflecting institutional characteristics rather than the bad learning behaviors of the students themselves.

*Students' Overall Satisfaction with Seminary Education*

A 7-question Likert-type scale ranked between “Extremely Satisfied” (value = 5) and “Extremely Dissatisfied” (value = 1) measured respondents’ satisfaction with various aspects of their current seminary education. The average response of the total group (N=29) can be found in Table 3.13.

**Table 3.13. Average Satisfaction-Level with Various Aspects of Seminary Education**

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<b>Aspect of Seminary Education</b>	<b>Average Aggregate Satisfaction Score (N=29)</b>
Required Introductory Courses	3.31
Courses You’ve Chosen as Electives	4.48
Spiritual Formation Opportunities	2.9

Social Events & Opportunities	3.62
Friendships with Other Students	4.17
Life in Boston	4.21
Connection with Your Faith	3.46
1 = Extremely Dissatisfied, 2 = Somewhat Dissatisfied, 3 = Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, 4 = Somewhat Satisfied, 5 = Extremely Satisfied	

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All aspects of the students' seminary education were ranked fairly high in satisfaction, with only "Spiritual Formation Opportunities" averaging below a 3.0. The respondents clearly value their peer relationships and life in Boston, which are aspects of their seminary education that fall more under their own initiative than under the institutional supports of the School of Theology itself. In terms of coursework, the students overall prefer the elective classes they chose for themselves over those classes required as introductory prerequisites. This makes logical sense, as their chosen elective courses likely align more closely with their particular curricular interests and vocational goals. However, both introductory classes (3.31) and elective classes (4.48) average higher satisfaction than spiritual formation opportunities (2.9) at the seminary. In fact, spiritual formation opportunities were ranked lowest of all the areas of satisfaction.

This data is echoed by reports of student dissatisfaction in the area of spiritual formation within wider ATS statistics, as well. The 2016-2017 Total School Profile aggregating data from the Graduating Student Questionnaire of all ATS institutions showed that Millennial students consistently rate their satisfaction with spiritual growth during seminary lower than do their older generational peers. Table 3.14 shows this comparison.

**Table 3.14. Seminary Effectiveness in Facilitating Spiritual Formation of Students – ATS Graduating Student Data**

<b>Institutional Effectiveness in the Following Areas</b>	<b>Under 31 years old</b>	<b>31 – 40 years old</b>	<b>41 – 50 years old</b>	<b>50+ years old</b>
Ability to live one’s faith in daily life	3.9	4.0	4.1	4.3
Ability to pray	3.4	3.5	3.7	3.9
Strength in spiritual life	3.7	3.9	4.1	4.3
Trust in God	3.9	4.1	4.2	4.3
1 = not at all effective, 2 = not very effective, 3 = somewhat effective, 4 = effective, 5 = very effective				

Source: Jo Ann Deasy, “GSQ Webinar: 2016-17 Total School Profile Highlights” (presentation, Association of Theological Schools, September 7, 2017).

Could it be that older seminarians have more thoroughly formed personal spiritual lives at the onset of seminary, making their spiritual practice more satisfying during their studies? Could Millennial students be encountering crises of faith more often than their older peers, who might have had a “dark night of the soul” prior to their seminary years? Further research would be necessary to say exactly why younger students appear to be less satisfied when it comes to spiritual formation offerings. But it is important to note that, among the current survey population of Millennial MDiv students at Boston University School of Theology, “spiritual formation opportunities” is the only area of all seven seminary satisfaction questions whose aggregate score falls into the “Somewhat Dissatisfied” ranking.

As an employee of the Boston University School of Theology, I know that the institution provides many events, retreats, practical spirituality workshops, small group gatherings, and worship opportunities through its Community Life and Spiritual Life Offices each year. It is possible that this wide variety of offerings is not an ample selection to serve this seminary’s student population. However, knowing the good and intentional work of the Spiritual Life Office, and the number of focus groups and student interactions this office regularly engages, it would be surprising to me if the issue of low student satisfaction in this area was simply a function of access to co-curricular spiritual formation resources through the Spiritual Life Office. As a reworking of the old adage goes, one can lead students to spiritual formation opportunities but cannot make them

drink. Especially when to “drink” means to not only attend events but open oneself to the somewhat intangible process of formation itself. Does the respondents’ dissatisfaction with spiritual formation denote discontent with the opportunities already offered by the institution, or a broader lack of spiritual formation integration into the seminary curriculum? Here the individual qualitative responses from respondents can shed some light.

Most of the qualitative responses related to respondents’ satisfaction with spiritual formation opportunities at the seminary focused not on the Spiritual Life Office or its offerings but on the classroom. One quote, which is representative of many similar ones, offered:

*The Spiritual Life office is awesome, and does a great job with providing opportunities to center your spirit and soul. However, I think there are times that the faculty will say something foundation shaking, earth shattering, and mind blowing in the classroom, and then there aren't the resources available to help students unpack it spiritually. There seems to be an attitude that students have the ability to unpack these things themselves (or that they have encountered this kind of stuff before) when, for many, that is not the case.*

Another student’s reflections were similarly focused on the classroom experience, saying, “So often we are given complex theological concepts to wrestle with intellectually but we are not given tools to process them spiritually.” With these and other comparable comments from the students, it appears that the overall dissatisfaction with spiritual formation opportunities at the seminary is a curricular issue for faculty to consider, not just a co-curricular one. Making the

classroom space integral to the spiritual formation process of Millennial MDiv seminarians, then, is a central issue to be considered.

*Comparing Student Satisfaction Through Cohorts Based on Quest Scores and Racial/Ethnic Groups*

As mentioned previously, research from the Pew Center on Religion and Public Life suggests that people's race and ethnicity affect how they experience and enact their religious lives.<sup>285</sup> As such, I placed the current survey's respondents into groups based on racial and ethnic background (Caucasian Students, N=18 and Students of Color, N=9) to see if these demographic cohorts would yield different levels of satisfaction with seminary life. Furthermore, I created two cohorts from the respondents' highest Questing Scores (those with scores above 90, N=6) and lowest Questing Scores (those with scores under 70, N=7), and analyzed satisfaction with aspects of seminary using these cohorts, as well. Table 3.15 shows the comparison among all of these groups, and Figure 3.4 represents this comparison graphically.

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<sup>285</sup> Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study*.

**Table 3.15. Seminary Satisfaction Levels – Comparison Between Various Cohorts of Respondents**

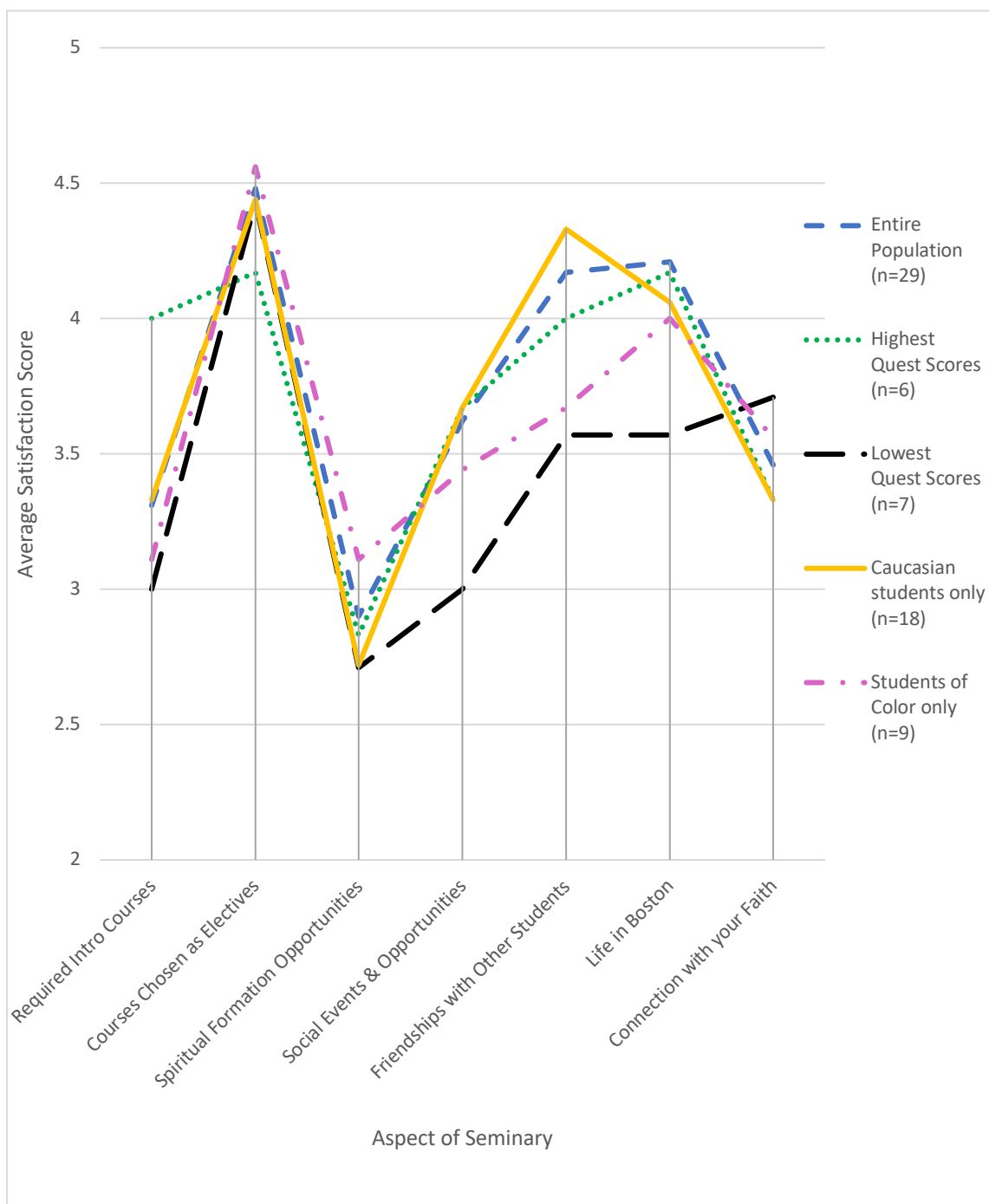
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	<b>Required Intro Courses</b>	<b>Self-Chosen Elective Courses</b>	<b>Spiritual Formation Options</b>	<b>Social Events &amp; Opportunities</b>	<b>Friendships with Other Students</b>	<b>Life in Boston</b>	<b>Connect-ion with your Faith</b>
Entire Population (n=29)	3.31	4.48	2.9	3.62	4.17	4.21	3.46
Highest Quest Scores (n=6)	4	4.17	2.83	3.67	4	4.17	3.33
Lowest Quest Scores (n=7)	3	4.43	2.71	3	3.57	3.57	3.71
Caucasian students only (n=18)	3.33	4.44	2.72	3.67	4.33	4.06	3.33
Students of Color only (n=9)	3.11	4.56	3.11	3.44	3.67	4	3.56

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**Figure 3.4. Satisfaction with Aspects of Seminary – Comparison Among Students Grouped by Race/Ethnicity and Average Questing Score**



There are some noteworthy findings from this comparison of racial/ethnic and Questing Score groups with regard to seminary satisfaction. First, when it comes to the seminary's academic curriculum, most groups score quite similarly in their satisfaction with introductory-level courses and considerable preference for elective courses instead. The one outlying group in this regard are those in the highest Questing Scores cohort. This group is more satisfied with introductory-level classes than other students are, and reports only slightly higher satisfaction levels for elective courses than introductory ones. Since the Quest Scale tests people's perception of religion as an existential quest and openness to change,<sup>286</sup> the difference in satisfaction between this and other groups could mean that those with higher Questing Scores are more open to all religious coursework, not just the classes they choose for themselves.

Students of Color report somewhat higher satisfaction with both the seminary's spiritual formation opportunities and their own personal connection with faith than their Caucasian peers do. This is likely related to the fact, mentioned in a previous section, that Students of Color received higher overall Spiritual Well-Being scores than the Caucasian students did. This could mean that Students of Color are more rooted in their faith traditions, or that they have a more personally fulfilling spiritual life as they go through seminary study. Further study is needed to determine why exactly this is. However, this data gives further credence to the idea stemming from the Pew Research Center on Religion and

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<sup>286</sup> Batson and Schoenrade, "Quest: Reliability Concerns," 430.

Public Life that one's experience of faith is affected by one's racial or ethnic background.

Caucasian respondents report more satisfaction than Students of Color do with regard to the social aspects of seminary life, namely social events and friendships with other students. In fact, the aspect of seminary satisfaction with the biggest difference between these two cohorts is peer friendships. While Students of Color report an average satisfaction level of 3.67 in this area, Caucasian students averaged 4.33. It will be seen as this analysis continues that peer relationships are a disparity between these two groups in other ways, as well. It could be that Students of Color are not as satisfied with their peer friendships because the seminary communities themselves are not as diverse or multi-culturally sensitive as they could be. Some of the literature on theological higher education lends itself to this explanation.<sup>287</sup> Or perhaps Students of Color arrive with networks of support already in place outside the seminary, such as through their communities of faith, and do not choose to engage the student community as deeply. The question of why Students of Color report lower satisfaction with their seminary peer friendships is an area in which further study would be helpful, especially as ATS-member schools anticipate higher enrollments of Students of Color.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Lee, Shields, and Oh, "Empowerment or Disempowerment?," 93-105.

<sup>288</sup> Daniel O. Aleshire and Marsha Foster Boyd, "ATS Work on Race and Ethnicity," *Theological Education* 38, no. 2 (2002): v.-vi.

Finally, also related to the more social aspects of seminary life, those in the Low Questing Scores cohort had much lower satisfaction ratings than the other groups with regard to “social events and opportunities,” “friendships with other students,” and “life in Boston.” Lower Questing Scores were shown in a previous section of this study to correlate with higher Spiritual Well-Being scores. As such, respondents in the Lower Questing Score cohort are both less likely to feel comfortable with the existential questions of life (measured by the Quest Scale) and more likely to have a robust and satisfying spiritual life (measured by the Spiritual Well-Being Scale). It could be that these students find enough engagement of existential questions within the classroom and choose not to mingle with their seminary peers as much socially, where those uncomfortable conversations might continue. It is also true that, though this survey targeted Millennial MDiv students, this is only one group within the seminary. Classrooms include MDiv students of different ages, as well as students from other master’s programs. It could be that Millennial MDiv students with lower Questing Scores feel more or less isolated from their peer group depending on who they encounter in the classroom. It is also the case that the Low Questing Scores cohort overlaps in terms of respondents with the Students of Color cohort, though they are not exactly the same. Since several in the Lower Questing Scores group are also Students of Color, the same issues around seminary community diversity could be at play here as were discussed above. More research with larger sample sizes are necessary to determine whether or not this is the case.

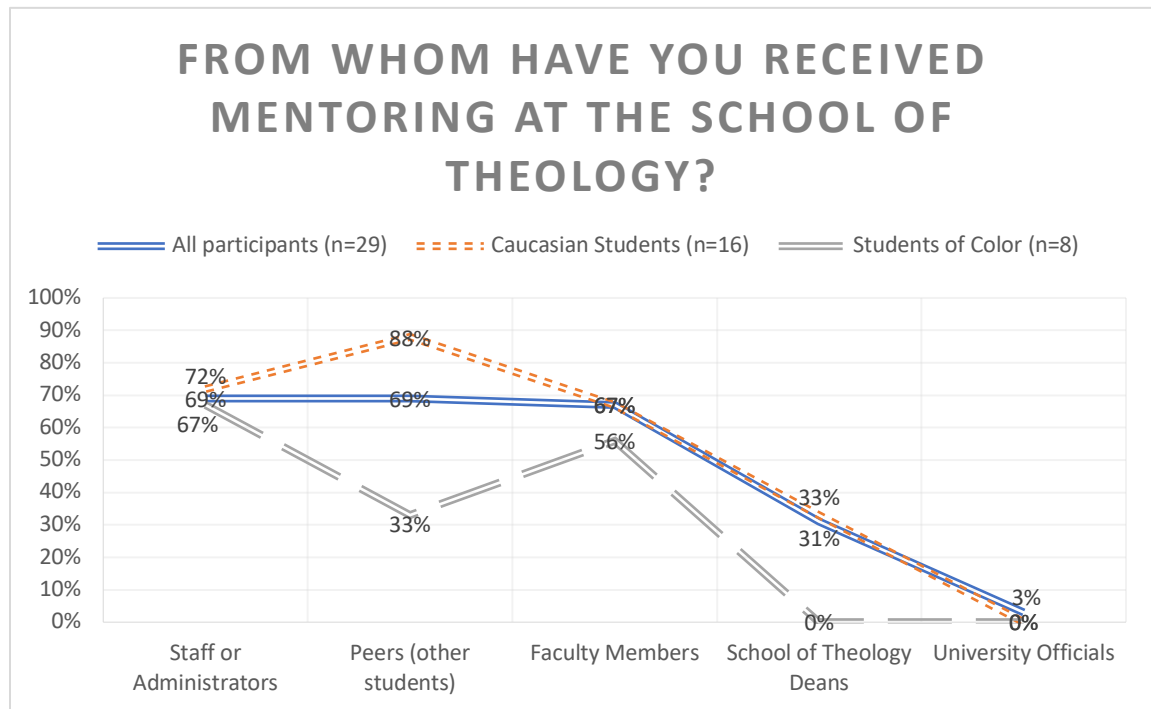
*Student Experiences of Mentoring and Support During Seminary*

Students surveyed were asked a series of questions about the types of support they had received in seminary, who they could call on for support, and areas of student life that could benefit from increased support. This data is visually represented in Figures 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7, broken into the aggregate percentages of all participants (N=29), Students of Color (N=8), and Caucasian Students (N=16).<sup>289</sup>

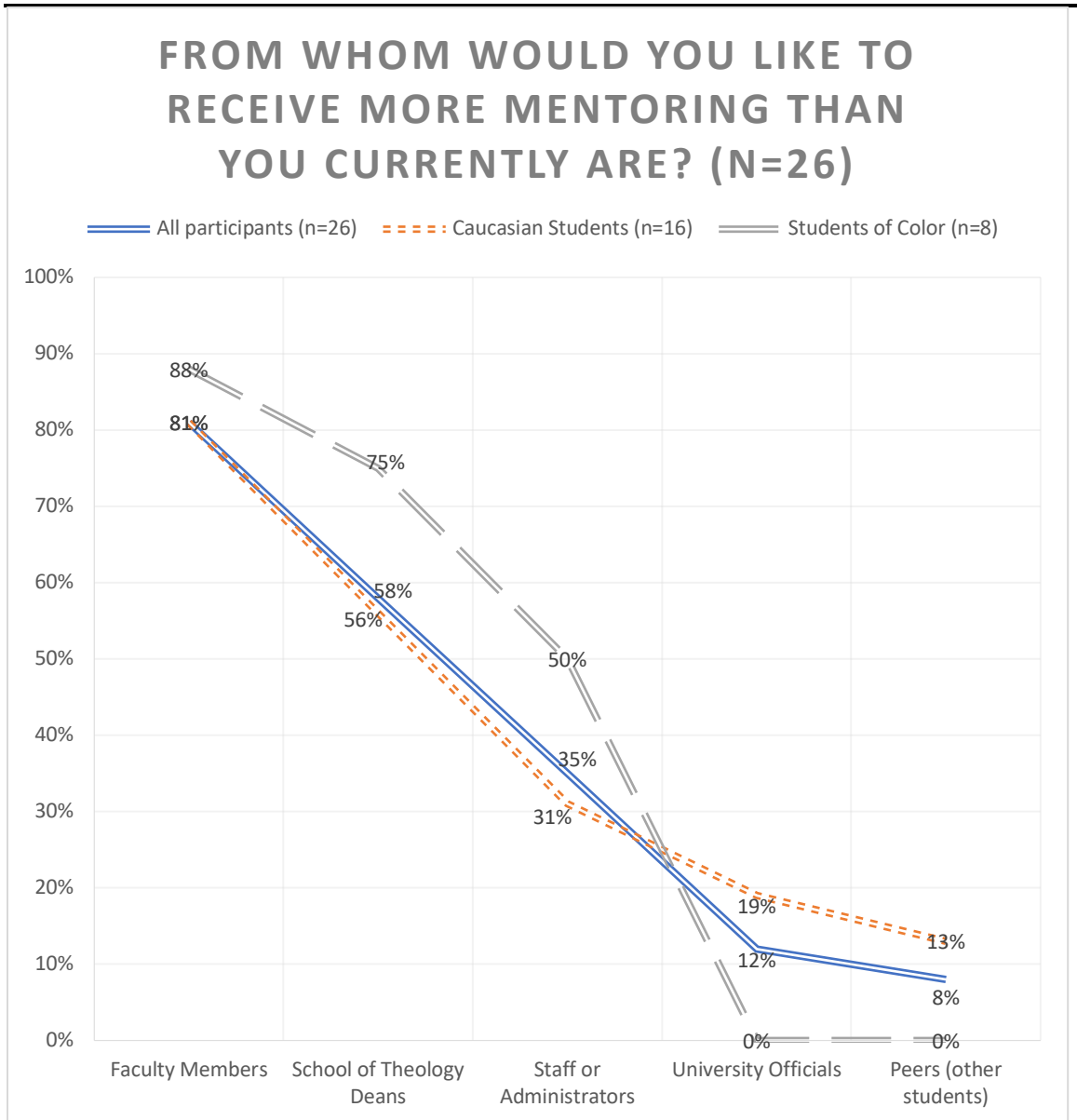
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<sup>289</sup> Some survey respondents chose not to reveal their race and ethnicity, and thus the overall aggregate number of participants is larger than the sum of the two groups Caucasian Students and Students of Color.

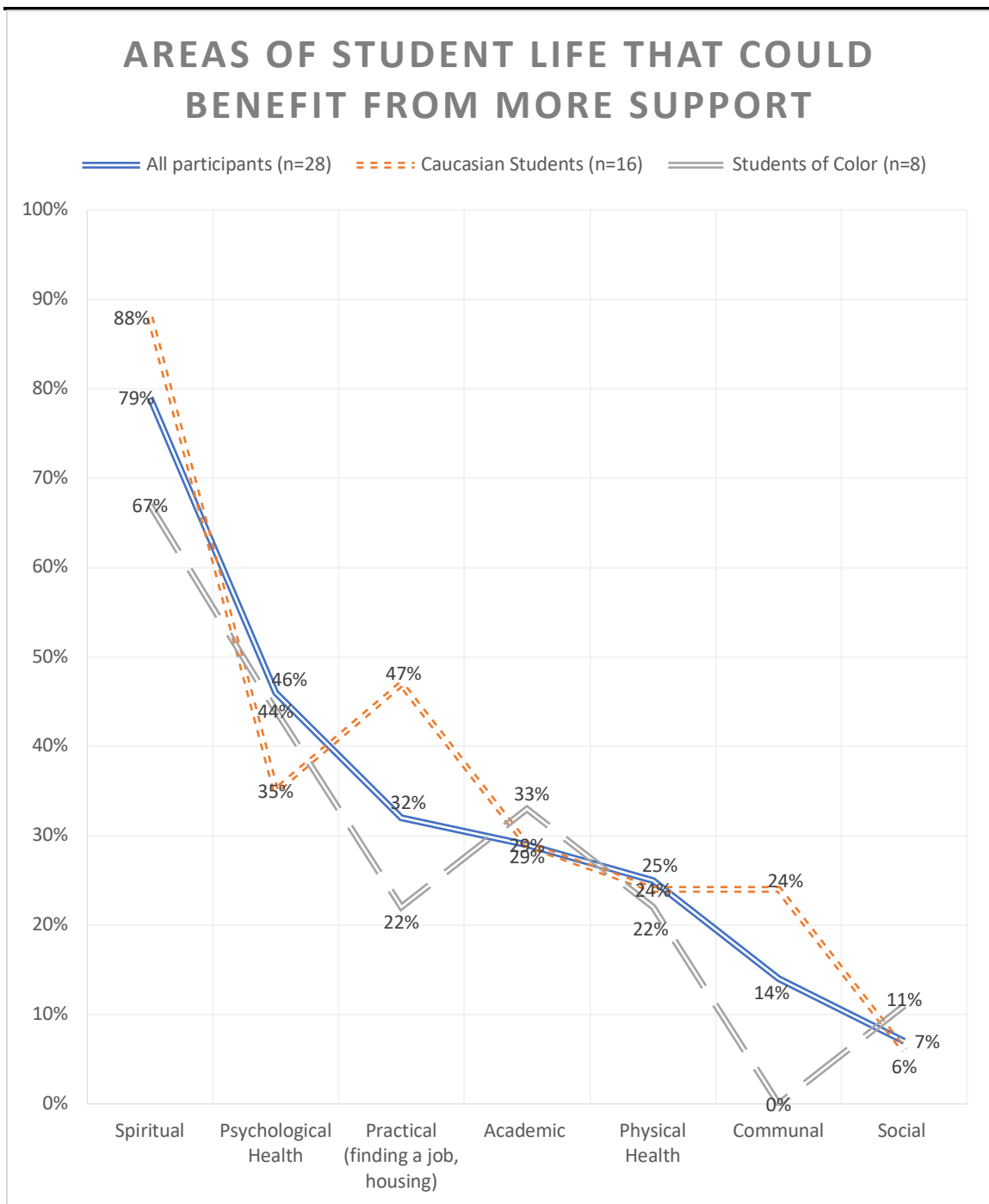
**Figure 3.5. Students' Self-Reported Mentors During Seminary**



**Figure 3.6. Seminary Populations from Which Students Want Increased Support**



**Figure 3.7. Areas of Student Life That Could Benefit from More Support**





Out of the total 29 respondents, 23 (79%) reported having received enough support from faculty and/or staff at the School of Theology, while 6 said they had not (21%). Yet, when asked “From whom have you received mentoring here at the School of Theology?” (Figure 3.5) all participants chose at least one of the groups listed, and 2.38 groups on average. Seminary staff were named as having provided mentoring at a slightly higher level overall than faculty, with Caucasian Students enjoying higher levels of reported mentoring by both staff and faculty than did Students of Color.

The widest difference among these groups of students could be seen in terms of peer mentoring. Only 33% of Students of Color reported having received mentoring from seminary peers, while 88% of Caucasian Students had. This significant difference is cause for reflection. It could be that Students of Color responding to this survey understood “mentoring” differently than their Caucasian classmates, and would not consider peers as “mentors.” Or it could be a reflection of the Students of Color not feeling as supported by their peers as Caucasian students do. Despite increased attention from the Association of

Theological Schools to multicultural inclusion in seminaries,<sup>290</sup> many scholars still critique the theological academy's white, Western hegemony.<sup>291</sup>

The data can be put into dialogue with answers to the question (Figure 3.6), "From whom would you like to receive more mentoring than you currently are?" Here, no Students of Color reported desiring more support from their peers. Students of Color and Caucasian Students both reported wanting increased faculty mentoring first and foremost, followed by School of Theology Deans. Staff and administrators ranked third, and considerably higher for Caucasian Students than Students of Color.

The final question asked generally about the areas of student life that could benefit from increased support (Figure 3.7). Respondents clearly ranked "Spiritual" as the area in most need of increased support. Remembering from a previous section that these same seminarians rated "Spiritual Formation Opportunities" their lowest aspect of seminary satisfaction, this is a further indication that the School of Theology needs to improve students' experiences in

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<sup>290</sup> Daniel Aleshire, "Community and Diversity" (presentation, Association of Theological Schools Biennial Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, June 2012), accessed October 27, 2017, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/community-and-diversity.pdf>. And Association of Theological Schools, *Folio*, 1-45.

<sup>291</sup> Fernando A. Cascante-Gómez, "Advancing Racial/Ethnic Diversity in Theological Education: A Model for Reflection and Action," *Theological Education* 43, no. 2 (2008): 21.

this area. Caucasian Students were also more likely than their Students of Color peers to wish for more Practical and Communal support, as well.

Given their reported low level of interest in peer support, it is worth noting that Students of Color also do not report a desire for increased community support. In fact, they ranked this area last among those that could benefit from more support. Perhaps this is, again, a reflection of Students of Color feeling disengaged with the seminary community due to its majority-white culture of learning. It could also be that Students of Color have support from family, friends, and communities of faith outside the seminary, and do not feel the need to make the seminary their primary community. For whatever reason, it is striking to notice these differences in communal and peer preferences between Caucasian Students and Students of Color, and these should be investigated further within other studies in order to learn how best to support all students in theological education.

#### *Crisis of Faith Frequency, Precipitating Events, Duration, and Self-Disclosure*

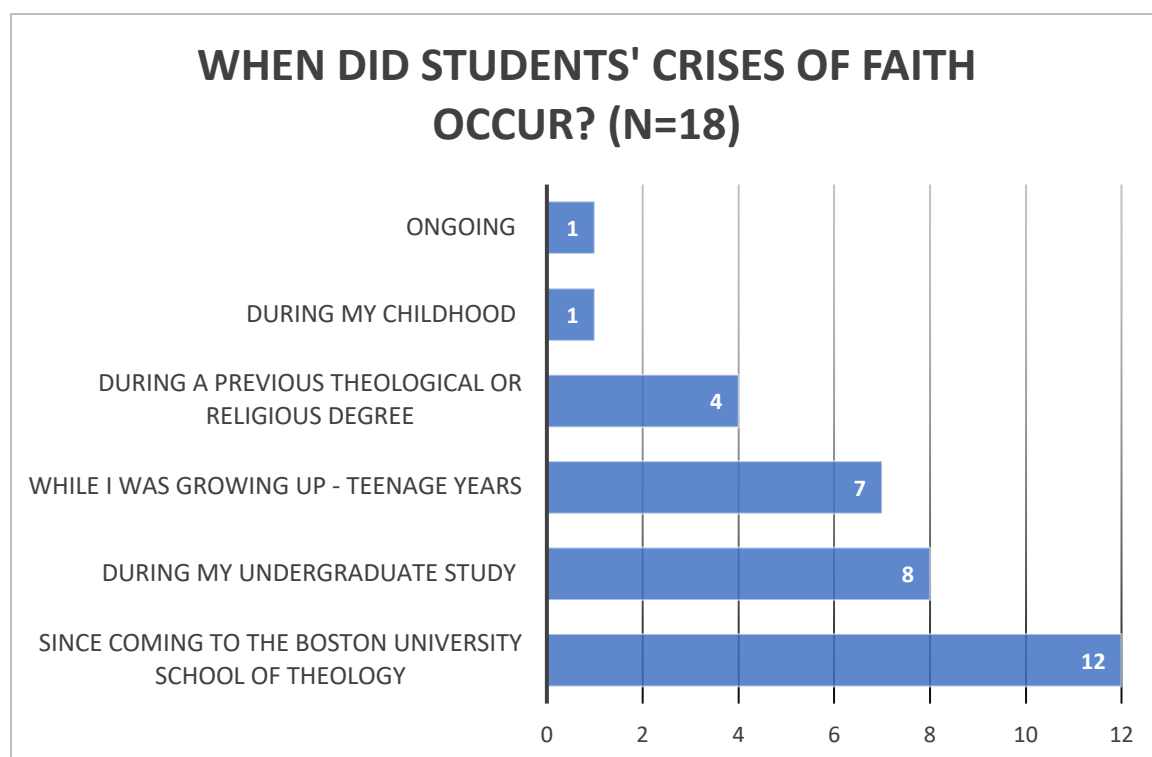
When offered a robust definition of “crisis of faith,” as quoted at the start of this section, every responding Millennial MDiv student (100% of N = 29) felt they adequately understood what was meant by this phrase. What’s more, a full 76% of respondents (N = 22) admitted to having faced the phenomena themselves. However, as the survey became more personally probing with regard to their experiences, four seminarians stopped responding to the questions. This created

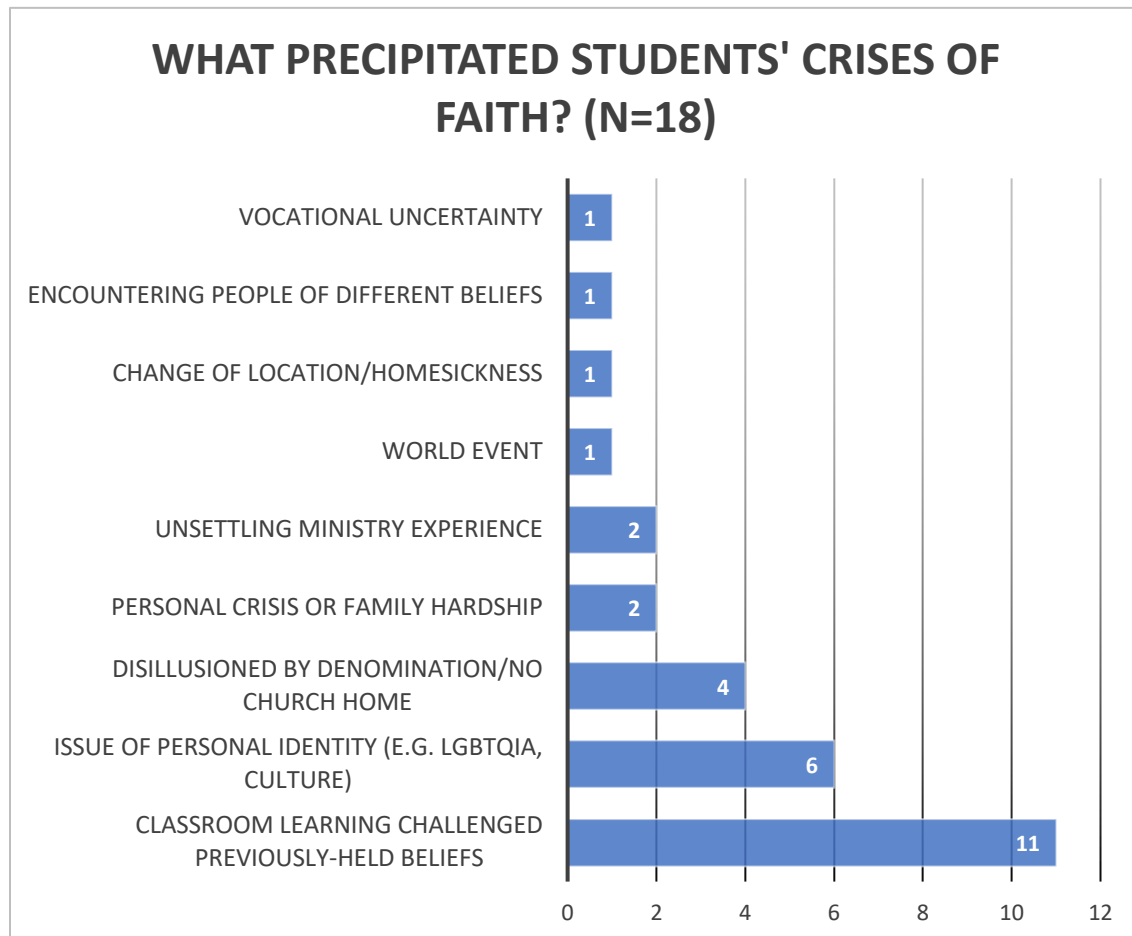
a group of 18 respondents who fully described their experiences with crises of faith.

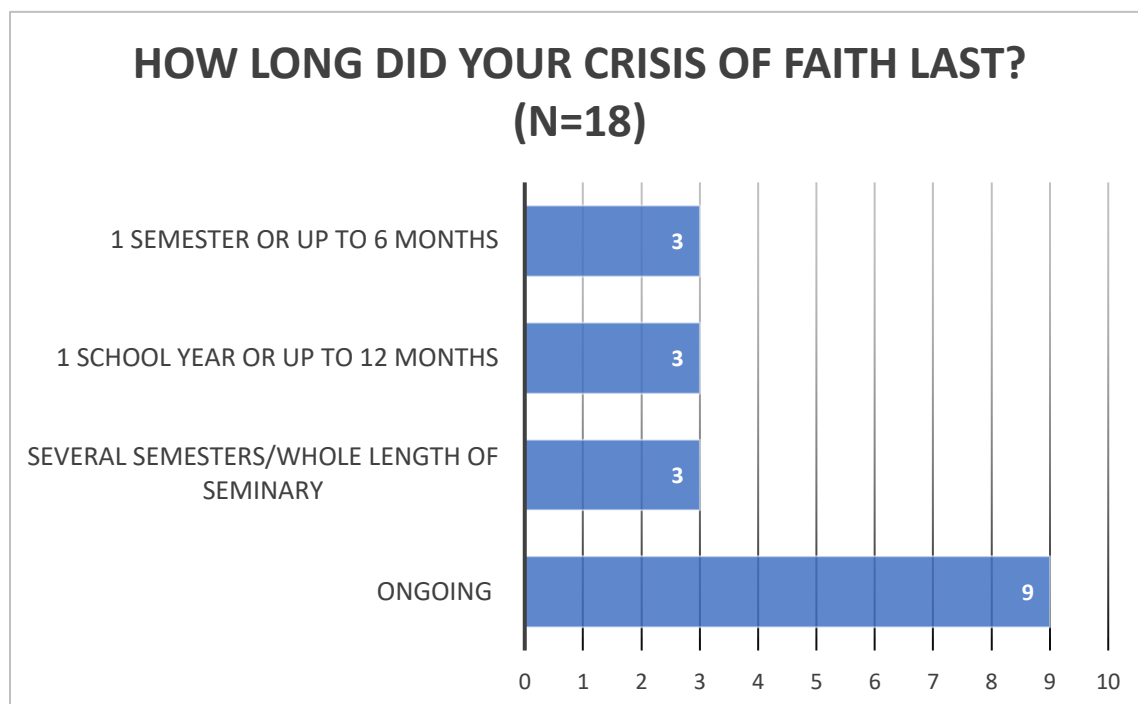
These eighteen individuals were asked three basic questions about their crises of faith: when they had experienced them, what had precipitated them, and how long they lasted. This data can be found in Figures 3.8, 3.9, and 3.10 below, in which the responses are ranked by frequency.

**Figure 3.8. When Did Students' Crises of Faith Occur?**

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**Figure 3.9. What Precipitated Students' Crises of Faith?**

**Figure 3.10. How Long Did Students' Crises of Faith Last?**

The first question (represented in Figure 3.8), “If you have experienced a crisis of faith, when did it occur?” was a multiple-choice query in which the seminarians could choose as many responses as were applicable to them. As such, it became clear that most students had experienced a crisis of faith more than once in their lives, on average 1.8 times per person. Two-thirds of the respondents (67%) reported undergoing a crisis of faith during their current seminary program, 22% said one occurred during a previous religious studies degree, and another 44% said one had arisen for them alongside their

undergraduate study. This means that out of 33 total responses, 27 of these students' crises of faith (82%) had transpired while engaged in higher education. This statistic reinforces the idea that the classroom can incite existential crises as new information conflicts with previously-held beliefs. Transformative Learning Theory experts encourage such encounters as fundamental to the educational experience, claiming that without "disorienting dilemmas" students are not provoked toward learning.<sup>292</sup>

The second question was "What precipitated your crisis of faith?" In order to not influence the data, this was left an open-ended qualitative response, and students answered in their own words. The answers were then coded into similar groupings, as are represented in Figure 3.9 by frequency of response. The Millennial MDivs reported a variety of causes for their crises of faith, some personal (e.g. realizing one's LGBTQIA identity, homesickness) and some academic (e.g. classroom learning). The most frequently-cited cause (61%) was that classroom learning challenged the student's previously-held beliefs. Imbedded in these "academic" responses were also those who mentioned specifically the sometimes-thorny experience of applying an historical-critical method of studying biblical texts to holy writ from their own faith tradition.

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<sup>292</sup> See the "Seminary Educators Can Learn from Transformative Learning Theory" section of this study's literature review for a more robust explanation of Transformative Learning Theory.

Most people cited more than one precipitating event for their crisis of faith, and the average was 1.6 per person. This suggests that personal and academic disorienting dilemmas can intermingle to cause crises of faith, and that what happens in the classroom does not remain distinct from what happens in one's personal life. Again, this finding is consistent with Transformative Learning Theory, which emphasizes both critical self-reflection (personal) and acquisition of new knowledge (academic) among its steps<sup>293</sup> to overcoming disorienting dilemmas, such as crises of faith.

The third question, "How long did your crisis of faith last?" (Figure 3.10) was a multiple-choice forced-answer question with a qualitative "other" entry possible if none of the potential answers were true for that respondent. Though the length of time reported ranged from "only a couple months" to "the entire length of my 3-year degree program," a full 50% of the students said their crises of faith were "ongoing," or still happening currently.

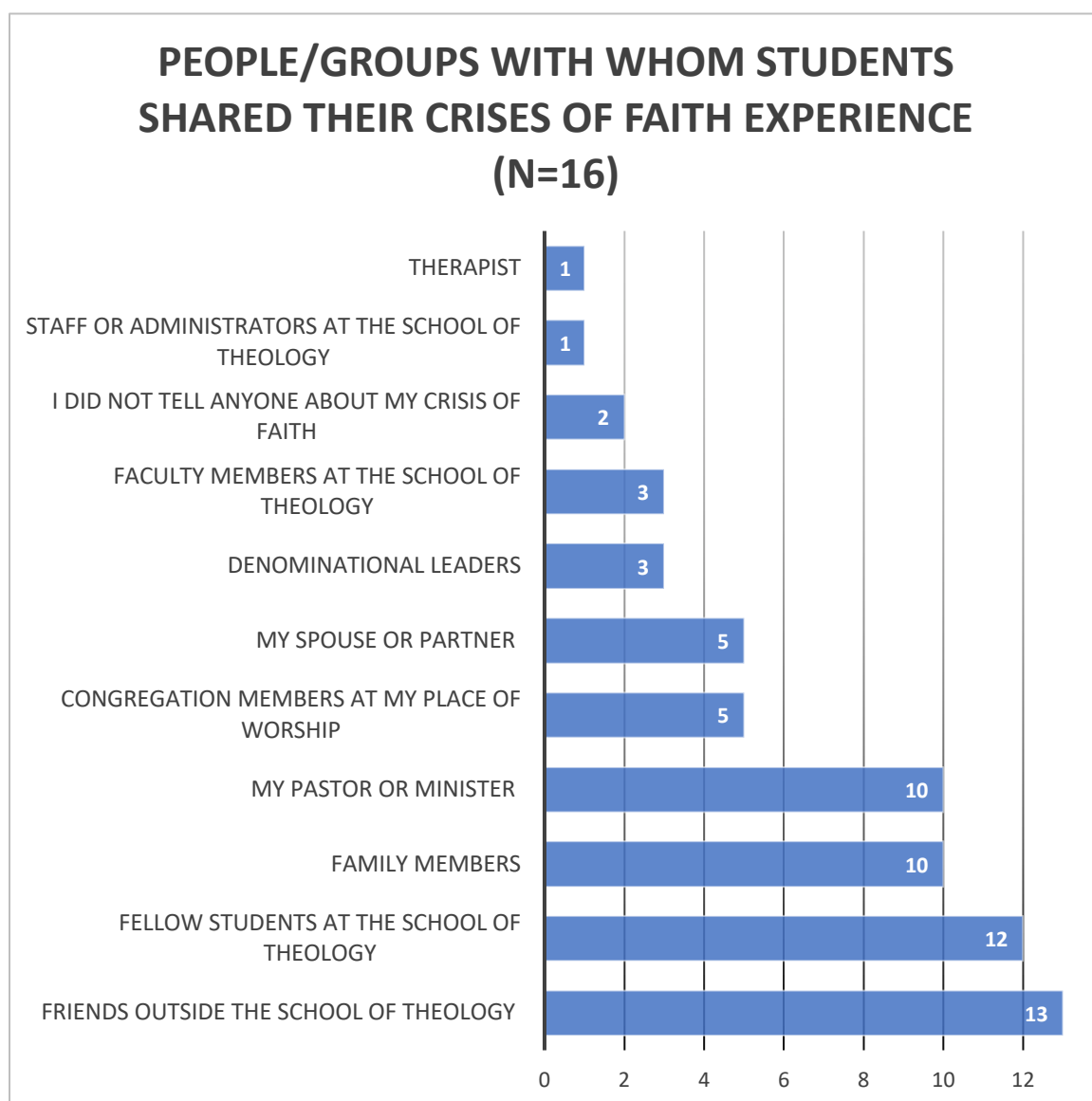
The final question of this section asked "Who did you tell about [your crisis of faith], if anyone?" Two students had not shared their crisis with anyone (11%). However, among the other 16 respondents they listed several conversation partners, who can be found in Figure 3.11.

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<sup>293</sup> Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Learning Theory," in *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, eds. Jack Mezirow and Edward W. Taylor (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 19.



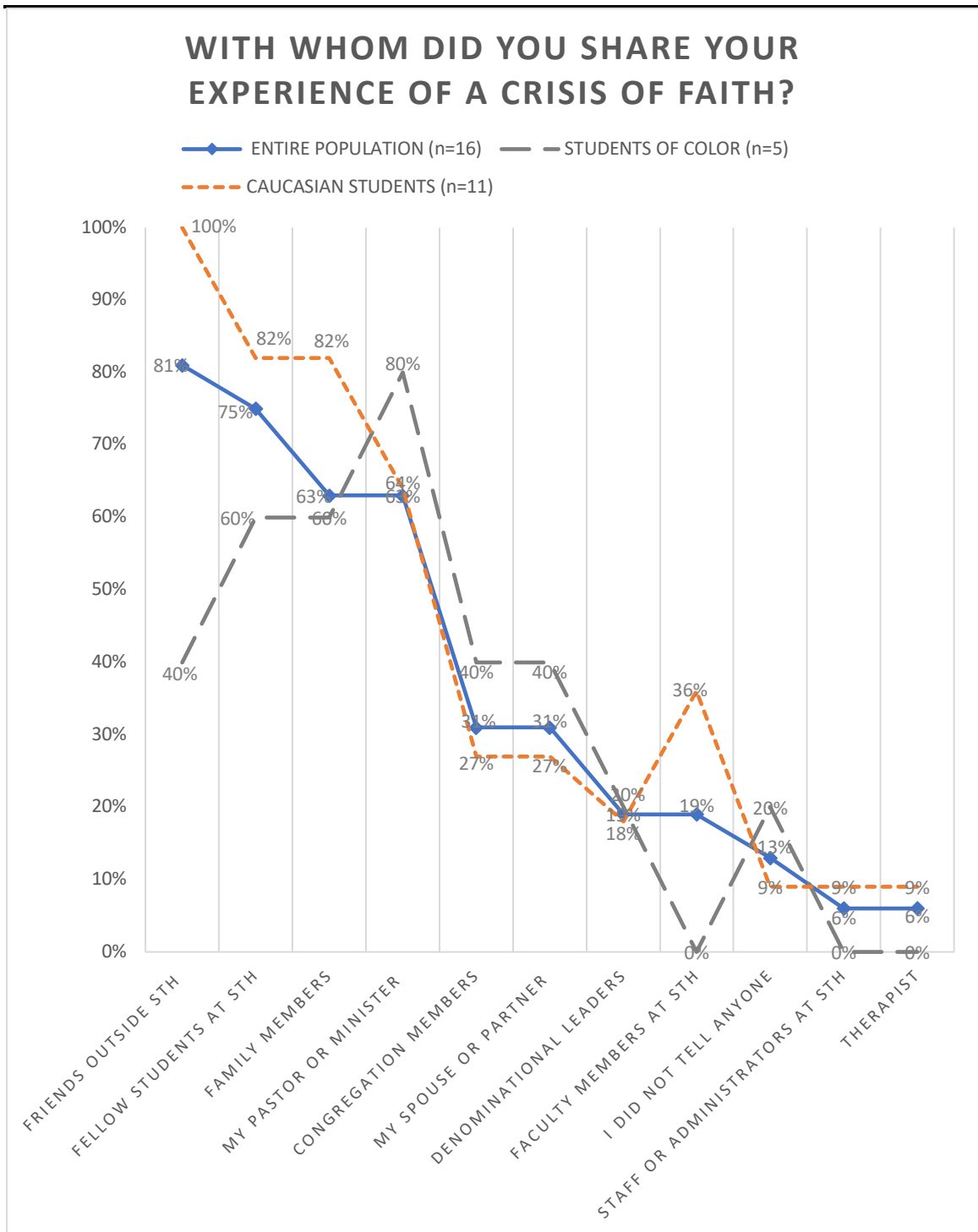
**Figure 3.11. With Whom Did Students Share Their Experience of Crises of Faith?**



These supportive people were a mix of academic and therapeutic professionals, family members, friends, and religious leaders with whom the students felt comfortable sharing their experiences of crises of faith. Those surveyed reported talking with 4.06 people or groups each, on average. This suggests that when students decide to talk to others about their crises of faith, they talk to many different people in their lives.

Breaking these responses down further into Students of Color and Caucasian Students shows some differences in approach to sharing their crisis of faith experience with others (Table 3.16). Though these findings will be examined, it is important to note that, when broken down by race and ethnicity, the sample sizes of these groups become small enough not to be reliable for generalization. As suggested previously, it would benefit theological educators to more thoroughly survey the crisis of faith experiences and reconciliation needs specifically for Students of Color. Still, just as race and ethnicity apparently influenced Questing and Spiritual Well-Being Scores, it also seems to affect how students reach out for support during crises of faith, and to whom.

**Table 3.16. Comparison of Students of Color and Caucasian Students by People/Groups with Whom They Shared Crises of Faith Experiences**



Of those who reported sharing their crises of faith with someone, there were 5 Students of Color and 11 Caucasian Students. Because the number of Students of Color completing this portion of the survey was half that of Caucasian Students, Table 3.16 is shown in percentages of these groups rather than actual numerical tallies. On average, Students of Color reached out to 3.4 people or groups, while Caucasian Students reached out to 4.45, or one more connection each. The biggest differences when comparing these two groups were that Caucasian students were more likely to reach out to School of Theology faculty and to friends both within and beyond the seminary, while Students of Color reported reaching out to their pastor and congregation members more often than the Caucasian Students did.

Again, it is difficult to make generalizations based on such small sample groups. Still, it is interesting to note that the Students of Color, who were shown above to have higher Spiritual Well-Being Scores, may also have stronger connections to their places of worship. Perhaps this is why they are more likely to call upon the people within their faith communities as conversation partners than those within the seminary, such as student peers or faculty. It could also be true that the shortcomings within the theological academy with regard to multicultural education<sup>294</sup> may leave Students of Color with fewer people at the seminary with whom they feel comfortable sharing their crises of faith.

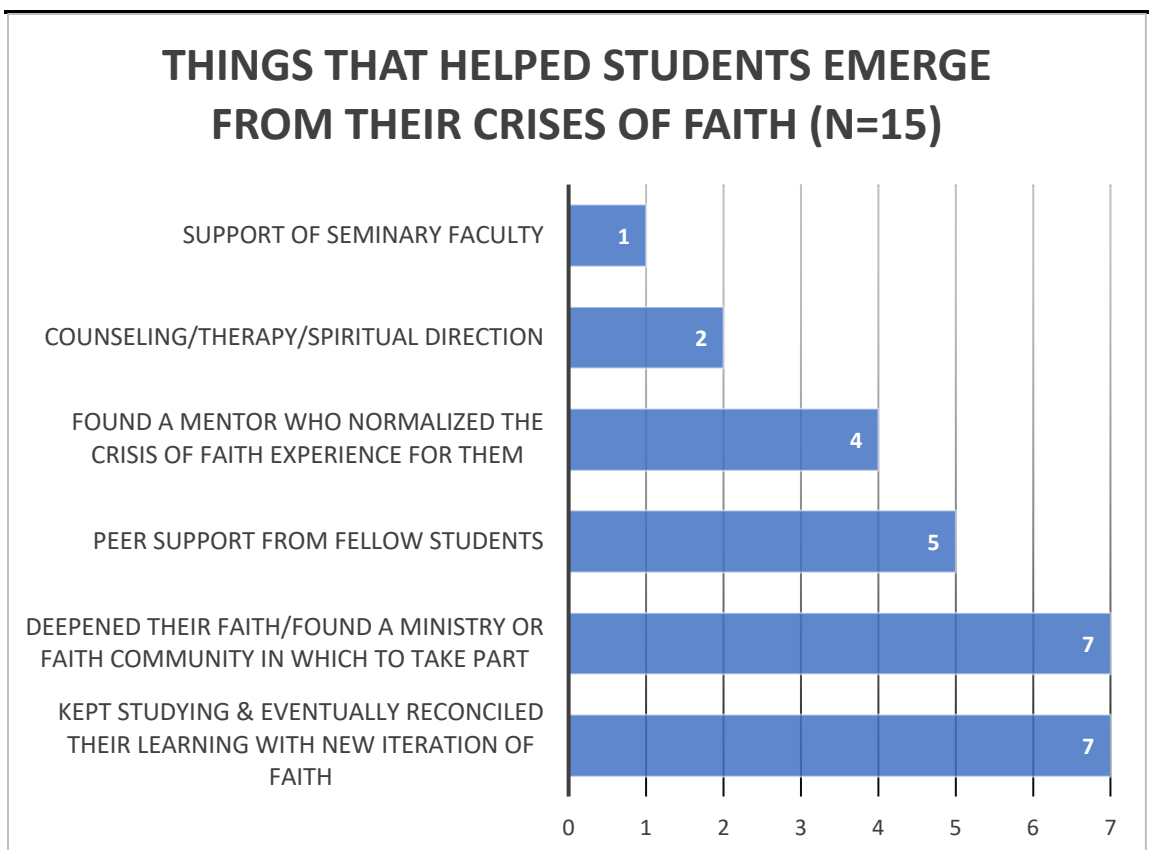
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<sup>294</sup> See the “Spiritual Formation and Multi-Cultural Theological Education” section of this study’s literature review.

*Crisis of Faith Reconciliation Process and Resulting Changes in Belief and Behavior*

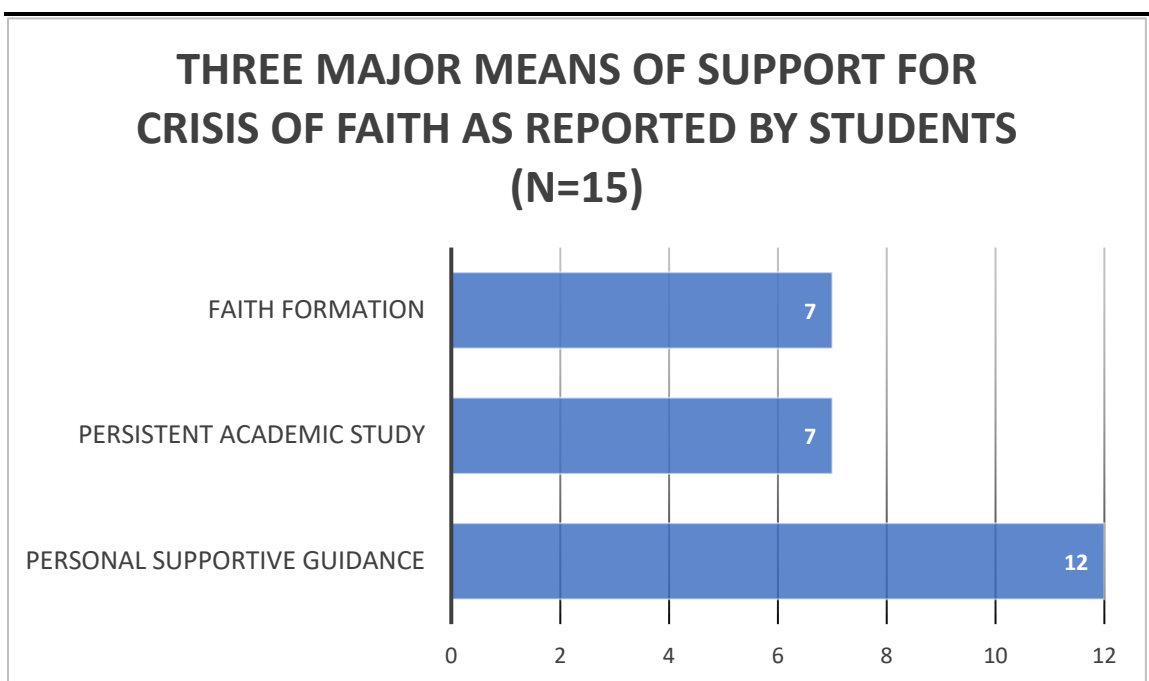
The 15 respondents who reported having emerged at some point from a crisis of faith cited different means of ameliorating this experience. Again, the survey included a qualitative, open-ended question, “If you have done so, what helped you emerge from your crisis of faith?” to generate the most candid responses from those surveyed. Six helpful areas emerged, and they are represented in Figure 3.12 by order of frequency.

**Figure 3.12. Things that Helped Students Emerge from Their Crises of Faith**



With 26 total responses, a majority of students cited more than one of these as helpful to their process of reconciliation, for an average of 1.7 per person. These responses could be arranged further into three primary Means of Support: Persistent Academic Study, Faith Formation, and Personal Supportive Guidance. This visual breakdown is offered in Figure 3.13.

**Figure 3.13. Three Major Areas of Crisis of Faith Help as Reported by Students**



Like the other findings, these three primary Means of Support intersect well with Transformative Learning Theory. They mirror some of the theory's "core elements," or those things that are considered essential to transformative

teaching and learning, as identified by Edward W. Taylor, a leading researcher in the Transformative Learning field.<sup>295</sup> Persistent Academic Study is akin to the core element of “Promoting Critical Reflection,” which includes examining one’s knowledge of content, the premises of what one knows, and the process of knowing itself.<sup>296</sup> These are all encountered in the classroom experience, and thus this is the most cognitive of the three Means of Support for crises of faith. Faith Formation is related to the “Holistic Orientation” core element within transformative teaching and learning, which encourages non-rational ways of knowing.<sup>297</sup> And, finally, Personal Supportive Guidance intersects with Transformative Learning Theory’s “Authentic Relationships” core element, which encourages productive and positive connections between learners and mentor-educators.<sup>298</sup>

The majority of the survey’s respondents (16 out of 18) reported changing certain previously-held beliefs and behaviors because of their crises of faith. They were asked multiple-choice questions and were able to select as many

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<sup>295</sup> Edward W. Taylor, “Fostering Transformative Learning,” in *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, ed. Jack Mezirow and Edward W. Taylor (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 4.

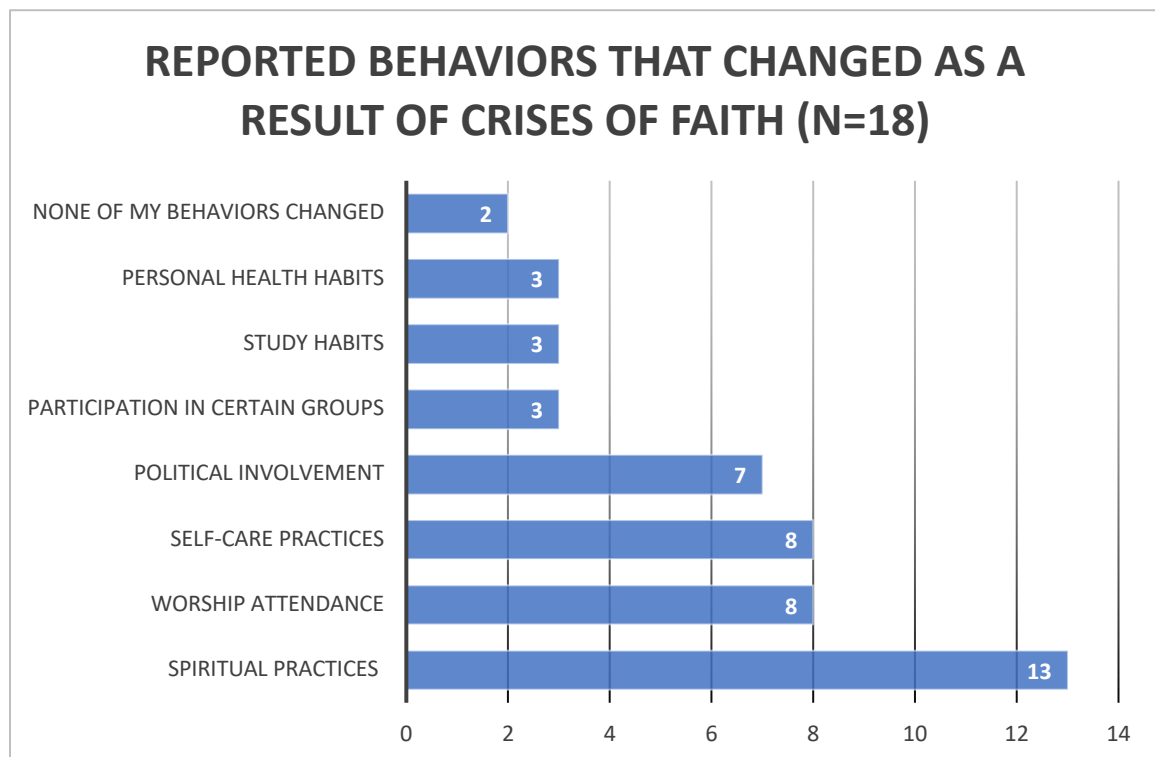
<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

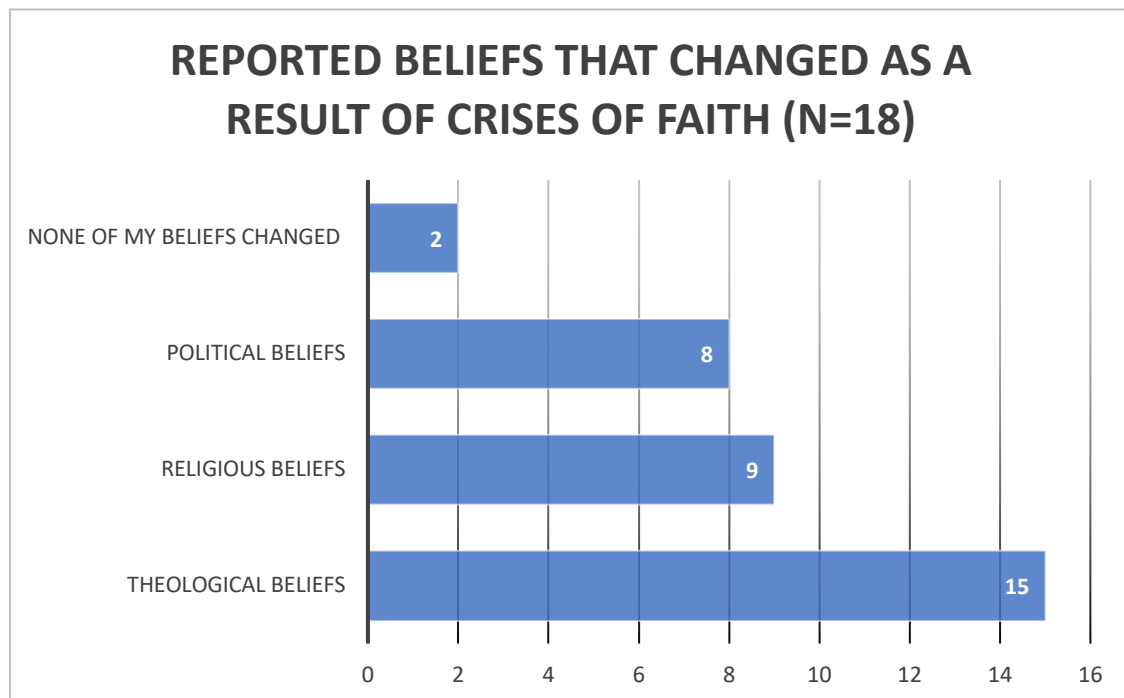
beliefs and behaviors as applied to them or type in their own. The frequency of responses can be found in Figures 3.14 and 3.15.

**Figure 3.14. Behaviors Students Reported Changed as a Result of Crises of Faith**





**Figure 3.15. Beliefs Students Reported Changed as a Result of Crises of Faith**



Two survey respondents (11% of the 18 who answered all questions about crises of faith) reported having neither their beliefs nor their behaviors change as a result of their crises of faith. The other 16 seminarians (89%) averaged a change of 3.1 behaviors and 2.1 beliefs each. Transformative Learning Theory again corroborates these shifts in beliefs and behaviors as a function of the educative process.

As described in the literature review of this study, Jack Mezirow, the founder of Transformative Learning Theory, proposed that at the heart of true

learning is “perspective transformation,” which is a function of incorporating new information and experiences into previously-held worldviews; he considered this change the necessary backbone of adult educational endeavors.<sup>299</sup> However, some scholars argued his theory placed too much emphasis on the cognitive function of learning,<sup>300</sup> and, building on Mezirow’s theoretical foundations, suggested that the integration of new behaviors is also central to true transformation.<sup>301</sup> The current study’s findings that a vast majority of those undergoing crises of faith changed both beliefs and behaviors substantiates the idea that meaning-making happens as a result of both reflection and practice.

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<sup>299</sup> Jack Mezirow, “Understanding Transformative Theory,” *Adult Education Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 222-232.

<sup>300</sup> Taylor, “Building Upon Theoretical Debate,” 34-60.

<sup>301</sup> Elizabeth Saavedra, “Teachers Study Groups: Contexts for Transformative Learning and Action,” *Theory Into Practice* 35, no. 4 (Autumn 1996): 274.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – SURVEY OF STUDENT AFFAIRS AND STUDENT SERVICES PERSONNEL (SASSPs) IN THEOLOGICAL HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **Rationale for Surveying Seminary SASSPs**

This study's literature review suggests that seminary SASSPs have not been studied very often as a distinct professional group within theological higher education. The accrediting body for theological education in North America, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), has not kept data on who these staff and administrators are since 1989. As such, little is known about seminary SASSPs other than their compensation levels as an overall portion of the fiscal responsibilities of each institution.<sup>302</sup> Yet, as seminary student enrollment shifts toward increased diversity, denominational resources and institutional budgets dwindle, and technological shifts in learning demand innovative student formation opportunities, now is the time for seminaries to maximize the usefulness of each person on their payrolls. It could be that seminary SASSPs are an under-utilized professional group within theological education, and that they could be

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<sup>302</sup> See the "Non-Faculty Student Affairs and Student Services Professionals within Theological Higher Education" section of the literature review, in which it was discussed that the ATS stopped collecting demographic data such as age, race, and gender of staff and non-faculty administrative professionals in 1989, moving to only collecting overall compensation levels of this group. And, though ATS does provide an annual conference for its "Student Personnel Administrators," the conversations there are primarily concerned with policy and job function rather than incorporating SASSPs into the learning goals of the institution, as occurs in secular higher education student affairs.

particularly helpful with regard to supporting students through crises of faith, as a co-curricular function of seminary learning.

This theory is backed by the two decades' worth of research that has occurred in secular higher education's student affairs field. Student affairs has become a specialized discipline with professional membership organizations, peer-reviewed journals, and national conferences. To promote "academic support" is secular student affairs' primary professional goal.<sup>303</sup> Either this research from the secular student affairs discipline has not been on the radar of theological educators, or it has been ignored. As such, it is likely that in many seminaries SASSPs are neither held to the professional development standards of training and expertise that their secular counterparts are, nor are they thought of as viable partners for co-curricular academic programming in consultation with faculty. There is an opportunity for seminary SASSPs to be professionalized in the same way that this career cohort has been within secular higher education. Doing so could build upon existing student affairs research, but grow the field with particular attention to the unique formational needs of students within theological education. I believe the care of seminarians facing crises of faith

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<sup>303</sup> American College Personnel Association, *Student Learning Imperative*. And College Student Educators International (ACPA), "Trends and Issues in Academic Support: 2016 -2017," *Commission for Academic Support within Higher Education Monograph* (Washington, D.C.: ACPA, Winter 2016/Spring 2017), accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.myacpa.org/sites/default/files/ACPA%20CASHE%20Monograph%20FINAL.PDF>.

would be an excellent starting place for such seminary SASSP professionalization and research, as it is a pervasive issue within theological education that needs improvement.<sup>304</sup>

But, to begin, one must know who seminary SASSPs are, personally and professionally. Understanding their career trajectories and vocational goals, as well as their personal backgrounds, can help establish whether this group of people are viable partners in the task of student academic support within seminaries. If so, this would provide further support for the idea of incorporating them into the educational mission of seminaries, just as student affairs professionals have been within secular higher education institutions. The current study hoped to gather enough information about seminary SASSPs to show that their involvement in the educational mission of their institutions could be useful, especially with regard to supporting students through crises of faith. This research might also provide a glimpse of the kind of data available to the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), should it begin to once again systemically research SASSPs and provide resources for their professionalization as a cohort within theological education. Such attention could help institutions of theological education innovate their co-curricular endeavors

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<sup>304</sup> In the current study's survey of Millennial MDiv seminarians, spiritual formation offerings were marked both lowest in student satisfaction and the area in which students would most like additional support. Similarly, statistics from ATS's 2016-17 Graduating Students Questionnaire show "spiritual growth during seminary" as the lowest of all satisfaction areas. See Deasy, "GSQ Webinar: 2016-17."

and better support student needs while also attending more systemically to the professional development of SASSPs.

### **Data Collected from the Survey of Seminary SASSPs<sup>305</sup>**

A Qualtrics survey was sent to 135 SASSPs working in theological education at a variety of ATS-accredited Mainline Protestant institutions across the United States. The survey received 45 responses (33% response rate), but one of these surveys was too insufficiently completed for use within the data set. This left an overall N=44. Respondents first read the disclosure statement and gave their informed consent to participate in the study. They then completed sections of questions on personal demographics, religious affiliations, educational background, and current professional status.

#### *Gender and Sexual Orientation*

The gender and sexual orientation of all respondents can be found in Table 4.1. Out of 44 total SASSPs, 30 were female (68%) and 14 were male (32%). None of the respondents reported as gender non-conforming. Within the group, 11 (25%) self-identified as members of the LGBTQIA community.

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<sup>305</sup> Throughout the data analysis, all percentages were round to the nearest whole number. As such, in some instances the total of each area does not equal a perfect 100%.

**Table 4.1. Gender and Sexuality of Respondents (N=44)**


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<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	30	68%
Male	14	32%
Gender Non-Conforming	0	0%
LGBTQIA	11	25%

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Since ATS currently does not keep statistics on the gender or sexual orientation of non-faculty staff and administrators, there is no way to know if this breakdown mirrors the national average.

#### *Age*

The ages varied greatly among the 44 SASSPs. The youngest age reported was 24, and 60 was the oldest. The average age of all respondents was 38.33 years old with a median age of 36. Women responding to the survey (average age 34.67) were on the whole younger than the men who responded (average age 40.71). Again, the lack of data on SASSPs leaves this survey at a loss to determine whether these are in line with national averages at seminaries.

### *Race, Ethnicity, and Country of Citizenship*

All of the 44 respondents were United States citizens, which is interesting to note given the fact that international student presence within theological schools continues to grow.<sup>306</sup> Yet, as anyone who has tried to do so knows, it is easier to secure a U.S. visa for study than one for full-time employment, unless one is a highly-skilled worker in a specific area. Perhaps the types of positions held by SASSPs do not often qualify international persons for work visas. Still, it is important for seminaries to imagine ways to have global voices represented within their staff. After all, per ATS's *General Institutional Standards*, "administrative leaders and staff shall include, insofar as possible, individuals reflecting the institution's constituencies."<sup>307</sup> If institutions seek to serve all students, a variety of staff and administrative backgrounds is preferable, including those from outside the United States.

Despite the lack of global diversity among the SASSPs surveyed, there was better representation with regard to the racial and ethnic backgrounds of respondents (32% non-Caucasian, 68% Caucasian). However, these still fall below the diversity represented in the overall ATS seminary student body, which

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<sup>306</sup> Brown and Meinzer, "New Data."

<sup>307</sup> Association of Theological Schools, *General Institutional Standards*, 23.



stands at 41%.<sup>308</sup> The comparison of respondents based on race and ethnicity can be found in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2. Race and Ethnicity of Respondents (N=44)**

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<b>Race or Ethnicity</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Caucasian/White	30	68%
Hispanic/Latinx	2	5%
African-American/Black	7	16%
Asian-American/Asian	2	5%
Native American/American Indian	1	2%
Multi-Racial	2	5%
TOTALS		
Total Non-Caucasian	14	32%
Total Caucasian	30	68%

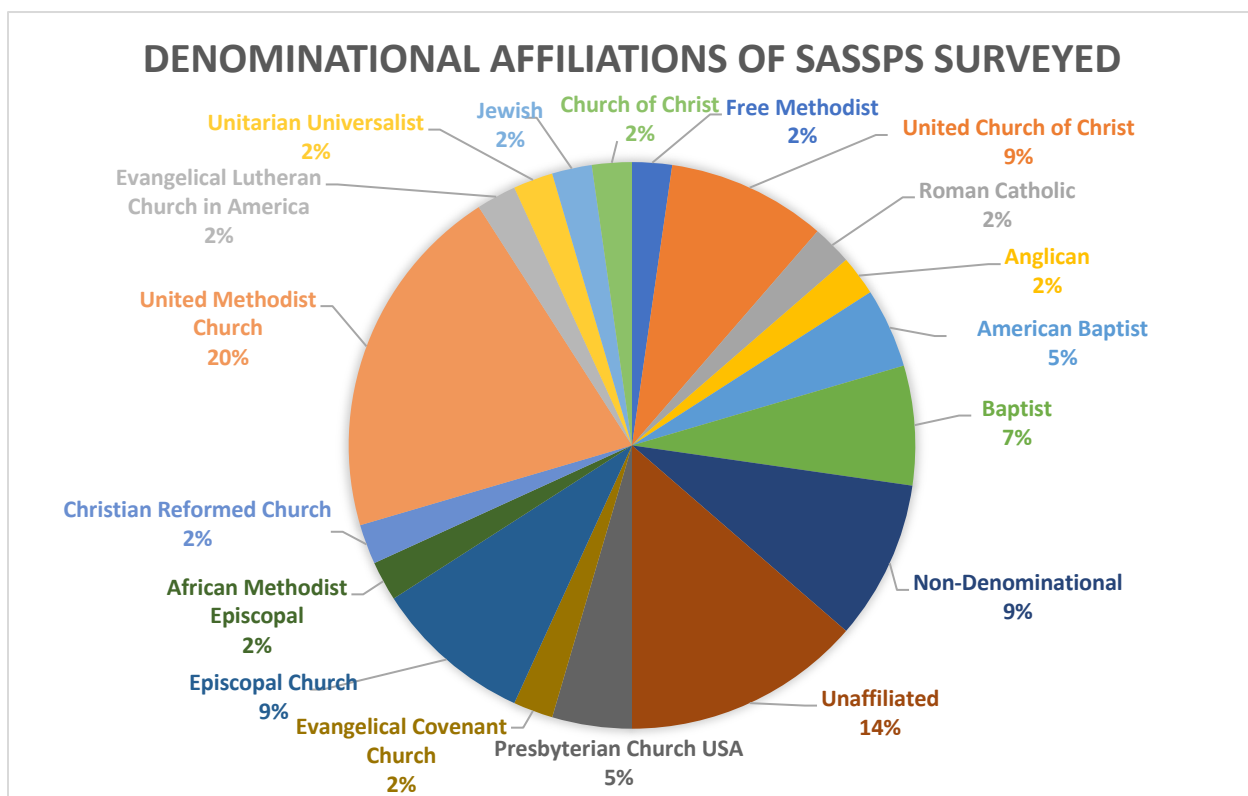
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<sup>308</sup> Brown and Meinzer, "New Data."

### *Religious Affiliation*

Just as do the students at Mainline Protestant seminaries, the SASSPs surveyed represented a wide variety of religious and denominational affiliations. The full breakdown is represented in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1. Denominational Affiliations of SASSPs Surveyed**



By grouping the many Mainline Protestant traditions together, this becomes the largest denominational category represented among respondents (54%). It makes sense that this would be the largest group, given that the survey

focused on SASSPs employed within Mainline Protestant seminaries. The next largest group were those who are unaffiliated with any church or denomination (14%), followed by those in non-denominational churches (9%). Table 4.3 shows the length of time the SASSPs have been affiliated with their denomination, and a vast majority (26 individuals, or 70%) have been members for 10 years or longer.

**Table 4.3. Number of Years Affiliated with Their Denomination or Faith Community (N=37)**

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<b>Number of Years</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 to 3 years	4	11%
4 to 9 years	7	19%
10+ years	26	70%

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Considering that the median age of respondents was 36, this means that many SASSPs have been “church-goers” since at least young adulthood. Of those who named a denominational affiliation, 16 of them (42%) stated they were planning to be ordained in their tradition or already were. The other 22 of them (58%) had no plans to be ordained. By and large, the statistics suggest that

these SASSPs are people who live out their faith in practice as members of religious communities.

### *Educational Background*

One of the most surprising things learned from this survey is how well-educated seminary SASSPs are, and that a vast majority (84%) hold a previous theological degree. The average number of degrees held by the SASSPs was 1.98, meaning that almost all respondents had both their undergraduate degree and a subject master's degree. Again, 36 out of the 43 responding SASSPs (84%) held a previous theological degree, while only 7 (16%) did not. Table 4.4 shows the types of theological degrees held, and Table 4.5 breaks the responses down further to show exactly which seminary degrees respondents have. In these tables, the total number of degrees reported is higher than the total number of respondents because several people hold more than one degree in religion or theology. It is interesting to note that among SASSP who hold a theological doctoral degree (N=5), all have the Doctor of Ministry degree rather than a Doctor of Philosophy.

**Table 4.4. Level of Theological Education Degrees Held by the Seminary SASSPs (N=43)**

<b>Type of Theological Degree</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Undergraduate Major in Religion or Theology	12	28%
Undergraduate Minor in Religion or Theology	3	7%
Previous Master's Degree in Religion or Theology	34	79%
Previous Doctoral Degree in Religion or Theology	5	12%

**Table 4.5. Frequency of Seminary Degrees Held by SASSPs with Theological Training (N=32)**

<b>Degree Held</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Master of Divinity	22	69%
Master of Arts or Master of Theological Studies	11	34%
Master of Sacred Theology or Master of Theology	1	3%
Doctor of Ministry	5	16%

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that so many SASSPs surveyed hold theological degrees, since they are working in theological higher education. Yet the fact that they do helps make the case that these are well-trained people, the majority of whom have walked the same educational journey as the students with whom they work daily. This lends further credence to the suggestion that seminary SASSPs may be useful collaborators with faculty in the area of student support for crises of faith.

### **Vocational Goals Then and Now**

The SASSPs who had attended seminary were asked to describe their vocational goals during their theological higher education years. Table 4.6 shows the breakdown of what they described.

**Table 4.6. SASSP Vocational Plans During Their Seminary Study (N=36)**

<b>Vocational Plan</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Pastoral Ministry	15	42%
Professor teaching Theology or Religion	11	31%
Non-profit Leader	4	11%
University Chaplain	3	8%

Higher Education Administrator	3	8%
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These percentages are far more weighted toward academic occupations than the vocational aspirations of most graduating seminarians, as reported within the most recent *ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire Total School Profile*.<sup>309</sup> If taken together, the number of seminary SASSPs who planned to work in higher education (N=14) nearly equal those who wanted to work in pastoral ministry (N=15). Further research would be needed to determine why those who sought to be professors ended up in SASSP roles within theological higher education. Perhaps they “settled” for their current positions given the decline of tenure-track teaching jobs in the theological academy,<sup>310</sup> discerned a new vocational path once in the administrative field, or still plan to pursue a research doctorate in the future and go on to teach.

A related question posed to the SASSPs was whether their current position fulfilled their sense of vocational calling. Of 42 respondents 19 (45%) said their current position did fulfill their vocational calling, and another 7 (17%) said it partially did. However, over one-third of the SASSPs (16, or 38%) said that

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<sup>309</sup> Deasy, “GSQ Webinar: 2016-17.”

<sup>310</sup> Tom Tanner, “Tenure and Other Faculty Facts at ATS Member Schools: Part 1” (presentation for the ATS Commission on Accrediting, June 26, 2015), accessed October 22, 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/tenure-and-other-faculty-facts-part-1.pdf>.

their current position did not fulfill their vocational calling. These 16 folks were asked, “Then why do you stay in the position?” Table 4.7 lists their responses by frequency.

**Table 4.7. Of Those Unfulfilled Vocationally by their SASSP Position, What Makes Them Stay in the Job? (N=12)**

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<b>Reason for Staying in Current Position</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Good fit for my interests now	5	42%
Financial Stability or Benefits	3	25%
I am, or my spouse is, finishing another degree at this institution.	3	25%
Can't find another job	1	8%

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### **Membership in National Professional Associations**

Though the SASSPs surveyed work specifically in theological higher education, membership in secular professional student affairs and student services organizations is open to them. Such membership would provide excellent resources for continuing professional education in the field. However, given that the vast majority of the survey respondents were educated within



theological higher education, I expected that few SASSPs would know or take advantage of these secular student affairs resources. This suspicion was borne out by the data. Table 4.8 shows that, of the 44 respondents, 32 (73%) had no professional affiliations, 10 (23%) had one affiliation, and 2 (5%) had two affiliations. Table 4.9 shows the organizational memberships of those who are affiliated with them (N=12).

**Table 4.8. Number of Professional Affiliations Among SASSPs (N=44)**

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<b>Number of Professional Affiliations</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
None	32	73%
One Affiliation or Membership	10	23%
Two Affiliations or Memberships	2	5%

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**Table 4.9. Professional Organizations Where SASSPs Hold Membership****(N=12)**


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NASPA	4	
American Association of Collegiate Registrars & Admissions Officers (AACRAO)	4	
NAGAP	3	
Association of Fundraising Professionals	1	
NACE	1	
National Campus Ministry Association (NCMA)	1	

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It is worth noting that 4 of the SASSPs responded that they belonged to the Student Personnel Administrators Network (SPAN) of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). However, this is not an official professional membership organization but rather a yearly conference gathering for this career cohort organized by ATS. In reality, all the SASSPs surveyed would technically have access to SPAN. However, since SPAN is not officially a professional membership organization, it was not counted among the affiliation responses.

It is unsurprising but disappointing that so few SASSPs belong to the many available professional organizations within secular student affairs and student services, since they are excellent resources for professional development. When asked why they do not belong to these groups, the 26 who responded listed several reasons, as shown by frequency in Table 4.10.

**Table 4.10. Reasons Seminary SASSPs Named for Not Belonging to a Professional Membership Organization (N=36)**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
My institution does not encourage such memberships for staff members like myself.	15	42%
I do not have enough money in my budget to dedicate to membership costs for professional associations.	10	28%
I was not aware there were national professional associations for administrators in higher education.	7	19%
Even if I became a member, I would not have time to utilize the resources of the professional organization.	3	8%

I do not feel membership in national professional associations would help me in my current position.	2	6%
I do not feel membership in national professional associations would help me in my professional development.	2	6%
Don't know which to join	1	3%

It was good to see that only 7 of those responding (19%) said they were unaware of the professional membership associations for higher education administrators. Though that represents one-fifth of the SASSPs, I feared that number would have been much higher. It seems that, rather than a lack of knowledge, it is institutional culture that keeps the majority from joining. Almost half of the respondents, 15 (42%), said that their seminary does not encourage memberships among staff, and 10 (28%) reported that their budgets could not accommodate the membership costs. Together those total 70% of the reasons named why SASSPs are without professional affiliations. What a difference it could make if seminaries encouraged SASSPs to join membership associations as part of their professional development and also provided them the resources to do so. Again, such a change could help SASSPs become, as their secular counterparts often are, valued academic support staff.

## Current Professional Role & Length of Time in Higher Education

### *Level of Position and Area of Responsibility*

Seminaries vary their position titles widely. Sometimes a “Dean-level” position at one institution is a “Vice President-level” position elsewhere. Titles are affected by institutional culture, size, and tradition. And so, to make sure like jobs were grouped together, the survey asked respondents to both name their title and describe its professional level within their institution. From there, they were asked their area of responsibility. Collectively, the respondents (N=36) ranged the entire gamut of positions from Clerical to Deans. The majority of SASSP respondents (19 individuals, or 53%) were mid-level administrators at the Director level or equivalent. The areas of professional responsibility among the SASSPs were even more varied. The largest numbers were in Admissions/Recruitment (36%) and Registration/Enrollment (25%). The full breakdown is offered in Tables 4.11 and 4.12.

**Table 4.11. Level of Professional Position Within the Institution Among SASSPs (N=36)**

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Level of Position	Frequency	Percentage
Vice President or Dean	7	19%

Director (including Assistant or Associate)	19	53%
Officer or Coordinator	7	19%
Clerical or Secretarial	3	8%

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**Table 4.12. Area of SASSPs Professional Responsibility Within the Institution (N=36)**

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<b>Area of Responsibility</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Recruitment or Admissions	13	36%
Enrollment or Registration Services	9	25%
Student Affairs, Community Life, or Spiritual Life	4	11%
Academic Program Management	3	8%
Office Management	3	8%
Development or Alumni Relations	2	6%
Financial Aid	2	6%

---

The various position levels and areas of responsibility among the surveyed SASSPs was encouraging. It means that the survey's intention of

gathering data from a wide range of SASSPs was successful. The range of the surveyed SASSPs' professional roles means that the data in this study is likely representative of seminary non-faculty staff and administrators as a whole, not just those in one certain area or level of employment.

*Length of Time Serving in Current Role and Overall in Theological Higher Education*

On average, the SASSPs surveyed had been in their current position for 4 years, but responses ranged from 15 years to only three months. The median length was 2 years. Out of 39 people responding to this question, only 12 (31%) had been in their position for 5 years or more. This seems to represent a rather high rate of turnover, which would correlate with turnover and satisfaction data from surveys of secular SASSPs.<sup>311</sup> However, when asked their total years in theological higher education, the numbers stabilized a bit more. Table 4.13 shows the length of time the SASSPs have spent in theological higher education over the course of their careers.

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<sup>311</sup> Approximately half of new student affairs professionals leave the field within 5 years. See Sarah M. Marshall et al., "Attrition from Student Affairs: Perspectives from Those Who Exited the Profession," *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 53, no. 2 (May 2016): 146. For a discussion of why the turnover rate is so high, see Barbara E. Bender, "Job Satisfaction in Student Affairs," *NASPA Journal* 46, no. 4 (2009): 553-566. And Ashley Tull, "Synergistic Supervision, Job Satisfaction, and Intention to Turnover of New Professionals in Student Affairs," *Journal of College Student Development* 47, no. 4 (July/August 2006): 465-480.

**Table 4.13. Overall Length of Time SASSPs Have Been in Theological Higher Education (N=42)**

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<b>Number of Years</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
0 – 4 years	19	45%
5 – 10 years	11	26%
11 – 31 years	12	29%

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From these numbers, it becomes clear that many of the SASSPs responding have stayed in theological higher education for quite some time, working their way through various professional positions. Given the relatively young age of most respondents (median of 36 years old), and that a wide majority (79%) hold a seminary degree, it is likely that many SASSPs began their work in theological higher education shortly after their own degrees ended. For many, it is likely the only place of professional employment they have known. This further reinforces the idea that many seminary SASSPs are insiders to the theological education conversation, having navigated it first as students themselves, but also serving within the field.



## **Job Satisfaction**

The next section of the survey queried respondents' satisfaction levels with ten aspects of their current employment within theological education. The SASSPs were asked to respond on a Likert-type scale ranging from Extremely Satisfied (5) to Extremely Dissatisfied (1). This means that the higher the overall score, the more satisfied the respondent was with that aspect of their work life. Figure 4.2 charts the overall satisfaction levels of each aspect when averaging the responses of all surveyed SASSPs (N=43).

### **Figure 4.2. Respondents' Overall Satisfaction with Aspects of Current Employment (N=43)**

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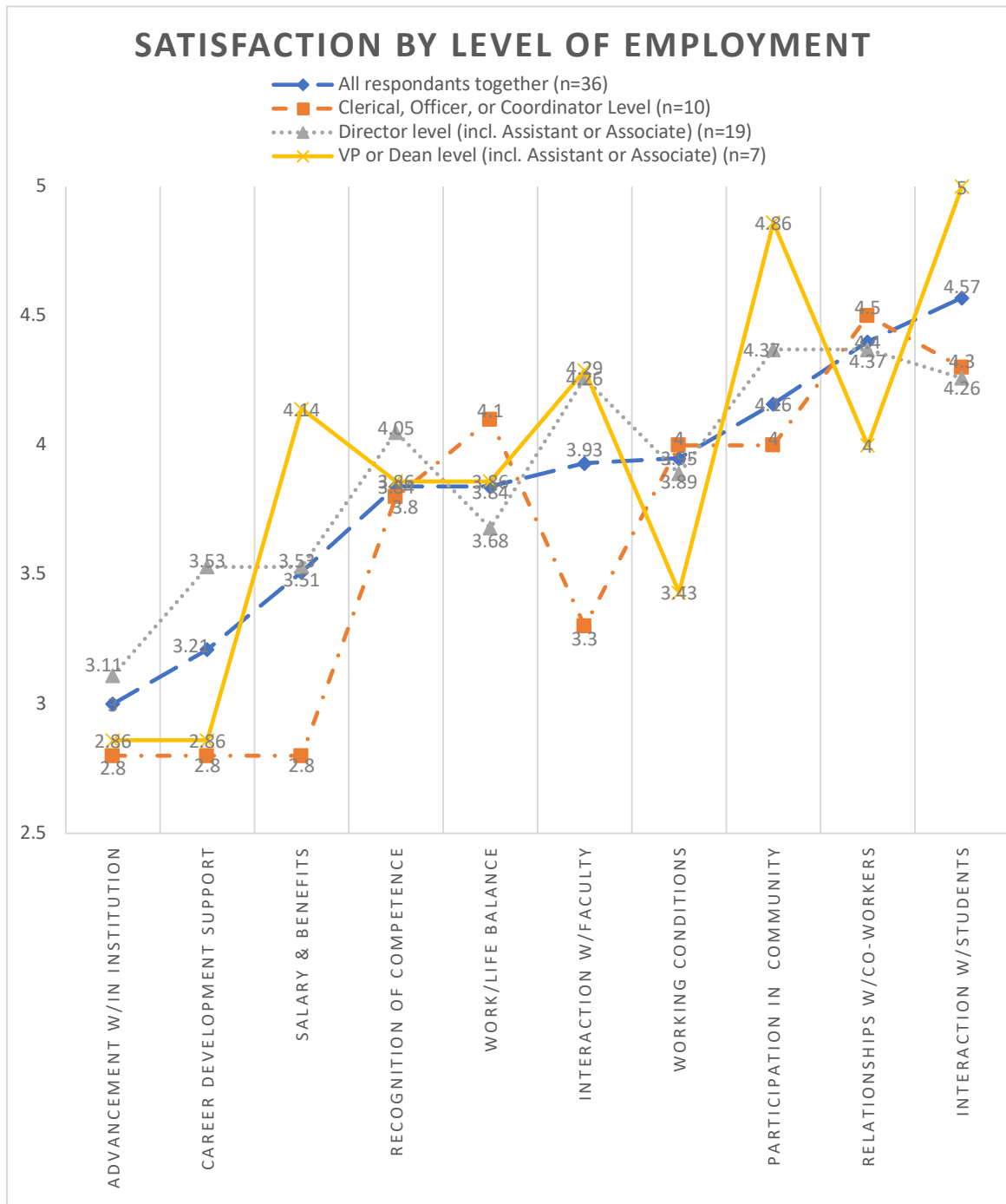


Overall, the SASSPs seem to be fairly satisfied with their employment within theological higher education. None of the average responses dipped into “dissatisfied” scores. Still, it is interesting that the lowest-ranked aspects of employment were all related to professional advancement and feeling valued by the institution, while the highest-ranked aspects were all relational in nature. Respondents were least satisfied with “Opportunities for Advancement within the

Institution” (average score of 3.0), “Career Development Support” (average score of 3.21), “Salary/Benefits” (average score of 3.51), and “Recognition of Competence” (average score of 3.84). They were most satisfied with “Interactions with Students” (average score of 4.57), “Relationships with Co-Workers” (average score of 4.4), and “Participation in Seminary Community” (average score of 4.16). These responses further indicate the need for professional development resources to be extended toward seminary SASSPs, whose satisfaction levels might rise with such support.

The data is further clarified by averaging satisfaction scores by each level of employment, and this can be found in Figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3. Satisfaction with Aspects of Current Employment by Professional Level of Respondents (N=43)**



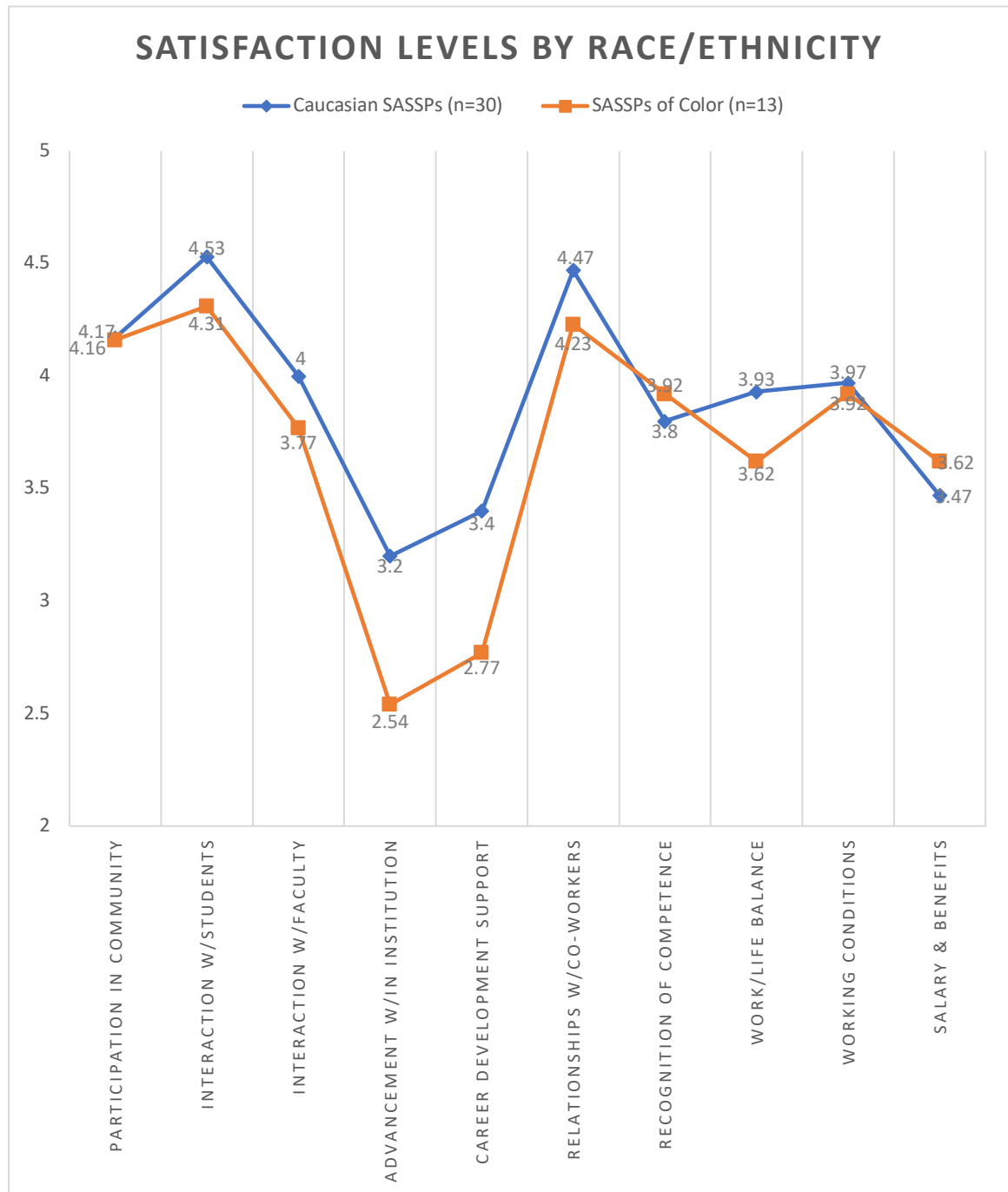
Breaking the SASSPs' job satisfaction down by professional level shows that the Director-level respondents had much higher satisfaction scores for both "Opportunities for Advancement within the Institution" and "Career Development Support" than did their Clerical-level or VP/Dean-level colleagues, who reported overall dissatisfaction in these two areas. It could be that Directors, as mid-level administrators, have more resources of budget or time than their Clerical and VP/Dean counterparts, and can therefore take better advantage of professional support and growth opportunities. The widest gaps arose in "Salary and Benefits" where it is no surprise that naturally higher-paid VP/Dean-level SASSPs have markedly higher satisfaction (4.34 average score) than their Director (3.53 average score) or Clerical (2.8 average score) colleagues.

There are differences in satisfaction for "Interaction with Faculty," as well. Clerical-level SASSPs report much lower scores (3.3 average score) in this area than those SASSPs either at the Director-level (4.26 average score) or VP/Dean-level (4.29 average score). One cannot tell from the data why this is the case. It could be that Clerical-level SASSPs have less collaborative interaction with seminary faculty and more functionary interactions, which could be less-satisfying relationally. Further research into this question is needed to determine exactly why Clerical-level SASSPs report less satisfaction with faculty interactions than their colleagues at other professional levels. Finally, while "Participation in the Seminary Community" and "Interactions with Students" rank as highly satisfying for all levels of employment, it seems they are particularly

important to VP/Dean-level SASSPs. Almost everyone in this professional level ranked these areas of employment the highest score, “Extremely Satisfying.”

A final arrangement of the respondents’ satisfaction data by race/ethnicity shows some important differences, as well. This breakdown can be seen in Figure 4.4.

**Figure 4.4. Satisfaction with Aspects of Current Employment by Race/Ethnicity (N=43)**



There were too few respondents in the current survey to generalize satisfaction-levels for each individual racial/ethnic group. This is unfortunate because such data could yield valuable information with regard to supporting increased satisfaction and inclusion within multi-cultural seminary workforces. The current survey's job satisfaction data was therefore broken into the problematic groupings "Caucasian SASSPs" and "SASSPs of Color." This is not ideal because it treats all non-white people as a monolithic group. Knowing this is not the case, it is still helpful to notice differences between these two groups with regard to job satisfaction, and is the best the current survey can do with its limited data pool. Future research could rectify this issue by raising the number of respondents to a level where each non-majority racial or ethnic group could be represented on its own.

As can be seen by Figure 4.4, the two groups track with one another fairly closely regarding which aspects of the job are most and least satisfying. However, the Caucasian group was almost always slightly more professionally satisfied than the SASSPs of Color. The biggest gaps between the two groups occurred with regard to "Advancement Opportunities within the Institution" and "Career Development Support." In both of these cases, the SASSPs of Color were appreciably less satisfied than their Caucasian colleagues were. This difference in satisfaction level based on racial/ethnic background is troubling, and it is worth remembering that student satisfaction levels, found in Chapter 3 of this study, also varied with regard to race and ethnicity. As mentioned then, articles



from ATS and theological educators suggest that seminaries have a long way to go with regard to being fully integrative of multi-cultural pedagogy, scholarship, and community life.<sup>312</sup> Though research to date has focused on classroom learning and the student experience, it is likely that SASSPs of Color within theological higher education are not immune to the microaggressions and alienation that non-Caucasian faculty and students report.<sup>313</sup> This may help explain why seminary SASSPs of Color respond to the survey with slightly lower overall professional satisfaction than their Caucasian colleagues did.

To see if their job satisfaction would lead the respondents to stay within theological education or seek employment elsewhere, they were asked the following two questions, “How long do you plan to stay in your current position?” and “Do you intend to stay within theological higher education until retirement?” The results of these questions can be found in Tables 4.14 and 4.15.

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<sup>312</sup> Aleshire and Boyd, “ATS Work on Race,” v.-vi. And Association of Theological Schools, *Folio*, 1-45.

<sup>313</sup> Cascante-Gómez, “Advancing Racial/Ethnic Diversity,” 21-39. And Lee, Shields, and Oh, “Empowerment or Disempowerment?,” 93-105.

**Table 4.14. How Long Respondents Plan to Stay in Their Current Position****(N=43)**


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<b>Length of Time</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
I am currently looking/less than 1 year	9	21%
One to three years	18	42%
Four to nine years	14	33%
Ten years or above	1	2%
Unknown	1	2%

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**Table 4.15. Do the Respondents Plan to Stay in Theological Higher Education Until Retirement? (N=43)**


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<b>Do you plan to stay in theological higher education until retirement?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes, definitely	3	7%
Yes, probably so	6	14%
Unsure	23	53%
No, probably not	7	16%
No, definitely not	4	9%

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It makes sense that the majority of people are unsure whether they plan to stay in theological higher education until their retirement. Being that the average age of respondents is fairly young (38 years old), most of those surveyed have a long time to go before retirement. That said, it is noteworthy that most of the SASSPs intend to move positions fairly soon, either within the next few months (21%) or within one to three years (42%). Considering that these same respondents ranked “Opportunities for Advancement within the Institution” their lowest overall aspect of satisfaction, it could be that the SASSPs are unsure whether they will stay within theological higher education because they do not know whether they will find opportunities for professional advancement therein. If seminaries would like to keep their most productive SASSPs they will need to continue to work toward improved professional development and advancement opportunities for them.

### **Experiences with Student Crises of Faith**

The final section of the seminary SASSP survey asked the respondents about their experiences with students within their institutions having crises of faith. This section began with the same definition of “crisis of faith” as was relayed to the Millennial MDiv students in their survey (found in Chapter 3). All of the SASSPs (100%) responded that they adequately understood this concept, and 40 out of 43 (93%) stated that they had known a student to have a crisis of

faith at their institution. This large number, paired with the 76% of Millennial MDiv students who reported having a crisis of faith in that survey,<sup>314</sup> reinforces this study's theory that crises of faith are a frequent phenomenon in theological higher education. Also, as mentioned previously, the SASSPs who were surveyed ranged in professional roles from Clerical-level all the way up to VP/Dean-level. The fact that nearly all (93%) confirmed having experience with students in crises of faith means that these students interact with SASSPs at a variety of professional levels, not just those whose primary responsibilities include student support in this way.

#### *Factors Precipitating Student Crises of Faith*

The SASSPs were then asked a qualitative question about what precipitated the students' crises of faith, and were given the freedom to respond in their own words to this question, allowing for the broadest array of answers. Once coded for similarities, a wide variety of precipitating events emerged, and these can be found by frequency in Table 4.16.

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<sup>314</sup> See those statistics in Chapter 3 of this study, which discusses the Millennial MDiv survey.

**Table 4.16. SASSPs Perception of What Precipitated Seminarians' Crises of Faith (N=36)**

<b>Precipitating Factor</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Classroom learning challenged students' previously-held beliefs (including study of scripture)	31	86%
Student had a personal crisis or family hardship	9	25%
Student encountered people of differing beliefs	8	22%
Student was disillusioned by their denomination or had no church community to call home	6	17%
Student's vocational uncertainty or negative experience in ministry	4	11%
Student was overwhelmed at the demands of graduate school	3	8%
Student experienced racism	2	6%
Student had a mental health or physical health issue	2	6%

Student lacked self-care	2	6%
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It is a sign of SASSPs' good insight into student life that they named almost all of the same precipitating factors as did the Millennial MDivs who were surveyed about their own experiences (Chapter 3). Also, both the students and SASSPs surveyed reported that "classroom learning challenging students' previously-held beliefs" is the most frequent cause of crises of faith. There was not complete overlap between the two groups, however. SASSPs named some issues that the Millennial MDivs did not, for example "Lack of Self-care" and "Student Mental or Physical Health." These and others mentioned by the SASSPs alone likely reflect the wide range of interactions with students they have had during their professional lives in theological higher education.

However, it seems that the SASSPs did miss one important precipitating factor cited by a full one-third of the students surveyed, namely "Issues of Personal Identity." The students who listed this as a trigger to a crisis of faith described experiences such as coming to terms with their own sexuality or gender-identity, reconciling their LGBTQIA status with their Christian upbringing, or being a woman called to ordained ministry in a denomination that discourages female leadership. The SASSPs did not name such "personal identity" issues in their reporting, even though they seem to have played a significant role in the crises of faith of 33% of the Millennial MDiv students surveyed. On the surface,

this discrepancy seems a rather glaring omission on the part of the SASSPs. However, it could be that these identity issues were, in fact, too personal, and reflect things that seminarians would not share with their SASSPs. In that case, these issues of personal identity would be off SASSPs' radar. In some theological schools, it might even be politically dangerous for a seminarian to "come out" to an SASSP. As was seen in a previous section, seminary SASSPs are often denominationally-connected. Some may have ecclesial standings that include influence over the ordination process. It makes good sense for MDiv students to be careful, even reluctant, to share these "personal identity" issues far and wide if they could later be a barrier to denominational ordination.

Overall, the SASSPs and students surveyed both identified a mix of personal and professional issues as points of origin for crises of faith. This, as stated in Chapter 3, is consistent with the premises of Transformative Learning Theory. That educational model suggests that disorienting dilemmas, or existential crises like those experienced frequently by seminarians, are helped along by both the acquisition of new information (academic) and critical self-reflection (personal).<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Mezirow, "Transformative Learning Theory," 19.

*How SASSPs Learn About Students Having Crises of Faith*

But how do SASSPs learn which students are experiencing crises of faith?

They were asked this question, and Table 4.17 shows the frequency of their responses.

**Table 4.17. How SASSPs Learned About Student Crises of Faith (N=36)**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
The student came to speak with me directly about it.	26	72%
The student stated religious or spiritual concerns as a deciding factor to change enrollment status. (e.g. reduce hours, take leave, or withdraw)	17	47%
Another student shared concerns about the student in crisis with me.	14	39%
They spoke to another administrator about their crisis of faith, and that administrator spoke to me to consider ways we could care for the student.	13	36%
A faculty member raised concerns about the student with me.	11	31%



The seminary SASSPs report an average of 2.25 means of learning about students in crisis, with the most frequently-cited being conversations with the students themselves (72%). Also, because many of the SASSPs surveyed aid students in the process of enrollment or registration, 42% learned about a student's crisis of faith as part of their change in student status, whether that means the student reducing hours, going on a leave of absence, or withdrawing completely from seminary. A few years ago, the enrollment data from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) accrediting agency was sobering. It showed a decade of shrinking student matriculation numbers across the seminaries of North America, regardless of denominational affiliation, and sounded the alarm that "a shrinking [student] population is the most corrosive problem a school can face."<sup>316</sup> The ATS statistics of late, in large part fueled by the increase of online theological degrees, provide a more hopeful outlook; there has been a two-year upward trend in overall student enrollment statistics.<sup>317</sup> Still, when SASSPs in this study report that they frequently hear crises of faith cited as reasons for student enrollment status changes, it is an indication that seminaries would serve themselves well as institutions by providing support for students in

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<sup>316</sup> Barbara G. Wheeler and Anthony T. Ruger, "Sobering Figures Point to Overall Enrollment Decline," *In Trust*, April 1, 2013, accessed November 14, 2014, <http://www.intrust.org/Portals/39/docs/IT413wheeler.pdf>.

<sup>317</sup> Brown, *Transitions: 2017 Annual Report*, 8.

existential crises. Doing so may help students remain enrolled when they would otherwise disengage.

It is also important to note that the top three means SASSPs named for hearing about student crises of faith were all directly from students. Either the student in crisis came to report it (72%), they stated a crisis of faith as their reason for changing enrollment status (42%), or another student shared concerns about the student in crisis with the SASSP (39%). Whether or not these SASSPs are meant by their institutions to have direct contact in this way with students in crisis, the reality is that they frequently do. One survey respondent named this tension saying, "I am happy when students come talk with me, and am known to be 'safe' for students in this way. I like this reputation, but am afraid it will get too widely known. After all, my position is meant to very specifically be financial aid." This person did not clarify whether their nervousness about increased student contact is a function of not having enough time to take on this additional relational role, or whether their superiors would be upset with them engaging students beyond their stated job description. Either way, they are clearly both glad to be supportive of students and wary of how that intersects with the limitations of their current position. Other SASSPs spoke of being "informal" advisors or mentors to students, or serving in a stated capacity (such as an advisor to a student group) that then morphs into a more general support role as students need someone with whom to speak about their concerns. One SASSP's

comment summarized their institution's improvised means of supporting students having crises of faith:

*"In my experience, more emotionally charged issues like faith crises fall within no one official job-title. No administrators or faculty are specifically tasked with making sure that this somewhat perennial issue gets addressed according to students' needs. Support is ad hoc depending on previously established relationships with staff or faculty with a pastoral bent. This is an unfortunate oversight, in my opinion."*

The survey data supports this quote, and suggests that seminary SASSPs are already playing a role in helping students through their crises of faith, albeit one sometimes beyond the bounds of their current job descriptions. This is likely a function of their schools not having institutionalized plans of support for students in existential crises, but relying informally on, as the quote says, "those with a pastoral bent" to be a listening ear when issues arise. When asked "How does your seminary support seminarians going through crises of faith?" 67% of the surveyed SASSPs named "open-door policies for students to come talk with faculty and staff whenever they would like to" as the number one means of support. This is, on the one hand, a good policy. However, it also creates unofficial care networks, which can be difficult for SASSPs to navigate professionally if their job descriptions do not include student assistance. Increased training and institutionalized support for student crises of faith could not only help the students, but also make seminary SASSPs feel more professionally prepared and sanctioned to serve students in this way.

The data from this survey shows that seminary SASSPs already function as informal encouragers for students in crisis. However, their counterparts in secular student affairs positions partner with faculty to formally create student learning plans that include experiences within the classroom and beyond. Seminaries could adopt similar plans by bridging the gap between academic and student affairs to the betterment of student learning, and by training and utilizing SASSPs for this effort. Seminary SASSPs, having been mostly trained within the theological academy (84%), have had informal responsibilities for student academic support without the professional development resources to do so. The implications of this research will be discussed in Chapter 5, and will include suggestions of how to address this disparity between secular and seminary SASSP professional life.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

### **Central Findings of the Millennial MDiv Survey**

This study's statistical analysis suggests that the Boston University School of Theology has room to improve its normative student apprenticeship efforts, particularly those around spiritual formation. Students across demographic and theological backgrounds all rated satisfaction with the institution's "spiritual formation opportunities" lower than any other area, falling into the "Somewhat Dissatisfied" range overall. Correspondingly, the Millennial MDiv seminarians ranked "spiritual support" as the number one area of institutional student life in need of strengthening. This mirrored statistics from the Association of Theological Schools' 2016 - 2017 survey of seminarians graduating from their member schools. As mentioned previously, this data showed that Millennial students rate their satisfaction with spiritual growth during seminary the lowest of all satisfaction areas.<sup>318</sup> This suggests that seminaries beyond Boston University School of Theology struggle with the same issues of normative spiritual formation for their students.

Differences among Caucasians and Students of Color arose with regard to preferences for mentoring and peer support. When asked from whom they would like to receive increased mentoring, all students hoped for faculty support.

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<sup>318</sup> Deasy, "GSQ Webinar: 2016-17."

Students of Color were also more desirous of mentoring from the institution's Deans and administrative staff than were Caucasian students. This is likely correlated to their responses to another question, "From whom have you received mentoring at the School of Theology?" Answering this question, Caucasian students reported more instances of receiving mentoring already from faculty, administrators, and Deans than did Students of Color. Students of Color also reported no interest in increased support for "Communal" aspects of student life. While all students unanimously agreed that peer support was an important assistance on which they could call, Students of Color reported less satisfaction with the social aspects of seminary community life than their Caucasian counterparts. It could be that Students of Color experience less institutional support overall, or feel the pressure of North American theological education's historically white male, European-focused culture.<sup>319</sup> This is a concern that deserves more research attention as human diversity within theological education grows.

A breakdown of students using the Quest Scale and Spiritual Well-Being (SWB) Scale showed a reverse correlation between Questing and SWB scores over the length of one's three years in the MDiv program. As Questing Scores increased, SWB Scores decreased, suggesting that, like Sandage and

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<sup>319</sup> Cascante-Gómez, "Advancing Racial/Ethnic Diversity," 21.

Williamson found in their research,<sup>320</sup> as students' comfort with existential questions rose through their experience of theological higher education, their spiritual lives became less content overall. Again, here students' racial and ethnic backgrounds had an effect on their responses and subsequent scores. Among those surveyed, Students of Color had higher SWB scores and lower Questing scores than their Caucasian seminary peers. Further research on Students of Color in theological higher education is needed to determine the specific experiences and needs of this population, since race and ethnicity clearly play a role in how one engages and is supported by seminary study.

Crises of faith were universally understood by students as a real phenomenon, whether or not they had experienced one themselves. A significant majority of students (76%) responded that they had or were currently having a crisis of faith. A full 82% of those who underwent one reported that their existential crises happened while engaged in higher education, and were precipitated by a mix of personal and academic issues. Crises of faith varied in length from a few months to several years, and half of the seminarians (50%) reported being currently in the midst of one. Student crises of faith seem, therefore, to be something pervasive-enough to be worth acknowledging and supporting with institutional resources during seminary study.

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<sup>320</sup> Williamson and Sandage, "Longitudinal Analyses," 787.

Existential crises were precipitated by either academic or personal factors, or, frequently, a combination of both. It seems that the academic and personal aspects of students' lives are not compartmentalized from one another, which makes sense given educational theories of transformative student development.<sup>321</sup> Most students reported that talking about their crisis of faith with someone else helped them through the process; however, the seminarians showed differences along racial/ethnic lines in terms of the people with whom they shared their experiences. Caucasian students were more likely to share their crises of faith with friends outside the school, fellow current seminary peers, family members, and faculty of the seminary. Students of Color also shared their crises of faith with friends and family, but were more likely to share with their pastors and congregation members than did Caucasian students. Since Students of Color had also reported higher Spiritual Well Being scores, it could be that they enjoy more connected religious lives with their communities of faith. However, a small sample size among Students of Color means further research is needed to draw generalizations.

One-third of Caucasian students had received crisis of faith support from the seminary's faculty members, while none of the Students of Color had. This could be a reflection of Students of Color being less comfortable reaching out to faculty for a variety of reasons. This could also further support the notion of

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<sup>321</sup> See the "Seminary Educators Can Learn from Transformative Learning Theory" section of the literature review of this study.



systemic challenges inherent in theological higher education with regard to race and ethnicity. Students of Color may have to seek conversation partners beyond the school's walls because they do not feel they have as much access to faculty or comfort with the community as their Caucasian peers do. Again, as theological education faces increased diversity within its seminaries, the particular needs of Students of Color should be considered and met.

Finally, in terms of overcoming crises of faith, students reported three primary Means of Support as helping them through. The first was Persistent Academic Study, or continuing to wrestle with concepts during further coursework and readings. The second was Faith Formation, which often meant finding a faith community or religious practice outside of the seminary. And the third was Personal Supportive Guidance, or finding a mentor, therapist, or small group with whom they could talk through the experience of existential crisis. These three Means of Support could provide a helpful framework around which seminary educators provide resources for students undergoing crises of faith. Once resolved, 89% of students reported having changed both beliefs and behaviors as a result of their crises of faith. In this way seminary crises of faith behave like "disorienting dilemmas" in Transformative Learning Theory, which lead to perspective transformation that incorporates both new beliefs and behaviors into the learner's life. This means crises of faith should be seen by seminary educators as part of their educative enterprise, not peripheral to it. Also, lessons learned from Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, which

considers existential crises central to true learning, can rightfully be applied to seminary crises of faith as these institutions seek models on which to draw to provide more student support.

### **Central Findings of the Survey of Seminary Student Affairs and Student Services Professionals (SASSPs)**

It is difficult to find any recent studies on seminary SASSPs, and data beyond their compensation has not been gathered by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) accrediting agency since 1990. Thus, the data in this survey is valuable to understanding who these workers are, their backgrounds, and level of job satisfaction. However, this study was limited by its number of participants and the fact that it focused solely on SASSPs in Mainline Protestant theological schools. The hope is that ATS will one day begin again collecting significant data on this large population of seminary professionals, especially given the increased academic support SASSPs have given secular higher education institutions since the mid-90s.<sup>322</sup>

Because ATS does not keep statistics on seminary SASSPs there is no way of knowing whether the demographic data captured by the current survey differs from the national picture. Among those surveyed, 68% were female and

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<sup>322</sup> See the “Student Affairs as a Professional Field Dedicated to Holistic Learning” section of the literature review.

32% were male; none of the respondents reported as gender non-conforming, though 25% self-identified as members of the LGBTQIA community. Their ages varied widely from 24 years old to 60 years old, with an average age of 38.33. Women surveyed were on the whole younger (average age 34.67) than the men who responded (average age 40.71). The SASSPs were 32% domestic non-Caucasian and 68% domestic Caucasian.

Just as student of color in the Millennial MDiv survey reported somewhat lower satisfaction scores, SASSPs of color also reported slightly lower professional satisfaction scores. This could mean that people of color in theological higher education settings generally feel less satisfied with their experience, though the number of people of color in both survey pools was not large enough to state this categorically. Yet, it is an important finding given the many recent writings on the growing multi-cultural diversity in seminaries. ATS remains very interested in preparing institutions for these demographic shifts, especially since white, primarily male, Western voices have dominated theological education historically. It could be this underlying bias and perspective that leads to people of color among students and SASSPs reporting lower overall satisfaction than their Caucasian counterparts.

Perhaps the most surprising piece of data was how educated the SASSPs are. The SASSPs surveyed held 1.98 degrees on average, meaning that most respondents have both a bachelor's and master's degree. A vast majority, 84% of the SASSPs, had a previous theological degree. This is important to note

because, since they have been through seminary study themselves, they can remember the student experience personally. More than two-thirds of respondents (69%) held the Master of Divinity, and were thus formed for professional religious leadership as part of their theological education. However, the SASSPs' vocational goals during their seminary study varied, with 42% hoping to be pastoral leaders and 31% expecting to teach theology or religion. Other goals included non-profit leader (11%), university chaplain (8%), or higher education administrator (8%). The SASSPs' vocational aspirations were much more weighted toward occupations within the academy than most people graduating from ATS degree programs. Lumping those who wished to work somewhere in higher education together, their number very nearly equals those who were vocationally pointed toward pastoral ministry.

The seminary SASSPs surveyed take faith seriously, with 86% of them holding membership in a denomination or faith tradition, and 70% of those that do have been members for over a decade. Considering the median age of respondents was 36, many SASSPs surveyed have been church members since at least young adulthood. Given that research suggests younger generations are much less likely to belong to traditional institutions such as the church, these seminary SASSPs are definitely on the whole more religiously connected than their generational peers. SASSPs' backgrounds in theological higher education and their religious affiliations, taken together, paint the picture of people with

experience quite pertinent to the cause of providing academic support for current seminary students, just as their secular peers do in their professional settings.

However, as expected, the seminary SASSPs were vastly under-resourced when it came to their development as part of the wider student affairs professional field. A full 73% of respondents had no professional affiliations in any of the many national organizations for professional student affairs leadership. When asked why, those who responded overwhelmingly named institutional barriers to their membership. Almost half of respondents (42%) reported that their seminary administration does not encourage professional memberships among staff, and another 28% reported their budgets being too low to accommodate membership fees. Here seminary leaders are either uninformed about the professional secular student affairs field or very short-sighted in not encouraging SASSP memberships. After all, these organizations provide incredible opportunities for professional development in this field.

Lack of institutional support for SASSP professional development should be compared with their satisfaction scores on various areas of their employment. While SASSPs report high satisfaction with relational aspects of their positions (interactions with students and co-workers ranking highest of all), the lowest satisfaction scores all related to few opportunities for professional advancement and perception of feeling valued by the institution. Despite decent satisfaction scores in most areas, 63% of SASSPs intend to move to other positions soon (within three years' time). Given that the lowest area of satisfaction among the

SASSPs was “opportunities for advancement within the institution,” theological schools should find ways to offer professional development support to their SASSPs and perhaps retain them in their positions for longer lengths of time.

In a final section of the survey, the seminary SASSPs were asked about their experiences with students having crises of faith. A full 93% of SASSPs reported encountering a student in the midst of such a crisis. When taken with the 82% of Millennial MDivs who self-reported having one during their higher education experience, it should be safe to say that many seminarians in Mainline Protestant schools often have crises of faith as part of their theological education. This is one of the most salient findings of this study, as it provides the foundation for considering them part of the transformative learning experience of seminary, not relegating them to the “null curriculum.” Educators within theological schools should consider how to best support their students more systemically through these often-painful existential crises.

To this end, both the SASSPs and Millennial MDivs surveyed agreed that an interplay of personal and academic factors led to their crises of faith. However, by far, the impetus most mentioned by both groups was classroom learning that challenges previously-held beliefs. 67% of the student and 86% of the SASSPs named this as one factor contributing to student crises of faith. The SASSPs named almost all of the same precipitating factors as the Millennial MDiv students did, suggesting that they have good insight into student life. This makes sense, given that most of the SASSPs had been seminarians themselves

once. SASSPs did miss one important factor that one-third of the Millennial MDiv students named as central to the onset of their crises of faith: “Issues of Personal Identity.” These deeply personal “disorienting dilemmas,” to borrow Mezirow’s phrase, included issues likely too personal to share with anyone in the seminary administration. Unfortunately, not all theological schools are places where issues such as sexual identity or mental health can be discussed by students without fear of stigma, or even ecclesial reprisal in cases of those seeking ordination. As such, SASSPs and other seminary leaders should remember the importance of facilitating students’ therapeutic relationships with outside professionals bound by confidentiality.

Finally, it seems that, though they are not being trained in the transformative learning models favored by the professional student affairs field, the seminary SASSPs surveyed are still playing a role in helping students through their crises of faith. Either they are sought out by a student to be an informal mentor, or their role puts them face-to-face with a student in crisis who is making an institutional decision, such as withdrawing, reducing their enrollment hours, or taking a leave. Several of the SASSP respondents reported nervousness about receiving students in this way. They either felt underprepared or as if their superiors might not appreciate them taking on this role. The “open door policies” in many seminaries creates informal care networks, where students go to see the person (faculty or staff) with whom they feel most comfortable sharing their crises of faith. Yet this is not nearly the systematized,

collaborative support for transformative learning advocated by the secular student affairs field.

## **Conclusions**

In the secular field of student affairs, SASSPs now consider academic support their primary role in higher education. Since its early history, the student affairs field has been concerned with educating the whole student, not just one's mind. Enlightenment biases in academia have led many faculty to devalue means of subjective knowing in favor of critically-informed objective reason. However, due to new understandings of how students learn, educational theories such as Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory and contemplative pedagogical practices that blur objectivity and subjectivity in the classroom are gaining ground within secular higher education. Faculty in a variety of disciplines, as well as many educational theorists, now advocate for students' holistic education. Collaborative partnerships between academic and student affairs areas of an institution can be innovative means of supporting whole-student transformative learning. For these partnerships to be made viable, secular SASSPs have prioritized professional development in a variety of core competencies that prepare them as co-curricular educators.

However, SASSPs serving in theological higher education have not been studied or resourced as a professional field as they have been in secular settings. The current study, therefore, provides valuable feedback on seminary



SASSPs in Mainline protestant settings. This data shows that SASSPs in theological higher education, though not aware of the vast resources of the secular student affairs field, have the educational backgrounds, vocational goals, and overall capacity to become professionalized into providing co-curricular academic support. Moreover, SASSPs are already encountering seminarians in existential crisis and supporting them as best they can without a formal education in transformative learning practices. Student crises of faith could be an excellent starting place for collaborative partnerships between the faculty and SASSPs in theological higher education. Both faculty and SASSPs would need further training in transformative learning and the steps by which crises of faith are reconciled, and SASSPs would need considerable professional development in the competency areas of the secular student affairs field. However, this would not be an insurmountable task if SASSP professional development is made a priority for institutional development by the Association of Theological Schools. This kind of work may help raise SASSP job satisfaction levels, which are lowest in areas of professional development, advancement opportunities, and feeling valued by their institutions.

Educational collaboration between faculty and SASSPs should begin by addressing student crises of faith. Both surveys showed that faith crises are prevalent among seminarians as they encountered disorienting dilemmas within their personal lives and coursework during their theological education. The students reported three primary means of support that helped them through their

crises of faith: persistent academic study, faith formation, and personal supportive guidance. 89% of the Millennial MDiv students surveyed reported changing both beliefs and behaviors as a result of their crises of faith. These seminarians' experiences clearly mirror the transformative learning arc initially proposed by Mezirow, which starts with a disorienting dilemma, moves through a time of internal critical self-reflection, external relational discourse, and ultimately responsive action, such as taking on new beliefs and behaviors. Seminaries should therefore look to the many years of research on Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) in supporting seminarians through their crises of faith. TLT also provides the educational model behind secular student affairs' "student learning" priority, which the field has advocated and researched for more than two decades.

Normalizing crises of faith as a "rite of passage"<sup>323</sup> within theological education honors the unique journey of each student while placing them within the wider story of religious leaders throughout time who have gone before them. This would likely be valuable also as an aspect of multi-cultural theological education, which starts, just as transformative learning does, by valuing the individual stories of each student. Practically speaking, such collaboration between faculty and SASSPs would allow the bulk of this time-consuming relational work to remain situated primarily outside of the classroom, as it has

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<sup>323</sup> Green, "Liminal Zone," 214.

been to date in most seminaries. The effort would be guided by the faculty's overall educational mission and curricula, but with high-touch oversight and co-curricular programming provided outside the classroom by SASSPs, once they are professionally trained to do so. In this way, crises of faith would move from the null or implicit curricula of seminaries to the explicit curriculum, seminaries could utilize all of their professionals in a coordinated effort toward student learning, and students would graduate with the knowledge that their crises of faith were valuable to their overall formation as religious leaders, rather than just a painful personal trial to be endured.

## **Appendix A: Survey Sent to Students**

### **Seminarian Crisis of Faith Study – Consent Form**

#### **Introduction**

Please read this form carefully. The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about taking part in a research study. If any of the statements or words in this form are unclear, please let the researcher know. She would be happy to answer any questions. Taking part in this research study is up to you. If you decide to take part in this research study, we will ask you to acknowledge your consent by answering “yes” on an online question. You may print this consent form at your leisure from this webpage.

The person in charge of this study is Anastasia Kidd, a Doctor of Ministry student at the Boston University School of Theology, under the faculty advisement of Wanda Stahl. Anastasia can be reached at [akidd@bu.edu](mailto:akidd@bu.edu) or 617-353-3036. Wanda Stahl can be reached at [wstahl@bu.edu](mailto:wstahl@bu.edu) or 617-353-9699. We will refer to Anastasia Kidd as the “researcher” throughout this form.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

The purpose of this study is to research seminary students’ faith development through their theological education, in particular their experience of crises of faith. By a “crisis of faith” I mean a season of theological limbo when previously held truths are deeply questioned and no longer satisfy a person’s current uncertainties, and at the same time new truths have not yet been found, resulting in a feeling of being untethered. Some people navigate such turning points without crisis, but for others this is a disturbing and emotional experience. Many crises of faith result in a profound sense of confusion, fear, loss, anger, apathy toward studies or one’s spiritual life, depression, and even physical or mental pain. Additionally, one can experience feelings of isolation from one’s God, faith community, family, friends, or wider world. Crises of faith can be sudden or prolonged, and they happen to people of every faith tradition. They arise frequently in the context of seminary education, where varieties of beliefs are introduced and challenged with regularity both within and outside of the classroom. This study will probe the frequency, causes, and resolutions of crises of faith in seminary.

We are asking you to take part in this study because you are a seminarian in a Master of Divinity program who is between the ages of 19 and 35.

Approximately 40 subjects will take part in this research study at Boston University.

#### **How long will I take part in this research study?**

This study will take approximately 5 months to complete, and is being undertaken as part of the researcher's Doctor of Ministry Final Project.

Those who choose to respond to the survey anonymously will be asked for approximately 30 minutes of time to complete the survey. The survey can then be completed online via the Qualtrics website link: \_\_\_\_\_

Those who choose to respond to the survey with name attribution will be asked for approximately 30 minutes of time to complete the survey online. If your survey data also qualifies you for an interview, you will be asked for approximately 45 minutes of time to complete the interview either by phone, email, or in one visit to the researcher's office at the Boston University School of Theology.

### **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you answer the online survey anonymously your responses will be collated with other surveys. The researcher will then determine whether patterns can be seen in the overall data. There will be no way to attribute your answers to you individually.

If you answer the online survey with name attribution your responses will be collated with other surveys, just as if you had answered anonymously. The researcher will then determine whether patterns can be seen in the overall data. If your survey indicates that a further interview would be useful to the research, the researcher will be in touch with you to schedule an appointment for an interview. You will have the option at that time to decline an interview, or to rescind your name attribution. If you choose to rescind your name attribution, the researcher will have knowledge of your name but will remove your name from your survey and all of its subsequent data. If you do choose to take part in the interview, you will spend approximately 45 minutes in conversation with the researcher, who will ask you a series of questions about your experience of faith development and/or an experience of a crisis of faith. The researcher will code your interview. If the researcher decides to use a quotation from your interview in the final project, it will be included without name attribution.

### **How will you keep my study records confidential?**

The data from your responses will be stored in the Qualtrics website that houses the online survey. Unless you provide your name in the last question of the survey, the researcher will have no way of matching your responses to your identifying information. If you do choose to include your name on your survey, thus allowing the researcher to potentially contact you for a follow-up interview, the researcher will be able to match your responses to your identifying information. In that case the researcher will keep your name only as part of an online report that requires password-protected access. The password will be

known only to the researcher herself. The researcher will make every effort to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records.

**The following people or groups may review your study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:**

- The researcher, her faculty advisor, and any members of her research team
- The Institutional Review Board at Boston University. The Institutional Review Board is a group of people who review human research studies for safety and protection of people who take part in the studies.

The study data will be stored **online, under password protection, within BU's Qualtrics web portal**. Only the researcher will have the password to this site.

The results of this research study may be published or used for teaching. The researcher will not put identifiable information on data that are used for these purposes.

**Study Participation and Early Withdrawal**

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to withdraw at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. As a student, participation in this research study will not affect your class standing or your grades at Boston University. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research study.

**What are the risks of taking part in this research study?**

This research focuses on seminarians' faith development, especially times when students have experienced a crisis of faith. You may feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions. If you are taking the online survey, you may stop it at any time or skip questions as necessary if you feel too emotional to answer them. If you choose and are chosen to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, and you become emotional or upset during the interview, you may tell the researcher at any time that you would like to stop the interview or take a break from it. If you are uncomfortable with any of the topics or questions asked you do not have to answer them.

**Loss of Confidentiality**

For those who choose to complete the online survey with name attribution, rather than anonymously, there is a risk of a potential loss of privacy. The researcher will protect your privacy by storing your data online through a password-protected

web portal, and labeling any interview information with a code, and keeping the key to the code in a password-protected computer. Any data or quotes used in publishing will be made without attribution or under a pseudonym.

**Are there any benefits from being in this research study?**

Though there are no direct benefits to those participating in this research study, others may benefit in the future from the information that is learned through this study.

**What alternatives are available?**

You may choose not to take part in this research study.

**Will I get paid for taking part in this research study?**

No, you will not be paid for taking part in this research study.

**What will it cost me to take part in this research study?**

There are no costs to you for taking part in this research study.

If I have any questions or concerns about this research study, who can I talk to? You can talk to the researcher or faculty advisor with any concerns or questions. Our contact information is:

- Primary Investigator – Anastasia Kidd, 617-353-3036 or [akidd@bu.edu](mailto:akidd@bu.edu)
- Faculty Advisor – Dr. Wanda Stahl, 617-353-9699 or [wstahl@bu.edu](mailto:wstahl@bu.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or want to speak with someone independent of the research team, you may contact the Boston University IRB directly at 617-358-6115.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the information in this consent form including risks and possible benefits. I have been given the chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_ YES

\_\_\_\_\_ NO

**Statement of Consent to Name Attribution** (*this question came at the end of the questionnaire, so the subject could see the questions they had answered and determine for themselves if they wanted their name on the data*):

I am willing to assign my name to the data in this questionnaire, understanding that it will be treated with utmost confidentiality by the researcher using the measures as outlined above. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Future Contact & Possible Follow-up Interview**

The researcher is allowed to contact me for a follow-up interview about my responses to this study. I know that I may opt out of an interview at that time, and am not obligated to provide any additional information. However, if I choose to provide an interview, the researcher and I will decide whether that conversation will happen by phone, email, or in one 45-minute in-person meeting. I understand that I may also not be chosen to give an interview, at the researcher's discretion.

Do you agree to let the researcher contact you in the future?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES

\_\_\_\_\_ NO

\_\_\_\_\_ INITIALS

### **Survey on Seminarians' Crises of Faith**

**Religious/Denominational Affiliation:** Below you will find the "Association of Theological Schools' (ATS) Religious/Denominational Affiliation List." Please consult this list and indicate your most accurate religious affiliation. For example, if you are "Baptist," please be specific about the kind of Baptist you are, i.e. "American Baptist Churches in the USA," "Southern Baptist Convention," or "Independent Baptist," using language from the ATS Religious/Denominational Affiliation List. If you do not see your particular tradition listed, please check the box "Other" and fill in the name of your affiliation. If you are not affiliated with any tradition, please check the box "None."

Affiliation:

Other

None – I am not affiliated with a religious tradition or denomination at this time.

Are you ordained in this religious tradition/denomination?  Yes  No  Not applicable

Is it your intention to seek ordination/are you in the processes of seeking ordination in this denomination?  Yes  No  Have not decided  Not applicable

How long have you been affiliated with this religious tradition/denomination?

Less than one year

One to three years

Four to nine years

Ten years or above



Not applicable because I am not affiliated with a religious tradition or denomination.

**Demographic Background:**

Date of Birth (month/day/year):                      Current Age:

Country of Citizenship:

Gender:  Male  Female  Gender Non-Conforming

Are you lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?  Yes  No

Do you consider yourself "queer?"  Yes  No

Do you consider yourself to be of Hispanic/Latino origin?  Yes  No

If yes, please check all that apply:

Cuban  Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano/Chicana  Puerto Rican

South or Central American  Other Spanish Culture or Origin

If no, please select one or more of the following groups in which you consider yourself a member:

American Indian or Alaska Native  Asian  Black or African-American

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  White

From the following list of denominations, what is your religious tradition?

I am not affiliated with any religious tradition.

### ATS Religious/Denominational Affiliation List

Advent Christian Church	Christian Brethren	Evangelical Formosan Church
African Methodist Episcopal	(Plymouth Brethren)	Evangelical Free Church of America
African Methodist Episcopal Zion	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	Evangelical Free Church of Canada
American Baptist Churches in the USA	Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Anglican Church of Canada	Christian Methodist Episcopal	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Anglican, Other	Christian Reformed Church	Evangelical Presbyterian Church
Assemblies of God	Christian Science	Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church	Church of God (Anderson, IN)	Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches
Associated Gospel Churches of Canada	Church of God (Cleveland, TN)	Foursquare Gospel Church
Baptist	Church of God in Christ	Free Methodist Church
Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec	Church of the Brethren	Friends, Quaker
Baptist General Association of Virginia	Church of the Nazarene	General Association of General Baptists
Baptist General Conference	Churches of Christ	General Association of Regular Baptist Churches
Baptist General Convention of Texas	Churches of God, General Conference	General Baptist State Convention, NC
Baptist Missionary Association of America	Conference of Congregational Christian Churches	General Church of New Jerusalem
Baptist State Convention of North Carolina	Conference of Mennonites	Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Baptist Union of Western Canada	Conservative Baptist Association of America	Independent Baptist
Brethren Church (Ashland, OH)	Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches	Independent Methodist
Brethren in Christ Church	Cooperative Baptist Fellowship	Inter/Multidenominational
Buddhist	Cumberland Presbyterian Church	Jewish
Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh	Episcopal Church	Korean Methodist Lutheran Church, Canada
Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists	Evangelical Church in Canada	Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod
Christian Mission and Alliance	Evangelical Congregational Church	Lutheran, Other
	Evangelical Covenant Church	

Mennonite Brethren Church in NA	Orthodox, Other	Roman Catholic
Mennonite Church, Canada	Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada	Salvation Army
Mennonite Church, USA	Presbyterian Church in America	Seventh Day Baptist General Conference
Mennonite Church, Other	Presbyterian Church in Canada	Seventh-day Adventist Southern Baptist Convention
Missionary Church in Canada	Presbyterian Church, USA	Swedenborgian Church, General Convention
Moravian Church in America	Progressive National Baptist Convention	Unitarian Universalist
Muslim	Reformed Church in America	United Church of Canada
National Baptist Convention	Reformed Church in Canada	United Church of Christ
Non-denominational	Reformed Episcopal Church	United Methodist Church
North American Baptist Conference	Reformed Presbyterian	United Pentecostal Church International
Orthodox Church in America	Religious Society of Friends	Wesleyan Church
Orthodox Presbyterian		Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

My current seminary degree program is

Do you hold a previous degree in religion or theology?  Yes  No

If so, which degree do you hold (please check all that apply):

- An undergraduate major in religion and/or theology  
 An undergraduate minor in religion and/or theology  
 A previous master's degree in religion and/or theology  
 Other, please specify:

What is your GPA in your current seminary program? (please choose one)

- 3.7 – 4.0  
 3.4 – 3.69  
 3.0 – 3.39  
 Below a 3.0

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with the following aspects of your seminary education?

Coursework – Required Introductory-level Survey Courses

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  5  
 (very satisfied)

Coursework – Courses You Have Chosen as Electives

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  5  
 (very satisfied)

Community Life – Spiritual Formation Opportunities

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  5  
 (very satisfied)

Community Life – Social Events and Opportunities

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  5  
 (very satisfied)

Community Life – Friendships with Other Students

1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  5 (very satisfied)

Personal Life – Life in Boston

1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  5 (very satisfied)

Personal Life – Connection with Your Faith

1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  5 (very satisfied)

Are there people in the School of Theology community on whom you could call for support?  Yes  No

Are these people (check all that apply):

Faculty  Staff  Administrators  Peers (other students)  University Officials

Do you feel that you receive enough support as a student?  Yes  No

If not, with which areas of life/student life could you benefit from more support? (check all that apply):

Academic  
 Spiritual  
 Communal  
 Social  
 Practical (ex. finding a job, housing)  
 Psychological Health  
 Physical Health  
 Other, please specify

Please explain what kind of support would help you in this area:

Do you feel that you have received adequate mentoring from faculty and/or staff at the School of Theology?

Yes  No

If so, from whom have you received mentoring? (check all that apply):

Faculty  Staff  Administrators  Peers (other students)  University Officials  
 Other, please specify

If not, from whom would you like to receive more mentoring? (check all that apply):

- Faculty  Staff  Administrators  Peers (other students)  University Officials  
 Other, please specify

What were your vocational plans upon entering your program here at the School of Theology?

- Parish Ministry  
 Non-profit Ministry, NGO, or FBO  
 Chaplaincy  
 Teaching/Professor at a College or University  
 Missionary  
 Other, please specify

Have they changed since entering seminary?  Yes  No

If so, what are your vocational plans now?

- Parish Ministry  
 Non-profit Ministry, NGO, or FBO  
 Chaplaincy  
 Teaching/Professor at a College or University  
 Missionary  
 Other, please specify

This next section will ask about your faith development here at the School of Theology, and will refer to the term “crisis of faith.” By crisis of faith we mean a season of theological limbo when previously held truths are deeply questioned and no longer satisfy a person’s current uncertainties, and at the same time new truths have not yet been found, resulting in a feeling of being untethered. Some people navigate such turning points without crisis, but for others this is a disturbing and emotional experience. Many crises of faith result in a profound sense of confusion, fear, loss, anger, apathy toward studies or one’s spiritual life, depression, and even physical or mental pain. Additionally, one can experience feelings of isolation from one’s God, faith community, family, friends, or wider world. Crises of faith can be sudden or prolonged, and they happen to people of every faith tradition. They also arise frequently in the context of seminary

education, where varieties of beliefs are introduced and challenged with regularity both within and outside of the classroom.

Do you feel you adequately understand what is meant here by “crisis of faith?”

Yes  No

Using this definition, do you think you have experienced a crisis of faith?  Yes

No

(If not, please look through the following questions and only answer any that apply to you.)

If you have experienced a crisis of faith, when did it occur? (check all that apply):

Since coming to the Boston University School of Theology

During a previous theological or religious degree

During my undergraduate years

During my teenage years

During my childhood

Other, please name

What precipitated your crisis of faith?

How long did your crisis of faith last? (If it is still ongoing, please indicate this.)

If you have done so, what helped you emerge from your crisis of faith?

With whom did you share your crisis of faith?

Did talking about your crisis of faith help you?

Did anything else help you reconcile your crisis of faith? (if you have done so)

Did your beliefs change in some way as a consequence of your crisis of faith?

Yes  No

If yes, which beliefs changed as a result of your crisis of faith (check all that apply):

- My religious beliefs, please specify
- My theological beliefs, please specify
- My political beliefs, please specify
- Other, please specify

Did your behaviors change in some way as a consequence of your crisis of faith?  
 Yes  No

If yes, which behaviors changed as a result of your crisis of faith (check all that apply):

- My spiritual practices, please specify
- My worship attendance, please specify
- My political involvement, please specify
- My participation in certain groups, please specify
- My study habits, please specify
- My personal health habits, please specify
- Other, please specify

If your crisis of faith occurred during your current program, do you feel that you received adequate support for it from faculty and/or staff at the School of Theology?  
 Yes  No

If so, from whom have you received support for your crisis of faith? (check all that apply):

- Faculty  Staff  Administrators  Peers (other students)  University Officials
- Other, please specify

If not, how could the School of Theology have provided you more support? (check all that apply):

- Talked about crises of faith as a normal part of seminary education during Orientation
- Provided a peer student mentor from an upper-level class with whom I could talk
- Provided a faculty mentor
- Provided a staff/administration mentor
- Placed me in a small group to process issues of faith
- Provided spiritual retreats that deal with the issue of crises of faith



Other, please specify

Is there anything else you think we should know about your experience of a crisis of faith?

Finally, please complete the following two brief measures. One is a 12-item scale and the other is a 20-item scale. Upon completing these you will have completed this survey. Thank you for your help with this study! Your time is very much appreciated.

---

## **Appendix B: Survey Sent to SASSPs**

### **Student Affairs/Student Services Personnel Questionnaire – Consent Form**

#### **Introduction**

Please read this form carefully. The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about taking part in a research study. If any of the statements or words in this form are unclear, please let the researcher know. She would be happy to answer any questions. Taking part in this research study is up to you. If you decide to take part in this research study, we will ask you to acknowledge your consent by answering “yes” to an online question. You may print this consent form at your leisure from this webpage.

The person in charge of this study is Anastasia Kidd, a Doctor of Ministry student at the Boston University School of Theology, under the faculty advisement of Dr. Wanda Stahl. Anastasia can be reached at [akidd@bu.edu](mailto:akidd@bu.edu) or 617-353-3036. Wanda Stahl can be reached at [wstahl@bu.edu](mailto:wstahl@bu.edu) or 617-353-9699. We will refer to Anastasia Kidd as the “researcher” throughout this form.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

The researcher is eager to learn about Student Affairs and Student Services Personnel (SASSPs) who serve in Association of Theological Schools (ATS)-accredited theological schools. Research from within secular higher education institutions shows that SASSPs are a larger professional group overall than faculty, and that the work of SASSPs has undeniable influence on the success of students. Yet little research exists on the demographics, educational backgrounds, and vocational plans of SASSPs working in seminary contexts. In addition to fulfilling part of the researcher’s Doctor of Ministry project (which focuses on utilizing seminary SASSPs to help students through crises of faith), the hope is that this study will help inform ATS’s future study of all SASSPs at ATS-accredited institutions. The ultimate goal is that this data, and the data of ATS’s future study, will in turn inform ATS in its efforts to provide professional development and best practice resources for all employed in the work of theological higher education, including SASSPs.

The researcher is asking you to take part in this study because you are employed as an administrator or staff person in the field of student services or student affairs at an ATS-accredited seminary, divinity school, or theological school.

Approximately 50 subjects will take part in this research study.

#### **How long will I take part in this research study?**

This study will take approximately 5 months to complete, and is being undertaken as part of the researcher's Doctor of Ministry program.

Those who choose to respond to the survey anonymously will be asked for approximately 30 minutes of time to complete the survey. The survey can then be completed anonymously online via the Qualtrics website link: \_\_\_\_\_

**What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you answer the online survey your responses will be collated with others to form a data set. The researcher will then determine whether patterns can be seen in the overall data. There will be no way to attribute your answers to you individually. Any quotes from your responses used in final publishing of the data will be made without attribution.

**How will you keep my study records confidential?**

The data from your responses will be stored in the Qualtrics website that houses the online survey. Since the researcher is not asking for your name, she will have no way of matching your responses to your identifying information. The researcher will make every effort to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records.

**The following people or groups may review your study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:**

- The researcher, her faculty advisor, and members of her research team
- The Institutional Review Board at Boston University. The Institutional Review Board is a group of people who review human research studies for safety and protection of people who take part in the studies.

The study data will be stored online, under password protection, within BU's Qualtrics web portal. Only the researcher will have the password to this site.

The results of this research study may be published or used for teaching. The researcher will not put identifiable information on data that are used for these purposes.

**Study Participation and Early Withdrawal**

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to withdraw at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential.

**What are the risks of taking part in this research study?**

This research focuses on professionals working in seminary contexts, and includes questions about one's vocational calling, educational background, and satisfaction with various aspects of one's current position. You may feel emotional when answering some of the questions. If you are taking the online survey, you may stop it at any time or skip questions as necessary if you feel too emotional to answer them. If you are uncomfortable with any of the topics or questions asked you do not have to answer them.

**Loss of Confidentiality**

Though responses to this survey are being collected anonymously, there is always a risk of a potential loss of privacy. The researcher will protect your privacy by storing your data online through a password-protected web portal.

**Are there any benefits from being in this research study?**

Though there are no direct benefits to those participating in this research study, others may benefit in the future from the information that is learned through this study.

**What alternatives are available?**

You may choose not to take part in this research study.

**Will I get paid for taking part in this research study?**

No, you will not be paid for taking part in this research study.

**What will it cost me to take part in this research study?**

There are no costs to you for taking part in this research study.

**If I have any questions or concerns about this research study, who can I talk to?**

You can talk to the researcher or faculty advisor with any concerns or questions. Our contact information is:

- Primary Investigator – Anastasia Kidd, 617-353-3036 or [akidd@bu.edu](mailto:akidd@bu.edu)
- Faculty Advisor – Dr. Wanda Stahl, 617-353-9699 or [wstahl@bu.edu](mailto:wstahl@bu.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or want to speak with someone independent of the research team, you may contact the Boston University IRB directly at 617-358-6115.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the information in this consent form including risks and possible benefits. I have been given the chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_ YES

\_\_\_\_\_ NO

**Survey Questions****Demographic Background:**

Date of Birth (month/day/year):

Country of Citizenship:

Gender:  Male  Female  I prefer not to sayAre you lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?  Yes  No  I prefer not to sayDo you consider yourself to be of Hispanic/Latino origin?  Yes  No

If yes, please check all that apply:

 Cuban  Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano/Chicana  Puerto

Rican

 South or Central American  Other Spanish Culture or Origin

If no, please select one or more of the following groups in which you consider yourself a member:

 American Indian or Alaska Native  Asian  Black or African-

American

 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  WhiteDo you belong to any national professional associations, such as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) or the American College Personnel Association (ACPA)?  Yes  No

If so, which:

I am employed by the following type of ATS theological school:

 Roman Catholic Mainline Protestant Denominationally-Affiliated Evangelical Independent Evangelical/Non-denominational Other, please specify:

Employment status:

 Full-time Part-time, approximately \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week

My professional title is:

How many years have you served in this role?

How many total years have you served in theological higher education?

How many total years have you served in secular higher education?

What other positions have you held at your current or another institution? (check all that apply):

- Chief Student Affairs Officer
- Chief Academic Officer
- Chief Admissions Officer
- Registrar
- Chief Financial Aid Officer
- Admissions Office Support Staff
- Student Services Support Staff
- Spiritual Life or Community Life Staff
- Library Staff
- Contextual/Field Education Staff
- Other, please specify:

Do you also teach classes at your theological school?  Yes  No

Are you considered faculty at your theological school?  Yes  No  Other, please explain:

To whom do you report in your institution?

- Dean/President
- Dean/Vice President of Academic Affairs
- Dean/Vice President of Student Affairs
- Senior-level Administrator, such as Director of Admissions or

Enrollment

- Mid-level Administrator, such as Financial Aid Officer
- Head of Library
- Other, please specify:

### **Educational Background**

Do you hold a degree in religion, biblical studies, or theology?  Yes  No

If so, which degree do you hold (please check all that apply):

A graduate degree (please specify which):

Master of Divinity

Master of Arts/Master of Theological Studies

Master of Sacred Music

Master of Sacred Theology/Master of Theology

Doctor of Ministry

Doctor of Philosophy in Religious, Biblical, or Theological

Studies

Other, please specify:

An undergraduate major in religion and/or theology

An undergraduate minor in religion and/or theology

Other, please specify:

What were your vocational plans during your undergraduate schooling?

If you have a seminary degree, what were your vocational plans during your seminary study?

Does your position in theological higher education fulfill your vocational plans?

Yes  No

Other, please explain:

If so, how does it fulfill your vocational plans?

If not, why do you remain in the position?

*This next section will ask about your faith development here at the School of Theology, and will refer to the term "crisis of faith." By crisis of faith we mean a season of theological limbo when previously held truths are deeply questioned and no longer satisfy a person's current uncertainties, and at the same time new truths have not yet been found, resulting in a feeling of being untethered. Some people navigate such turning points without crisis, but for others this is a disturbing and emotional experience. Many crises of faith result in a profound sense of confusion, fear, loss, anger, apathy toward studies or one's spiritual life, depression, and even physical or mental pain. Additionally, one can experience*

*feelings of isolation from one's God, faith community, family, friends, or wider world. Crises of faith can be sudden or prolonged, and they happen to people of every faith tradition. They also arise frequently in the context of seminary education, where varieties of beliefs are introduced and challenged with regularity both within and outside of the classroom.*

Do you feel you adequately understand what is meant here by "crisis of faith?"

Yes  No

Using this definition, do you think you have ever experienced a crisis of faith?

Yes  No (If not, please look through the following questions and only answer those that apply to you.)

If you have experienced a crisis of faith, when did it occur? (check all that apply):

- Since coming to my current place of employment
- During a previous theological or religious degree
- During my undergraduate years
- During my teenage years
- During my childhood
- Other, please name

What precipitated your crisis of faith?

How long did your crisis of faith last? (If it is still ongoing, please indicate this.)

If you have done so, what helped you emerge from your crisis of faith?

With whom did you share your crisis of faith?

Did talking about your crisis of faith help you?

Did anything else help you reconcile your crisis of faith? (if you have done so)

Did your beliefs change in some way as a consequence of your crisis of faith?

Yes  No

If yes, which beliefs changed as a result of your crisis of faith (check all that apply):

- My religious beliefs, please specify
- My theological beliefs, please specify



- My political beliefs, please specify
- Other, please specify

Did your behaviors change in some way as a consequence of your crisis of faith?  
 Yes  No

If yes, which behaviors changed as a result of your crisis of faith (check all that apply):

- My spiritual practices, please specify
- My worship attendance, please specify
- My political involvement, please specify
- My participation in certain groups, please specify
- My study habits, please specify
- My personal health habits, please specify
- Other, please specify

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with the following aspects of your current position?

Sense of Participation in the Life of my Seminary Community

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  
 5 (very satisfied)

Interactions with Students

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  
 5 (very satisfied)

Interactions with Faculty

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  
 5 (very satisfied)

Opportunities for Professional Advancement Within Your Institution

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  
 5 (very satisfied)

Career Development Support from Your Institution

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  
 5 (very satisfied)

Intra-Departmental Relations

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  
 5 (very satisfied)

Balance of Work Responsibilities with Personal Life Responsibilities (Work/Life Balance)

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  
 5 (very satisfied)

Salary and Benefits

- 1 (very unsatisfied)  2 (unsatisfied)  3 (neutral)  4 (satisfied)  
 5 (very satisfied)

Would you like to further explain any of your above rankings?

What are your favorite aspects of working in theological higher education?

What are your least favorite aspects of working in theological higher education?

How long do you plan to hold your current position?

- I am currently looking to change employment  
 Less than one year  
 One to three years  
 Four to nine years  
 Ten years or above

Is it your plan to remain professionally employed within an ATS-accredited school until retirement?

- Yes  No  Unsure  Other, please explain

### Religious/Denominational Affiliation

*On the next page, you will find the “Association of Theological Schools’ (ATS) Religious/Denominational Affiliation List.” Please consult this list and indicate your most accurate religious affiliation. For example, if you are “Baptist,” please be specific about the kind of Baptist you are, i.e. “American Baptist Churches in the USA,” “Southern Baptist Convention,” or “Independent Baptist,” using language from the ATS Religious/Denominational Affiliation List. If you do not see your particular tradition listed, please check the box “Other” and fill in the name of your affiliation. If you are not affiliated with any tradition, please check the box “None.”*

Affiliation:

- Other, please name  
 None – I am not affiliated with a religious tradition or denomination at this time.

Are you ordained in this religious tradition/denomination?  Yes  No  Not applicable

Is it your intention to seek ordination/are you in the processes of seeking ordination in this denomination?

- Yes  No  Have not decided  Not applicable

How long have you been affiliated with this religious tradition/denomination?

- Less than one year  
 One to three years  
 Four to nine years  
 Ten years or above  
 Not applicable because I am not affiliated with a religious tradition or denomination.

Is this denomination represented largely among the students in the seminary where you are currently employed?  Yes  No  Other, please explain

Is this denomination represented largely among the faculty in the seminary where you are currently employed?  Yes  No  Other, please explain

### ATS Religious/Denominational Affiliation List

Advent Christian Church	Christian Mission and Alliance	Evangelical Congregational Church
African Methodist Episcopal	Christian Brethren (Plymouth Brethren)	Evangelical Covenant Church
African Methodist Episcopal Zion	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	Evangelical Formosan Church
American Baptist Churches in the USA	Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	Evangelical Free Church of America
Anglican Church of Canada	Christian Methodist Episcopal	Evangelical Free Church of Canada
Anglican, Other	Christian Reformed Church	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Assemblies of God	Christian Science	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church	Church of God (Anderson, IN)	Evangelical Presbyterian Church
Associated Gospel Churches of Canada	Church of God (Cleveland, TN)	Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada
Baptist	Church of God in Christ	Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches
Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec	Church of the Brethren	Foursquare Gospel Church
Baptist General Association of Virginia	Church of the Nazarene	Free Methodist Church
Baptist General Conference	Churches of Christ	Friends, Quaker
Baptist General Convention of Texas	Churches of God, General Conference	General Association of General Baptists
Baptist Missionary Association of America	Conference of Congregational Christian Churches	General Association of Regular Baptist Churches
Baptist State Convention of North Carolina	Conference of Mennonites	General Baptist State Convention, NC
Baptist Union of Western Canada	Conservative Baptist Association of America	General Church of New Jerusalem
Brethren Church (Ashland, OH)	Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches	Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Brethren in Christ Church	Cooperative Baptist Fellowship	Independent Baptist
Buddhist	Cumberland Presbyterian Church	Independent Methodist
Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh	Episcopal Church	Inter/Multidenominational
Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists	Evangelical Church in Canada	Jewish

Korean Methodist Lutheran Church, Canada	Religious Society of Friends
Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod	Roman Catholic
Lutheran, Other	Salvation Army
Mennonite Brethren Church in NA	Seventh Day Baptist General Conference
Mennonite Church, Canada	Seventh-day Adventist
Mennonite Church, USA	Southern Baptist Convention
Mennonite Church, Other	Swedenborgian Church, General Convention
Missionary Church in Canada	Unitarian Universalist
Moravian Church in America	United Church of Canada
Muslim	United Church of Christ
National Baptist Convention	United Methodist Church
Non-denominational	United Pentecostal Church International
North American Baptist Conference	Wesleyan Church
Orthodox Church in America	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Orthodox Presbyterian	
Orthodox, Other	
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada	
Presbyterian Church in America	
Presbyterian Church in Canada	
Presbyterian Church, USA	
Progressive National Baptist Convention	
Reformed Church in America	
Reformed Church in Canada	
Reformed Episcopal Church	
Reformed Presbyterian	

### Appendix C: 12-item Quest Scale

Scale:

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1 = Strongly Disagree.....9 = Strongly Agree

<i>Readiness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity</i>									
1. I was not very interested in religion until I began to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. I have been driven to ask religious questions out of a growing awareness of the tensions in my world and in my relation to my world.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious convictions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. God wasn't very important for me until I began to ask questions about the meaning of my own life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>Self-criticism and perception of religious doubt as positive</i>									
5. It might be said that I value my religious doubts and uncertainties.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. I find religious doubts upsetting.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. Questions are far more central to my religious experience than are answers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>Openness to change</i>									
9. As I grow and change, I expect my religion also to grow and change.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. I do not expect my religious convictions to change in the next few years.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12. There are many religious issues on which my views are still changing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Scoring:

Items 7 and 11 are reverse scored. Scoring can be at the subscale level or as a whole. Scoring is kept continuous.

## Appendix D: 20-item Spiritual Well-Being Scale

### **SWB Scale**

For each of the following statements circle the choice that best indicates the extent of your agreement or disagreement as it describes your personal experience:

SA = Strongly Agree	D = Disagree
MA = Moderately Agree	MD = Moderately Disagree
A = Agree	SD = Strongly Disagree

- |  |    |    |   |   |    |    |
|--|----|----|---|---|----|----|
| 1. I don't find much satisfaction in private prayer with God.                  | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 2. I don't know who I am, where I came from, or where I'm going.               | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 3. I believe that God loves me and cares about me.                             | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 4. I feel that life is a positive experience.                                  | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 5. I believe that God is impersonal and not interested in my daily situations. | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 6. I feel unsettled about my future.   | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 7. I have a personally meaningful relationship with God.                       | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 8. I feel very fulfilled and satisfied with life.                              | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 9. I don't get much personal strength and support from my God                  | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 10. I feel a sense of well-being about the direction my life is headed in.     | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 11. I believe that God is concerned about my problems.                         | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 12. I don't enjoy much about life.   | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 13. I don't have a personally satisfying relationship with God.                | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 14. I feel good about my future.   | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 15. My relationship with God helps me not to feel lonely.                      | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 16. I feel that life is full of conflict and unhappiness.                      | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 17. I feel most fulfilled when I'm in close communion with God.                | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 18. Life doesn't have much meaning.  | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 19. My relation with God contributes to my sense of well-being.                | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |
| 20. I believe there is some real purpose for my life.                          | SA | MA | A | D | MD | SD |

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