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Spring 2008

Koinonia

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Association for Christians in Student Development

KOINONIA

Spring 2008

Has Facebook Jumped the Shark? *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Virtual Community* *Screenagers*

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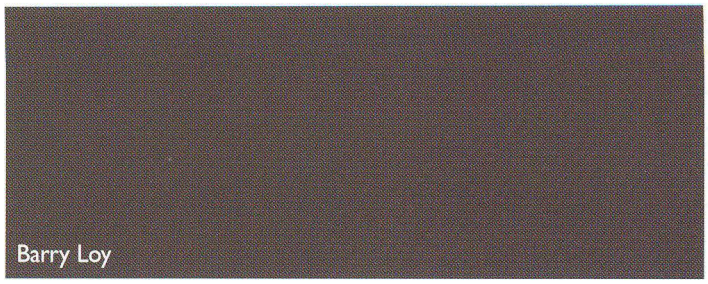


Barry Loy

Change is in the Air

Almost three decades ago our fledgling organization began with the vision that if members could get together on a regular basis, we would all be stronger. To realize our vision, we scheduled annual conferences and regional meetings to stimulate professional growth and provide for Christian fellowship. This model worked for a small organization in a pre-internet era, but we are now a mid-size organization in a technological age serving an increasingly complex vocation with more specialized professionals.

Do we need a new strategy to help us sharpen one another as Christian student development professionals? To answer this question, we formed a group made up of current and former regional directors to evaluate new options. Ultimately, this team, led by Edee Schulze, Secretary of ACSD, brought a recommendation to the ACSD Executive Committee suggesting that we enhance the existing regional model by adopting a new "Collaboratives" model - an approach that seeks to bring people together around a common interest, job function, need, or geographical location. (The model is fully explained in this issue in the article entitled, "From Location to Interest: ACSD Considers Move from Regional to Collaboratives Model").

The ACSD Executive Committee responded favorably to the proposal and voted to present the new model for a vote to the members at the annual conference at Cedarville University in June. I encourage you to spend some time evaluating the proposal before we vote at the annual conference. I think you will find the new concept to have much promise. You can find additional details at www.ACSDCollaboratives.

Another new development is the formation of a diversity advisory group headed by Jane Higa of Westmont College. Based on recommendations from the initial diversity task team and Salter McNeil & Associates, we have asked this group of ACSD members to advise the ACSD Executive Committee as we formulate new strategies to speak to intercultural needs and issues of our organization and the larger profession. The team has its first meeting in May.

In closing, I would like to request your prayers for our newly elected and re-elected ACSD officers. Thank you for serving our membership by voting in this important process.

We hope to see you at Cedarville in June. God bless and have a refreshing summer

Barry Loy
ACSD President
Dean of Students,
Gordon College

IN THIS ISSUE

SPOTLIGHT FEATURES

5 Has Facebook Jumped the Shark?
By Rick Zomer

7 The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Virtual Community
By David Johnstone

11 Screenagers: How Technology is Changing the Way we Interact with Students
By Dr. Tim Elmore

13 'In Loco Parentis' Revisited
By Gene C. Fant Jr.

15 ACSD News
From Location to Interest: ACSD Considers Move from Regional to Collaboratives Model
By Dr. Edee Schulze, Dr. Connie Sjoberg, Mike Broberg, David A. Kennedy, and Nicole Hoefle

THINKING THEOLOGICALLY

17 Keeping Faith: Serving Students or the Kingdom
By Michael and Stephanie Santarosa

BOOK REVIEWS

19 Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education
Reviewed by Jason M. Morris

20 My Freshman Year
Reviewed by Heidi Johnston

FEATURES

3 The President's Corner

4 Editor's Desk

FROM THE EDITOR'S (VERY MESSY) DESK

When I was a fourth grader in Mrs. Prail's science class, my imagination was piqued and my eyes widened as we watched film strips about how, in the year 2000, we would be able to ride the space shuttle to a space station or even a city on the moon. Though quite a futuristic idea, I remember it being completely believable. Space was all the rage in 1982. At my elementary school, we would cram into the library to watch the space shuttle Columbia blaze into the mysterious void of our solar system. When asked what you wanted to be when you grew up, a hip fourth grader better have "astronaut" somewhere near the top of the list or they lost valuable cool points. Space was the next horizon and the newly placed computers in our classroom seemed only a means to get us to Moon City, not an end unto themselves.

It's debatable when the "next" horizon switched from the romance of space to the fiber optics of cyberspace and its subsequent computer gadgetry with instant access. Somewhere along the line, commercial trips on the space shuttle became so... well, 1980's and now, much like Crystal Pepsi, the idea exists only in the memories of those of us whose education included hours of film strips. Pondering the mysteries of space must feel silly when the world and everything in it is seemingly just a click away. To be an active and productive member of this new "new world" in North America in 2008, most of us have grown technological appendages that we are convinced we cannot live without: our lap tops, cell phones, PDAs, IPods, Facebook accounts, GPS systems, etc. No doubt we can all do lots of cool stuff with this cool stuff. However, I would contend we do not often enough ask the question that Arthur Holmes (1975), in his book *The Idea of a Christian College,* raises as the basic concept of a Christian liberal arts education: "What will all this stuff do to me" (p. 24)? Sure, Holmes was speaking about education and the courses that make up one's liberal education, but the question seems just as relevant applied to the technology with which we outfit ourselves and use ubiquitously. Quentin Schultze (2002), in his book *Habits of the High-Tech Heart,* echoes the need for this line of questioning:

> There is much worth celebrating, from the joys of e-mailing friends to the Web sites that publish up-to-date information about medical treatments. Nevertheless, our tendency to adopt every new information technology uncritically – without discerning the options, setting appropriate limits, and establishing humane practices – is simply irresponsible. North Americans are largely unreflective, voracious consumers of cyber-novelty and informational trivia. We have naively convinced ourselves that cyber-innovations will automatically improve society and make us better people, regardless of how we use them. (p. 17)

Schultze's *Habits of the High-Tech Heart,* although written in 2002, which in a digital world seems ages ago, asks penetrating questions that go well beyond our digital devices du jour and makes us pause to gaze at our own reflection in the screen and discern exactly what kind of people we are becoming. As Schultze would readily point out, our habits with technology are really our habits, period. There is no separation between the virtual and real worlds when it comes to our hearts.

I wanted to address issues of technology and higher education in this *Koinonia* and feel that we have a great start to what should be an ongoing conversation. Rick Zomer, in his article "Has Facebook Jumped the Shark?," applies community formation and development theory to the phenomenon of Facebook. David Johnstone's piece, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Virtual Community", serves as a reminder to all of us that we have significant responsibility in how community, both virtual and real, is being shaped on our campuses and by our students. Tim Elmore offers a perspective on how to communicate with this latest generation of text-messaging students in his piece, "Screenagers: How Technology is Changing the Way We Interact with Students".

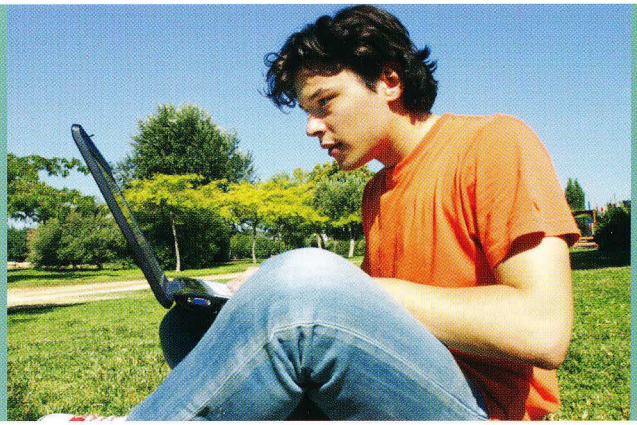
As you read these articles, I hope you will ask yourself questions about your own technology use and its impact on your immediate community, your patterns of living, and your communication with those around you. Perhaps this topic is merely personally interesting because I find myself examining my own techno-habits and wondering what this is all doing to me – even on the most basic level. Is it healthy for me to always take my lap top home, essentially bringing my office and work life home with me? Do I communicate too much using digital communication via e-mail and Facebook? Why am I relieved when my cell phone is on the fritz and I can't receive calls? Would Jesus use a cell phone? (Just kidding, but seriously, would He?) Am I missing out on communicating most effectively to my students because I refuse to text message? One has to wonder at what point we continue to cater to this generation of students in the name of effectiveness and at what point we resist and offer a countercultural way of being in the world that is significantly less instantaneous, but perhaps more healthy.

As usual, I have more questions than I do answers. Let's keep the conversation going, though, at our annual ACSD Conference at Cedarville University, through our publications, *Growth* and *Koinonia*, and maybe, most importantly, over coffee, face to face. I'll Facebook you to set something up.

Cheers,
Steve Austin
Editor of Koinonia

Has Facebook Jumped the Shark?

By Rick Zomer



It all started about a year ago. One of our student leaders came into my office and told me that he was contemplating giving up his Facebook account. Once my initial shock wore off, I asked why he would be considering such a move, especially since a large number of his peers seemed to use this on-line social network as their sole means of communication. He told me that he felt that the popularity of Facebook had grown to a level where keeping up with it was consuming too much of his time. In short, he said he was developing Facebook fatigue.

I was struck by that conversation so I decided to talk to other students and observe Facebook use on our campus. The goal was to see if more individuals were considering giving up on Facebook in the same way the student in my office reported last year. To answer this question, I took two divergent paths. I researched the prevalence Facebook has in the lives of our students, while at the same time exploring theories of community formation and development.

There is a significant amount of data that reinforces what is obvious to Student Life professionals: Facebook plays a significant role in our students' experiences. Studies have suggested that 85% of college students report using Facebook (Arrington, 2005); a finding that would explain the 1.6 billion hits a day to facebook.com (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). According to that study, the average student spends 10-30 minutes a day logged into Facebook, a figure that is consistent with the daily average total reported on Facebook's own statistics page. Other research, however, indicates that students might be spending more than twice that amount of time per day on Facebook. A study conducted at Syracuse University found that 11% of their student population reported spending more than five hours a week on their Facebook profile (Syracuse University Online Communities Research Team, 2006), while students participating in a recent Michigan State University study reported averaging 3.73 hours a day on Facebook (Kim, Tong, Van Der Heide, Walther, & Westerman, 2008). Regardless of statistical data, a review of computer use on most of our campuses would show that Facebook is a significant part of our students' experience and a noteworthy part of our campus communities.

Part of the reason for the Facebook phenomenon on campus can be found in a review of qualitative research methods. Researchers looking for potential interview participants will often incorporate a "snowballing" technique to identify new subjects. This process involves the researcher asking a participant at the end of an interview if they know of other individuals who might be eligible and willing to participate in their study, increasing the overall number of potential subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In many ways, Facebook employs a similar strategy except, rather than asking for additional participants, users are exposed to pictures, wall posts, and profile information from individuals they encounter through their friends' pages. As a result, time spent on Facebook results in coming into contact with more people with new information to review, leading to more time spent on the site. In the same way researchers can use "snowballing" to increase participant numbers, students can use Facebook to build a social network on campus.

When Mark Zuckerberg first developed thefacebook.com in February 2004, membership was only available to his fellow students at Harvard University. The popularity of the site on campus snowballed to the point where, within two weeks of its release, 4,300 Harvard students and alumni had joined Zuckerberg's online network. Since these individuals had friends at other institutions, he made the decision to make Facebook available on other campuses. By March 2004, individuals at Stanford, Columbia, and Yale joined the network (Levy, 2007). As time progressed, Facebook communities developed on campuses across the country and Zuckerberg found himself in charge of a college phenomenon. He was responsible for the creation of an online community that had become popular with young people, but was only available to individuals who had a college email account.

While the technique of "social snowballing" may offer an interesting explanation for how Facebook came to be so prevalent on campus, it adds little to a discussion of how long this online social network will retain its current level of popularity with our students. A clearer picture of what the future might look like may be found by reviewing the stages of growth Facebook has undergone since its inception in February 2004, and examining future implications based on community formation and development theory.

What Zuckerberg had initially created was an experience that was unique to college students and unavailable to those outside of higher education. Registration for Facebook was limited to those with college issued email accounts so high school students and other individuals were not eligible to utilize the website to stay connected with friends and participate in this on-line community. Individuals were not able to join campus networks until they were admitted to a specific institution, so the decision to attend college now included the benefit of being able to access Facebook. Unknowingly, Zuckerberg had created an additional rite of passage that was now a part of beginning a college experience.

Rites of passage have been described as specific rituals that indicate an individual's movement from one stage of life to the next or from one community to another (Van Gennep, 1960). Obtaining a driver's license, registering to vote, or turning 21 years old can be viewed as customary practices in U.S. culture that indicate a young person is moving from one stage of life to the next. While the decision to attend college has historically been included on that list, beginning in the fall of 2005 it now had the ancillary benefit of giving students access to Facebook. High school students could now look forward to college acceptance giving them the opportunity to move out of their parents' home and being able to join an on-line social network that was made up of 35 million participants (Levy, 2007). Joining Facebook became a marker event that demonstrated an individual had successfully navigated their way from high school to college in the manner consistent with Van Gennep's definition of community transition.

While Van Gennep's theory provides an interesting perspective on how Facebook became so popular with college students, it doesn't shed light on why its popularity on campus may begin to wane. The likelihood of its decrease in popularity seems more unlikely after reviewing Facebook's current user statistics. According to facebook.com, there are currently 250,000 individuals creating accounts each day with a total of 66 million users (Facebook, 2007). This growth can be attributed to a February 2006 Facebook decision to grant access to high school students and eventually to make the network available to anyone with an email account (Levy, 2007). As a result of this decision, currently half of all Facebook users are not college students. Instead, the largest demographic joining the site are people over the age of 25 (Facebook, 2008).

While these steps have significantly increased the number of Facebook users, they may also be ultimately responsible for a decrease in college students' use of Facebook. The ability of Facebook to serve as a rite of passage for college students may have been significantly diminished as the site has broadened its scope beyond campus boundaries. Parents are now joining Facebook and communicating with their student through the network. In addition, employers are utilizing the site to research potential interns and candidates (Wyckoff, 2007). Based on these developments and the demographic information provided by Facebook, it may no longer be accurate to describe the site as the exclusive domain of college students. As a result, the ability of Facebook to be viewed as a ritual that demonstrates movement from the high school to the college environment is not as clear as it might have been two years ago.

It may be argued that Facebook's growth has resulted in the site "jumping the shark" in terms of its popularity on college campuses. This term is typically applied in media studies to describe the phenomenon of a television show reaching a tipping point and beginning to decline in popularity. The phrase is a reference to a 1977 episode of "Happy Days" where Henry Winkler's character, "Fonzie", jumped a shark tank on water skis. It has been suggested that this episode "was the point where the show became blatant in terms of self promotion" (Wilton, 2006). It remains to be seen if the same critique can be applied to Facebook's decision to broaden its promotion beyond college students. According to social networking researcher Fred Stutzman, "Facebook is becoming a different place as it attempts to mass market itself" (Levy, 2007). Over the coming months it will be interesting to see if the efforts Facebook has made to expand its appeal will ultimately cause students to grow tired of the site and begin to look for the next thing that will become the unique domain of college students.

Rick Zomer serves as the Associate Dean of Residence Life at Calvin College, located in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Virtual Community

By David Johnstone

Ryan Burke, a student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, invites his girlfriend from North Carolina State University to meet him at the Pit, a central meeting point on his campus, for a Valentine's Day surprise. She arrives and finds hundreds of students (some estimates top 1,000) whom he had invited via Facebook. Her boyfriend starts by introducing an a cappella group—not to sing some romantic melody, but the Dixie Chicks' defiant hit "I'm Not Ready to Make Nice."

When the song is done, Burke tells his girlfriend that she has been unfaithful and that he's dumping her. They exchange harsh words — several of them four-letter epithets — while the audience watches, laughs and jeers. ... Many of those watching have cameras and are filming throughout, and numerous videos quickly end up on YouTube, where in less than two weeks they have attracted more than 500,000 viewers — along with parody videos, Facebook groups pro and con, and much debate. (Jaschik, 2007)

In 2004, a Harvard sophomore started Facebook Inc., which, according to Liedtke (2007), is the Internet's second largest social networking site (p. C1). Facebook currently has over 70 million monthly active users (Facebook Press Room, 2008). MySpace, the larger and more commonly known site established in 2003, currently draws over 110 million monthly active users (Techradar, 2008).

The bulk of site members are drawn from high school and college populations. The Pew Research Center suggests that 54% of those between 18-25 years have used one or more social networking sites (Kohut, p. 6).

For those of us in Student Life, some personal decisions need to be made about the role we wish to take in responding to the technological changes being felt by the college student culture. Things are moving so quickly, particularly in the world of online social networking, that we cannot afford the luxury of sitting back and allowing events to shape and redefine our campus communities without our input. We have the opportunity to participate in shaping and understanding the implications of these changes. Human nature tends to function in a reactive mode; I believe that we have the profound opportunity to structure the ways that online social networks (also called virtual communities) are used, viewed and understood by our students.

The last five years have redefined how collegiate student culture views community. It increasingly views community through the screen of social networks, virtual communities, and cybersocieties. There has been a radical shift in the ways that traditional-aged undergraduates view their relationships and the world around them. I desire to look at some of the implications of this technology, how these sites are used, and the benefits accrued by them. Further, I would like to begin a broader discussion of how students demonstrate, consciously or unconsciously, the value they ascribe to the essentials of a community. For lack of a better expression, I want to explore "the good, the bad, and the ugly" of the virtual community.

The Good:

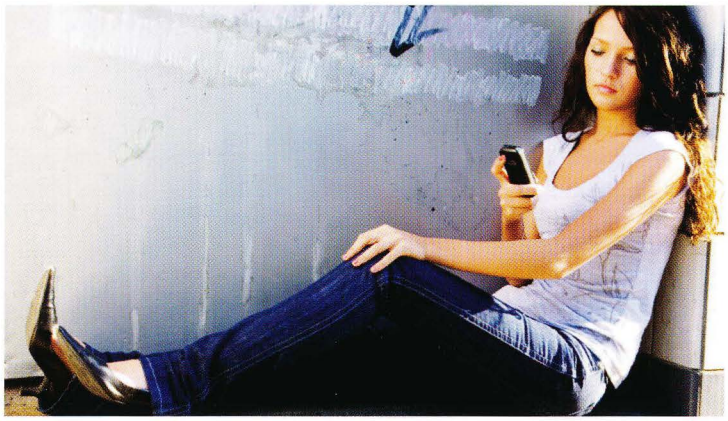
Students have articulated that the advent of social networking has been of tremendous benefit to them. Along with the rest of North American culture, their internet and email has reinforced the truism that their "communities are transforming" (Boase, 2006, p. i). As researchers have observed: "The traditional human orientation to neighborhood–and village-based groups is moving towards communities that are oriented around geographically dispersed social networks" (Boase, 2006, p. i). The Internet's ease, speed, and convenience in maintaining contact with family and friends thousands of miles away is a tool which students seize aggressively.

Speaking to college seniors who are veterans of these sites, it is fascinating

to hear some of their observations about how their lives are extremely busy and that social networking or virtual communities allow them to fulfill expectations and save time. Expectations to maintain relationships and contact with distant relatives, family, local, and distant friends, and even those they have never physically met, are a demanding part of their lives.

As they describe the process of maintaining connections, they frequently used the word "safety" to describe their virtual interactions. They further state that quick and short contact is acceptable, that it is alright to keep relationships at an acquaintance level, and that the emotional investment could be kept minimal if they choose; this freedom suggests it is a safe place to navigate. This "safety" was further increased knowing that "emotional rejection, when you put yourself out there, was not as intense." Thus, while previous generations would have to fortify and strengthen themselves in order to ask someone on a date, asking over the internet diminishes the risks of asking.

Mass or quick scheduling was identified as a standard occurrence for students. The ability to connect with a large group of friends quickly saves time. As in the Valentine's Day break-up story, a large number of people could be contacted and informed of plans in a quick way. The students spoke of scheduling events with an hour's notice and reaching a dozen of their friends over Facebook.



With a generation of students overwhelmed with the multiple demands of academics, relationships, work, faith, and finances, the Internet presents a lifeline to them, where they perceive that the use of social networks is increasing their discretionary time (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004, p. 35).

The Bad:

The seamy side of social networking is tied to the extremes of its negative use. For example, in January 2007, a fourteen year old girl was raped by two men who had fostered a relationship with her over MySpace (Gorman, 2007, p. A1). It is not unusual to come across an article such as this in the daily newspaper which links these crimes to social networks. Unfortunately, most of these crimes tend to be linked with predatorial behavior with far reaching consequences. Deceit, deception, and manipulation are hardly unusual in our society. These actions are maximized and exploited on these sites. Social network sites such as MySpace designate almost a third of their staff to watch "for inappropriate material on the site as well as identifying underage members (MySpace prohibits those 13 and younger from joining)" ("Culture Clips", 2006). Concerns are recognized, but cannot be completely eliminated.

The Ugly:

Last spring, the Associated Press, in a follow-up story to the Valentine's Day breakup, wrote that Ryan Burke and his girlfriend acknowledged that the confrontation was a stunt. In an attempt to demonstrate "the power of Internet communities," he also demonstrated the ease by which a hoax could be perpetuated on these sites ("Students Confess", 2007).

Distortion and fraud can be perpetuated; personal information can easily be abused. A few examples closely linked to the college experience demonstrate the scope of this concern:

1. Last year across the U.S., housing officers began to encounter incoming students who were assessing and judging their potential roommates, not from emails, telephone calls or "face to face" meetings, but solely from their MySpace or Facebook profiles. University housing departments began receiving calls requesting and sometimes demanding changes based on information gathered or inferred from these sites (Farrel, 2006).
2. Campus judicial officers across the United States were required to address students posting photographs that displayed actions in violation of codes of conduct. Among some of the actions displayed were drunkenness, lewdness and criminal actions. A tangential concern was highlighted by actions taken by the NCAA when it began to suspend athletes for posting photographs linked to team hazing, which is against the organization's policies (Teicher, 2006).
3. Gossip on a college campus has always been present, but with the advent of social networks, this has morphed onto a new level. Unfortunately, slandering, maligning, and malice are not unusual to find on these sites. Comments posted on these sites enter the public domain with all of its ability and power to transform rumor into fact. The personal devastation and heart-ache due to misinformation and misrepresentation has taken a form which elevates the skills of manipulation to a degree where it could be equated with bullying.

The relational abuses are real in virtual communities. Members feel a sense of anonymity because they do not have to observe the instant facial reactions of the victims. They are able to ignore and deny responsibility for careless or even malicious postings. While the networks present valuable tools to students, they also can be used as tools for harming and destroying relationships in these "communities". It is helpful to begin to

identify the essentials of a community and discern if a "virtual community" is truly something to be embraced.

Community:

McDonald (2002) states that a formal definition of community would include a "set of policies and practice that mark the distinctive mission" and "shared values and commitments held in common by institutional commitments" (p. 159). However, as many definitions of community are vague, it is often more valuable to identify what happens in a healthy community.

The first attempt to identify the characteristics and actions of a community is linked to its purpose. Stanly Grenz (1998), in his book Created for Community, observes that "God is at work in our world, we declare. And God's purpose in this activity is the establishment of 'community' – a reconciled people who enjoy fellowship with Him, with one another, and ultimately with all creation" (p. 23). A community, viewed through a spiritual lens, is highly interactive and relational. It has relationships that are not adversarial; they demonstrate a sense of joy and commitment amongst its members.

In terms of specifics, a community is perceived as having two essential elements required for a healthy life. A community needs to be able to provide the security which lies in intimacy and a sense of belonging (Parks, 2000, p. 89). This is an internal focus where the community develops a sense of knowing each other and individuals feel that they are known by others.

A second essential is tied to the sense of significance that an individual and group find in a personal or common meaning or direction. This provides a purpose to their existence and an external focus. The community and individual believe and identify that they have an impact and place in the scheme of events; yet, they also have found the security of relationships and belonging. Together they have developed a sense of meaning within the intimacy of relationships (Parks, 2000, p. 89). Both are critical for mental, spiritual and relational health. In short, these are the foundations of a healthy community.

Implications:

Twenty years ago, Boyer (1987) made the observation that: a student takes 16 credit hours, and spends 2 hours in study for each credit hour of instruction (a generous estimate!). That means 48 hours of the week are devoted to academics. If 50 hours are assigned to sleep, that leaves 70 hours in the student's life unaccounted for, a block of time greater than either sleep or academics. (p. 180)

With the development of social networks over the Internet, campuses and student culture are in the process of being transformed, with Christian higher education being no exception. While all staff at Christian colleges should have a sense of the vocational call that expects investment in and care of students, Boyer's breakdown of time has a more focused suggestion. With the amount of time an undergraduate student spends outside of the classroom, it is clear that those professionals in Student Life have a large potential impact on these students. Further, if a college has a residential program, those in Residence Life have an even clearer responsibility. Social networks and all the technology that stimulates and fosters relationships are of general interest to the whole campus community. However, when students spend 100 hours per week outside of the classroom, their co-curricular world becomes the world of Student Life. All of the community issues which have existed throughout the history of higher education still exist; they have just been magnified and transformed by the Internet, compelling Student Life professionals to become aware of the changes.

These transformations have implications for training and preparation, particularly for professional residence life staff and student leaders. Traditional training to develop and foster community and relationships is no longer adequate. Understanding how to enter into the world of college students involves understanding the technology they use, whether it be gaming, social networks, video sharing, etc. Ironically, while there appears to be an increase in social interaction through these sites, many students are identifying a loneliness and dissatisfaction with these online relationships.

The shallowness and fleeting nature of these online communities do not encourage intimacy or a sense of belonging. The potential for truly knowing an online friend is always tenuous and the ability to distort or falsify details is always present. It is not surprising that a tremendous sense of insecurity is created in these relationships. If relational security is paramount for a community, then the insecurity found on these sites undermines their sense of belonging.

All of the community issues which have existed throughout the history of higher education still exist; they have just been magnified and transformed by the Internet, compelling Student Life professionals to become aware of the changes.

Student Life professionals must also retool the ways they mediate and reconcile tensions between students which now originate through or spill over onto the computer. Many students do not have the skills for "face to face" confrontation, let alone confrontation defined by grace and respect. Campus legend has a story that describes two young women who were "screaming" at each other through instant messaging. While externally they seemed composed, they did not hesitate to use expletives in their harsh words to one another. The situation was further exacerbated because they

were college roommates. Unfortunately, they were in their own residence room, six feet apart, and with their backs to each other, "fighting!" They could not reconcile. Whether the story is true or not, its details are familiar when compared to other similar stories. The dynamics faced in the virtual world are an important "reality" for many students.

It is important that we are reminded that what happens outside the classroom can have tremendous positive or negative effects on the student's learning. On the surface, relationships online or off don't seem to have implications for academic success. Unfortunately, relationships powerfully affect a student's sense of belonging, intimacy, and security, which then impacts their learning. What happens in social networks ripples out to impact students and has an effect on their campus experience. Thus, community, online or offline, can be a powerful tool in the academic success of a student.

What happens in social networks ripples out to impact students and has an effect on their campus experience.

Conclusion:

Virtual communities should not be considered "evil" unto themselves. In the community's need for significance and direction, students view these sites as useful tools. They are used to mobilize students in response to world issues. Information about the atrocities in Darfur, child soldiers worldwide, or the slavery in America is quickly disseminated over social networks. Students use these sites to rapidly define concerns and quickly find answers. Institutionally, these are phenomenal tools which can and are being used to benefit communities.

However, the core of the implications for a Christian campus is that social networks are an imitation of the connections longed for by students. If Christian campuses are unable to provide genuine communities that are characterized by a sense of meaning and belonging, then students will look for these communities elsewhere. MySpace, Facebook, and other social networks provide a semblance of a student's need for connection and belonging. Social Network sites will continue to be created and transformed. MySpace and Facebook may not exist in two years, but alternative ways for students to connect with friends and develop new relationships (whether illusory or not) will continue to appear.

I believe we may be in the midst of a cultural and technological revolution with implications that are vast for higher education and, by association, Christian higher education. Social networking is the proverbial "uncharted territory" for many educators. However, there are many students familiar and comfortable within this strange terrain. For those of us in Christian higher education, I believe we will need to solicit the wisdom and counsel of these experienced guides in order to help us navigate through this new virtual community. I believe that in this world of extremely rapid change, those of us in Student Life have the possibility of prompting and priming our communities in defining how online networks can be viewed and understood. These actions may involve a shift in our pedagogical models and, in order to care for our students, we will need to understand and be aware of this new terrain. My hope is that this article will be another step in the development of some paradigms by which we seek to understand the virtual world through the lens of our faith. Soli Deo Gloria.

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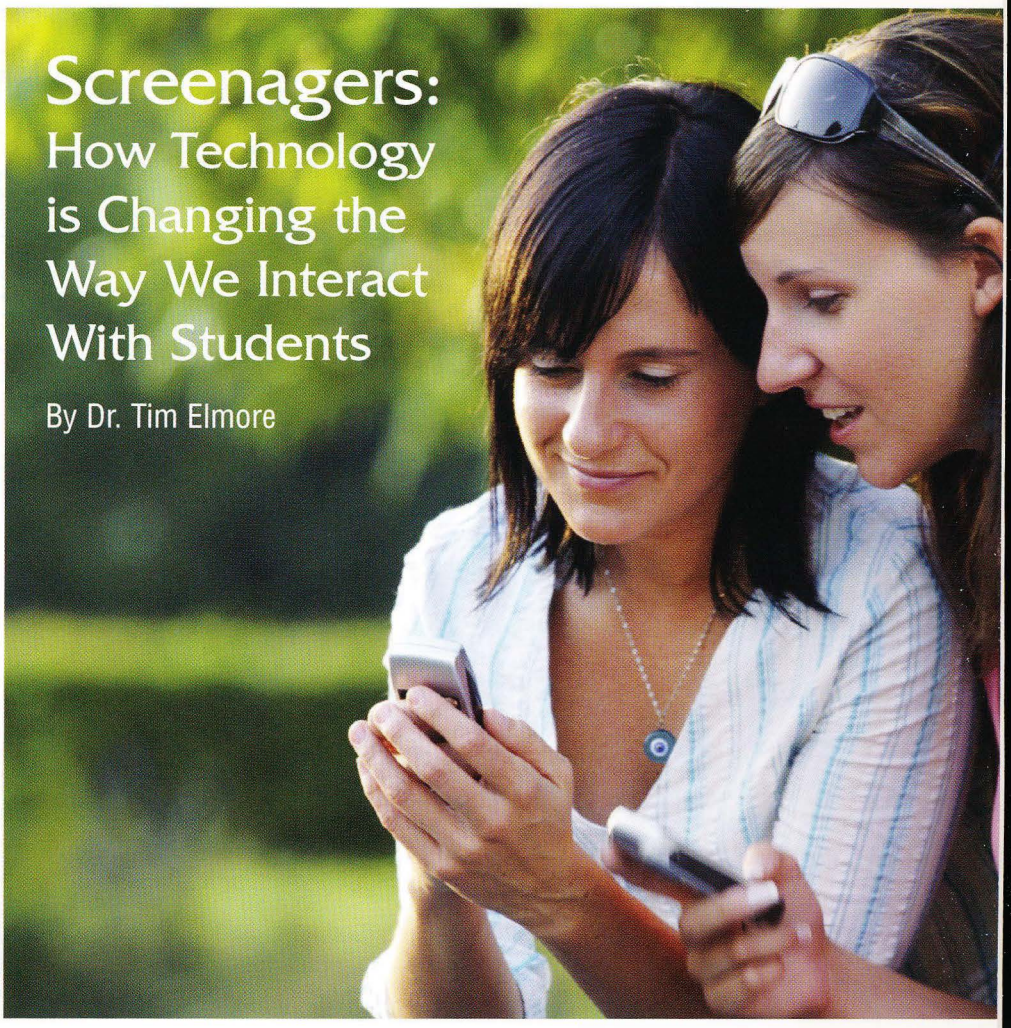
Screenagers: How Technology is Changing the Way We Interact With Students

By Dr. Tim Elmore



One of my greatest concerns for higher education is the disparity between how faculty and students prefer to give and receive communication. It isn't that faculty cannot communicate with students anymore. It's simply that the desired modes of communication are changing with our culture and many (perhaps most) of our institutions' faculty in the U.S. won't change with them. After interacting with faculty and staff at twenty-four campuses this year on the subject, I've found two prevalent attitudes: Staff and faculty either feel too tired to change, or they hide behind a façade that says: "Students need to demonstrate a desire to learn - so they need to find a way to understand my communication style." In both cases, faculty members dug their heels in and refused to change.

I must admit, I have my own issues. I mentor a group of student leaders in Atlanta where I live. After each meeting, I email the students to remind them of our next meeting and the assignments from the last meeting. Months ago, I realized the students never got my reminders. I finally asked them why they weren't getting my emails. One of the students got honest. He said, "Mr. Elmore, I never read email. Can you text us?" It was a light bulb moment. That little comment began a conversation where I learned that those students viewed email as a way to "communicate with older people."

Our Research

Several months ago, we hosted another focus group of students (ages 16-24) and asked them: What are your preferred methods of communication? We thought it was a good question. After all, we're all about trying to connect with this Millennial generation—so we thought we'd ask just how they wanted to receive our messages. Their response shouldn't have surprised us. Their top eight methods of communication were:

1. Text messaging
2. Internet (i.e. MySpace.com or Facebook.com)
3. IPods and podcasts
4. Instant messaging
5. Cell phone
6. DVD / CD
7. Books
8. Email

I want you to notice a few things about this list. First, note that email is last on the list. As I mentioned above, students often view email as "a way to communicate with older people." Second, with one exception, this list moves from more personal to less personal in nature. They want something customized, not generic, if they're going to pay attention. Third, and most importantly, these students prefer a "screen" for six out of their top eight favorite methods of communication.

The Screen Age

Every generation shares common characteristics. However, each generation is defined by some shared elements in their developmental years. The primary elements that define a generation are:

1. Shared music
2. Shared experiences
3. Shared crises
4. Shared television programs
5. Shared celebrities (people of influence)
6. Shared age and era

Today, the delivery of almost every one these elements shares one thing in common—they are driven by a screen. Call me the master of the obvious, but students want to interact with a screen. In fact, we've begun to call students "screenagers" because they are more at home in front of a screen than watching a talking head on a stage. They want a personal message, but want to control how intimate and vulnerable they

become. They like the option of signing off when they wish.

The fact that text messaging landed at number one on the list tells us a lot about students today. Bear with me as I venture some observations about why text messages are the preferred method of communication:

1. Text messages represent very current communication. More so than voicemails, a text means I need to interact now about something relevant to you.
2. Text messages are generally sent from someone you know. Unlike phones, you generally don't get a "wrong number" or generic call on a text message.
3. Text messages are brief and to the point. The person texting doesn't waste words; in fact, they usually abbreviate the message.
4. Text messaging is in your control. The receiver can stop when they want to. This kind of control is attractive to students today. They want communication on their terms.

Students today are inundated with messages from every side. I believe they're most likely to respond to a text message because it allows them fast, current, relevant communication with friends - but at a safe distance. They like intimacy without a lot of vulnerability. It sounds like a paradox - and perhaps it is. I believe this is but one of several paradoxes that exist among Generation Y. Consider this: This is the first generation that does not need authorities to access information. Why? They have screens: however, they do need authorities, like you and I, to help them process that information. We can interpret it for them. This is our challenge.

Last year, Facebook experienced a drop in membership for the first time since the social networking site was started. Why? Perhaps the novelty has worn off. Maybe it's simply competition. I believe it is also because of the mass advertising that has consumed so much space on the site. Last year, Facebook advertising rose by 155%. Marketing experts believe it will jump another 75% this year. Young people are simply tired of the massive amount of generic messages they receive. They want something personal, current, relevant and convenient.

What We Can Do to Penetrate Their Hearts?

The need for education in our day doesn't involve changing the "what" of our message, but the "how." For the most part, the content our meetings and lesson plans are sound. The need is to re-visit the "how" of our message. How are we delivering the truths we wish to communicate to students? Are we communicating healthy messages and sound truth in a relevant fashion?

My friend, Reggie Joiner, provides a great definition for relevance. Relevance is simply using what is cultural to say what is timeless. That's our job. Incidentally, this is exactly what Jesus did while He walked this earth two millenniums ago. He visited an agrarian culture and used seeds, and fig trees, and birds to illustrate timeless Kingdom truths. He took the familiar and introduced the unfamiliar. If He were to visit us today, I am certain He would find cultural analogies in the 21st century and use them to teach these same timeless truths.

Let me suggest some ideas below to discuss with your team. They are simply ideas that staff and faculty might consider if they want their message to stick with students. Apart from the obvious suggestions like using technology (i.e. text messaging), remember the following communication tips:

1. **Students learn on a "need to know" basis.** Don't just jump into your topic; take time to explain the relevance of it. Why should they listen?
2. **The less predictable your words, the more memorable they will be.** Once you summarize your point, ask yourself: is it cliché? Find a fresh way to say it, with a new twist.
3. **The first four minutes must grab their head or their heart, if you want sustain interest.** Be quick to get to some content, or reveal your own heart. Provide a reason for them to listen.
4. **The more "in your face" your words are, the more trust you will earn.** They love to "speak their mind" and tend to believe communicators who are blunt in the same way.
5. **If you challenge the status quo, they will hunger to take a journey with you.** They have high expectations of themselves and of anyone "up front." Challenge the norm.
6. **They grew up loving images, so give them a metaphor.** Their world is MTV, video games, photos, DVDs, and the internet—you must have a picture, too.
7. **Once you prepare your message, find a way to tweak it to exceed their expectations.** Think about movies that stick, or popular novels; they excel by adding another layer of story.
8. **For your message to be remembered, keep the pace of change high and call them to change.** Change is key. Their world is changing fast. They love change; your talk must be full of changes.
9. **Teach less for more.** Although this sounds contradictory, it isn't. To be remembered, plunge into one central theme.
10. **Remember, students today are both high-performance and high maintenance.** Walk the delicate balance between nurture and challenge. Speak the truth in love.

Tim Elmore is the Founder and President of Growing Leaders, a non-profit organization created to develop emerging leaders. This summer, June 26-27, "Growing Leaders" is teaming up with Chick-fil-a, Inc. to host a National Leadership Forum. The theme is "Screenagers: Equipping and Unleashing Generation Y." To learn more about this forum or "Growing Leaders", log on at: www.GrowingLeaders.com.

'In Loco Parentis' Revisited

By Gene C. Fant Jr.

On February 5, a tornado carved a deep gash across the aorta of our campus: the dormitory complex. Along with the university's president, David Dockery, and another dean, I was among the first administrators to arrive at the disaster, a mere two minutes following the direct hit.

We stopped first at the men's dorms. Nothing could have prepared us for the devastation that we saw in the dim glow of the lightning flashes. Several of our students were trapped under a collapsed commons area. To the side of our view, we could see the rubble of the women's complex.

For me, a lasting mental image of that moment will always be the three of us wearing suits, standing in the raw sewage that was gushing out of the broken plumbing fixtures as orderly lines of students headed calmly to the primary academic building. A few students wandered around dazed, and some were bloody. Instinctively we grabbed those students and called for others to help them to safety.

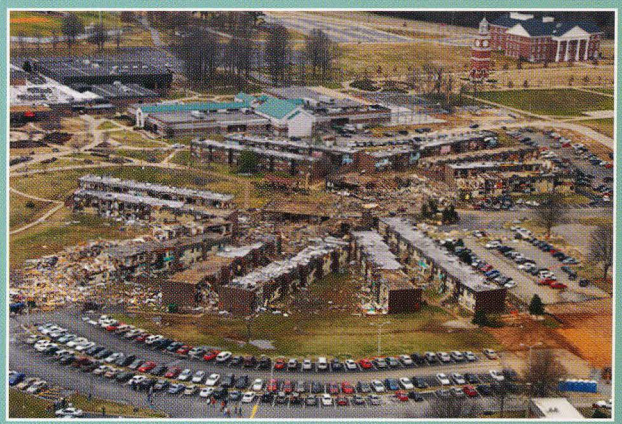
Everywhere we walked, students hugged us and shook our hands. We patted their backs and tried to speak with as much of a comforting tone as we could muster. I was struck by how many times students called out our names, as though their simple articulation offered a kind of solace.

Soon faculty and staff members swarmed all over the campus. We directed them to the shelter, asking them to comfort the students. Our nursing professors and their students established triage positions in several locations. Others arrived at the collapsed dorms and began to help the emergency workers in their rescue attempts.

By midnight, we finally received word that all of the trapped students had been rescued and that, incredibly, no students had been gravely injured. While 51 students had been taken to the emergency room, and several were in the intensive-care unit, the prognosis for all of them was optimistic. Then we received word that all of the residential students had been picked up by professors, staff members, and community folks and were now staying in private homes -- a feat that had been accomplished within a few hours of the storm.

At 1 a.m., I accompanied President Dockery on a quick survey of the campus. I am from South Mississippi, and I have seen many tornadoes in my life. In fact, my earliest memory is hiding under my mother's sewing machine at the age of 2 or 3 as a tornado passed over our house. I walked my aunt's property after it was hit. I almost drove into a twister that I could not see due to driving rain, missing it by less than 20 seconds. I've seen the aftermath of tornadoes more than I would like.

But that 1 a.m. walk-through was like nothing I had seen before. In a handful of acres, something like 1,100 students were now without their living spaces. Of the more than 1,000 cars in the campus parking lots, at least 950 were damaged. I estimate that at least a third of them were totaled. Dozens were piled like snowdrifts against building walls



Photos were courtesy of Union University and their campus Photographer Morris Abernathy

or in ditches. Car alarms were blaring even then. Flashers were still flickering. Generators were groaning in several locations, providing a weak but stark light for the workers.

We found the remaining rescue workers at the worst dorm collapse, and the president asked one more time, "Everyone is out? Everyone is accounted for?" The emergency workers assured us that was the case and that we had had no fatalities. It was nothing short of miraculous.

As I stood in the midst of the rubble, I was, first and foremost, an administrator, surveying the damage and thinking about the thorough preparations made by our vice president for student services and her staff. Their work is now the gold standard for the entire higher-education community. I also began to wonder how we could reopen for the spring semester when we were missing most of our residence halls.

That thought, though, metamorphosed my mind into that of a faculty member. Although my office was undamaged, I pondered why I hadn't remembered to videotape its contents as an inventory in case of a tragedy like this. I tried to remember how recently I had backed up my computer's hard drive. I wondered if I still had a job; could the institution even survive such devastation?

Lastly, though, I stood there as a parent. During that 1 a.m. survey, I saw my friend Mario Cobo, the resident director of a men's dorm, staring into the rubble. His quick thinking and brave efforts helped save those young men who had been trapped. Despite losing everything, he selflessly cared for students who were, in a very real sense, a part of his own family. I thought about my own children and hoped that, should they ever be in a similar crisis, they would be cared for in the same way.

Suddenly I find I have a new understanding of the old concept of in loco parentis. In the shock of the chaos created by a howling storm, the young adults who are our students just wanted to see their parents. Our faculty and staff members, thus, became the very arms and shoulders of moms and dads who were hundreds of miles away. Those of us who were on the campus in the tumult also wanted to see our own children, and our students became our children in that moment.

Most of us think of in loco parentis in terms of the university's role in regulating behavior. In my own mind, I have always thought of in loco as a kind of authoritarian concept. I now see it, though, in terms of our responsibilities to our students, not as authorities but rather as preparers, protectors, and passers-on of our vision of a learning community's ideals.

I now see it, though, in terms of our responsibilities to our students, not as authorities but rather as preparers, protectors, and passers-on of our vision of a learning community's ideals.

For the past few weeks, we have worked to get our campus reopened, which means that we are providing shelter, food services, and even clothing for our charges. Our goal was to be back in class a mere two weeks after the tornado. On Wednesday, February 20, we accomplished just that.

In many ways, it was exactly what any parent would do: Exert every ounce of energy to ensure that the next generation succeeds.

Higher education is a very diverse enterprise, with institutions of all stripes. There is power in our diversity: All manner of viewpoints and worldviews are represented. Optimism, though, is not one of the perspectives that we have in surplus. By nature, faculty members are skeptics and cynics. We are doubters and detail people who can find the flaws and failings of anything at any time. There are times, I have to admit, when I am acutely aware of how my own cynicism hamstrings me.

Yet that cynicism was very little in evidence in the aftermath of the tornado, event though people kept asking us how we can be so optimistic when we had 20-foot piles of rubble all around us.

Our optimism may be directly related to our mission as a faith-based university. The pessimist in me looked at the destruction and asked, "So, what good is tenure at a residential college that now has no dorms? Better head home and work on that CV!" The voice of faith, though, whispered more reasonably: "Look beyond this. Look to the lives that were saved. To the families who rushed to campus to adopt students. To the rescuers who risked their lives. Look beyond the rubble. Find the hope that transcends these circumstances.

"And get to work."

This article was reprinted with the express permission of the Chronicle of Higher Education, where it first appeared in print on March 10, 2008, and the author, Dr. Gene C. Fant Jr.. Dr. Fant is Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Union University in Jackson, Tenn. The tornado that hit the campus was subsequently rated as an EF-4, with winds in excess of 200 miles per hour. Total damages are expected to exceed $40-million. To see photos and read more about Union University and their continued rebuilding efforts, visit http://www.uu.edu/stories/ or http://www.flickr.com/photos/41208530@N00/collections/72157603889196007.

From Location to Interest: ACSD Considers Move from Regional to Collaboratives Model

By Dr. Edee Schulze, Dr. Connie Sjoberg, Mike Broberg, David A. Kennedy, and Nicole Hoefle

ACSD could be crossing a significant threshold in June 2008. A proposal has been submitted to the ACSD Executive Committee from a selected Task Force that recommends the consideration of moving from our current Regional model to what is being called the "Collaboratives" model. This model would move our group affiliation from geographic location to the specific special interests with which we are involved. The Task Force believes strongly that this change is very positive for our Association and will increase: 1) access points for members; 2) communication of current concerns or issues; 3) professional development opportunities; and 3) provision of relevant resources.

Recently, it has become increasingly evident that the existing Regional model has become outdated. Due to the rapid development of technological resources (websites, listserves, and blogs), increasing costs related to travel, a general lack of knowledge and/or interest relating to the regional directors' role within the organization, regional directors report feeling generally ill-prepared, confused about their role, and ineffective.

On June 5, 1980, The Association for Christians in Student Development ratified a constitution that included the establishment of regions for the purpose of fostering spiritual and professional effectiveness of Christian student development. These regions would function in a manner consistent with the purposes of the Association constitution and the by-laws. There are currently nine regions served by an equal number of Regional Directors.

In recent years, the activity of the majority of the regions has decreased. Among the nine total regions, three are currently active in successfully meeting the objectives as outlined. The remaining six regions struggle to meet the objectives, not because the Regional Directors are doing poorly, but because the times have changed. The most significant source of this change is technology, which has greatly increased access among individuals and member institutions. Relevant information and resources are now available with the click of a mouse. For a myriad of reasons, regions are not functioning as they used to, nor as they were intended.

The Task Force contends that it is time to move from the Regional Model and implement a creative, collaborative solution. We feel this will further enable the Association to accomplish the broader goals of increased access for members and new constituents, foster greater communication of current concerns or issues, and provide relevant resources to our growing membership in an increasingly complex profession. The Task Force is suggesting a change in the current regional structure to provide members more access points for participation, increase professional development through common areas of interest, and an additional forum for knowledge dissemination and research. Related to the mission of ACSD, the Collaboratives model will promote professional growth by allowing members to more effectively collaborate across our international Association with members who share similar professional roles; increase the fellowship of the membership by offering more connecting points; and enhance the exchange of ideas by offering more

Collaboratives bring together people who want to connect because of a common interest, job function, need, or geographic area...

drive-in conferences, electronic mailing lists, and publication opportunities.

The Collaboratives Model can be described by the following.

1. Collaboratives bring together people who want to connect because of a common interest, job function, need, or geographic area;
2. Some Collaboratives would be long term or standing Collaboratives; others would be short-range or temporary;
3. Collaboratives would have a leader and a leadership team. The leader would be appointed by a member of the Executive committee, similar to how the Regional Directors are appointed now;
4. A Collaboratives leadership team would identify goals annually that could include virtual goals (related to electronic mailing lists, a Collaboratives website or online activities), conference goals (related to gathering at the annual conference or presentations at the annual conference), activities or events (mid-year conferences), research, resourcing, or other pertinent functions;
5. Members could be a part of one Collaborative or more within a given year; they could change from one Collaborative to another from year to year depending on their interest level or career needs or aspirations;
6. Some of the initial Collaboratives that are being discussed include "Collaborative for Residence Life and Housing," "Collaborative for Assessment and Evaluation" and "Collaborative for First Year Programs." Check the website listed at the end of this article for a complete list of the proposed Collaboratives;
7. The Role of the Collaborative Leader could include:
   a. Create the opportunity for members to join and recruit interested members;
   b. With a leadership team, identify the group's purpose and to set yearly goals;
   c. Attend the Collaboratives Leaders Breakfast at the annual conference;
   d. Provide a report of activities at the annual conference;
   e. Communicate with group members;
   f. Serve a 2 year term as a Collaborative Leader.

As word of this proposal has been communicated within our ACSD community, favorable comments are being shared. Last October during their fall meeting, the Executive Committee voted unanimously in favor of this move. One current Regional Director recently commented on this proposed change saying, "I absolutely think that the Collaboratives model would promote and increase Association involvement. This would give members a chance to make meaningful connections with those that may have similar job responsibilities as well as interests."

John Henry Newman, in the mid-1800's stated that, "Growth is the only evidence of life." Our Association of Christians in Student Development has grown beyond its current structure, which has brought this discussion of change. It is believed that this proposed move will assist ACSD in continuing to be a cutting edge professional Association for the future.

To learn more about the Collaboratives proposal and proposed initial Collaboratives, visit the website at www.ACSDCollaboratives.com. The tutorial is easy to use and very informational about this new idea. Also, you may contact any member of the Collaboratives Task Force through the information below.

Members of the Collaboratives Task Force who have worked this year on the concept, proposal, and presentation include:

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Keeping Faith:
Serving Students or the Kingdom

Michael and Stephanie Santarosa

This past summer we received word that the college where we had invested a combined seven years of our working lives had closed. The news brought with it mixed feelings. On the one hand, we were saddened to think of students whose "alma mater" would no longer exist, colleagues, donors, and friends who would see their investment of time, money and energy seemingly come to naught, and of potential never reached. Yet, on the other hand, we could not say that we were surprised. For despite the best efforts of many Christian staff and faculty over the years, we had seen the college, originally founded by missionaries in an effort to spread the gospel message to a new frontier, drift ever so slowly away from that foundation until one had to wonder if its founders would have recognized it.

All this begs the question: How does a Christian college lose its way and what does it take to stay on course? How can our Christian institutions of higher education remain true to their Christian identity and mission? For an answer, we often point to faculty hiring practices, the chapel program, admissions standards, or the leadership of our top-level administrators or board of trustees. As student affairs practitioners, it then becomes easy to think that our role and responsibility for "guarding the mission" is as minimal as our participation in these areas might be.

Joel Tom Tate (2004), in an article entitled "Pass-Fail 101: Three Ways to Make or Break a Christian College", suggests that there are three basic changes in orientation that result in this drift. The first provides our focus in this article and relates directly to the way we, as student development practitioners, at every level, do our work. He suggests that Christian colleges begin to lose their Christian identities when there is a shift away from ministry to the Kingdom towards ministry to the student. At first glance, it may be difficult to see how these are different. After all, don't we serve God by serving students? While it may be a subtle distinction, there is a difference in focus between the two that, over time, can lead in very different directions. Tate writes:

> If a college does not exist for the sake of the Kingdom, it cannot expect its students to be there for the sake of the Kingdom. If it exists for the sake of the student, no one should be surprised if the students at that college are there for their own sakes. A college that shifts from intentionally providing a service to the Kingdom to merely providing a Christian alternative for its students will not only be doing its students a disservice, but will find it difficult, and eventually impossible, to hold on to its faith identity and purpose.

In other words, serving the ends, desires, or goals of the "Kingdom" or rather, its King, will look different from serving the ends, desires, or goals of "students" or even the students' parents.

For example, contrast the lifestyle required or desired by students vs. the Kingdom. In a comprehensive qualitative study of the lives of teenagers during their "first year out" of high school, Tim Clydesdale (2007), in his book *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens After High School*, describes the "American teen lifestyle" which requires a car, clothing, meals, snacks, entertainment, and technology (including a cellphone) and costs an average of $1,035 per month (p. 111). The pursuit of this lifestyle is driving more and more teenagers to seek paid employment earlier and work longer hours than they have in past generations. This, he laments, leads to their trading in valuable hours of their lives for quickly discarded or depreciating consumer goods and often delaying

the onset of financial independence from parents while ushering them into "the relentless American cycle of work-and-spend" (p. 113).

In an effort to attract and retain such students, we may become willing accomplices in keeping them drunk on the American dream and personally benefiting from their unchecked consumer tendencies. But what kind of lifestyle would we encourage, support, or develop if we are more concerned about serving the Kingdom of God? If we are preparing students to inhabit God's Kingdom, wouldn't we expect our graduates to be soldiers and servants who care more about others than themselves, who are eager to take up their cross for the sake of denying their sinful natures, who learn for the cause of making the world a better place rather than just getting a better paying job, and are soberly reflective about the suffering and injustice that goes on in the world? If we are to serve the Kingdom rather than the students, one of our first priorities might include weaning them off the false hopes of prosperity and easy living.

Unfortunately, our drive to serve students all too often has little or nothing to do with developing them to reach their potential, grow to maturity, or fulfill the unique call of God on their lives. Instead, we focus our attention on keeping students happy, appeased, or simply entertained lest they become dissatisfied, transfer to another school, and lower our retention rates. As student development practitioners, we might be tempted to think of our profession as being grand butlers catering to the whims and fashions of a demanding target market of affluent teenagers and over-zealous "helicopter" parents. At many of our schools, we dress up this compulsion in spiritual jargon and talk about modeling servant leadership, or showing Christian love.

Consider the following chart as an attempt to distinguish the subtle difference between serving students or serving God's Kingdom as the object of your work in the student development arena of your college or university.

In light of the examples above, would you say your institution is more Kingdom-focused or student-focused? What would it take for you or your department to make a paradigm shift towards service to the Kingdom? How might that impact your assessment of good student development work?

It's important for us as student development professionals to recognize the role our work plays in helping our schools fulfill their unique Christian missions. Moreover, because Jesus is King even when his reign is not recognized, the good news for our counterparts working at public or otherwise secular schools is that cultivating a Kingdom focus in your sphere of influence can provide a solid foundation and direct your work as well. No matter our context, as we offer our best Kingdom-focused student development work for God's glory, we faithfully live out the Lord's prayer in our profession. Lord, may your Kingdom come and your will be done in and through us and our institutions.

Michael and Stephanie Santarosa both work at Indiana Wesleyan University, located in Marion, Indiana. Michael serves as the Director of Conference Services and Stephanie serves as the Associate Dean for Residence Life.

References/Further Reading:

Clydesdale, T. (2007). *The first year out: Understanding American teens after high school.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tate, J. T. (2004). "Pass-Fail 101: Three ways to make or break a Christian college." *Touchstone Journal of Mere Christianity* 17 (5).

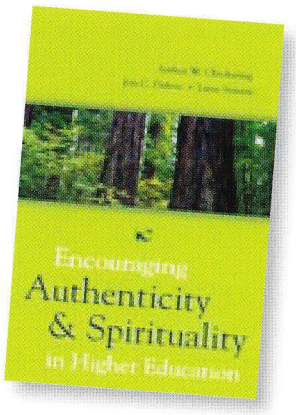
Area/Function	Student-Focus	Kingdom-Focus
General	Recognizes student as consumer and education as product	Recognizes student as apprentice in a process of developing wisdom and maturity
Success measured by:	No complaints, increased enrollment, graduate placements, and high scores on satisfaction surveys	Fruit-filled living; investment in eternity; students equipped for Kingdom work
Student Government	Organizes students to help them get what they want from the college/university	Develops rhetorical and diplomacy skills of students so that they more effectively become an organically whole student body that furthers the school's shalom
Residence Life	Provides the most comfortable housing possible and relieves discomfort from roommate conflicts	Helps students recognize their living environment as a microcosm of the greater society and serves as a laboratory for learning and developing true community
Career Planning & Placement	Arranges lots of interviews and secures well paying jobs	Teaches students to discern God's call and offer themselves to His service
Intercultural/Diversity Programs	Focuses on entertainment, amusement, personal enrichment, and affirmation of student uniqueness	Focuses on cultural appreciation and engagement, holistic identity development, racial reconciliation, mutual understanding and edification, humility, and awe at God's creation
Academic Support Services	Helps students pass a class or get a degree	Helps students develop their potential
Chapel/Spiritual Life	Emphasizes efficient delivery of spiritual highs and positive approval ratings	Emphasizes spiritual formation for Kingdom advancement, excellence in preaching, use of technology, and quality music for God's pleasure
Student Activities	Offers entertainment as an escape from studies	Nurtures students' creativity, social cohesiveness, and artistic expression and develops discernment of culture

Book Review

Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education

by Arthur Chickering, Jon Dalton, and Liesa Stamm

Reviewed by Jason M. Morris



Interest in spirituality in the broader landscape of higher education has experienced a recent resurgence. In 2003, UCLA researchers at the Higher Education Research Institute launched a national longitudinal study on the spiritual life of college students that has become a seminal piece on this subject. This often quoted study reveals a high interest from U.S. college students in the areas of spiritual involvement and spiritual issues. In addition to this research project, several other recent major works also address college student spirituality (Astin 2004; Dalton, 2006; Johnson, Kristellar, & Sheets 2004; Love & Talbott, 1999; Ma, 2003). One such work, *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education*, is a timely and comprehensive study that complements the existing literature and presents a well balanced use of theory, research and practical application.

In *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education*, Arthur Chickering, Jon Dalton, and Liesa Stamm argue for increased efforts to assist students in seeking authentic spiritual lives. The authors cite a growing wave of interest in more holistic student development as an impetus for this book. The central theme of this book is a challenge to higher educators. The challenge is: "...we need to temper our current heavy emphasis on rational empiricism and professional and vocational preparation with increased efforts to help students address issues of authenticity and spiritual growth" (p. 23-24). The authors further contend that tapping into students' affective domain and addressing social responsibilities are key areas to be considered when educating the whole student.Chickering, Dalton and Stamm bring three unique perspectives to this work based on their past experiences and academic pursuits. Chickering currently serves as a special assistant to the President at Goddard College, but he is known for his groundbreaking work on student identity development entitled *Education and Identity*. This book introduces seven vectors of student development commonly used by student development professionals. Jon Dalton serves as an assistant professor in educational leadership and policy at Florida State, and Liesa Stamm serves as a senior associate at Rutgers University Center for Children and Childhood Studies. Both Dalton and Stamm have done extensive work on student spirituality.

As a reader, one must keep in mind the intended audience for this work are those in public and private higher education interested in holistic student development, particularly broadly defined spiritual development. The authors begin the book with a series of foundational discussions that orient the reader toward the current religious and spiritual climate on many of today's college campuses. These introductory chapters include a lengthy definitional discussion of spirituality and religion, the historical framework for the role of spirituality and religion in higher education, the shift toward more secularized higher education, the current need to focus more holistically on student development, and the social and ideological trends in our culture. All of the chapters are insightful, providing an outstanding context for the role of religion and spirituality in the American system of higher education.

In part two the authors address how to bring about intentional institutional change related to student spirituality and authenticity. They state, "To have significant impact, and to ultimately amplify the institutional culture, we need changes that penetrate all aspects of the student experience and that engage all administrators, faculty, student affairs professionals and staff" (p. 94). The authors then proceed to address pertinent legal and policy issues, curricular content and pedagogy, as well as the place of spirituality in student affairs and community building. Many of the ideas and examples illustrated in this section are readily transferable to one's own campus milieu. The last two chapters in this section, in my opinion, will be the most helpful to the *Koinonia* audience. These chapters focus specifically on spiritual formation in the mission of the student development professional and the importance of creating a campus ecology where student spiritual formation will flourish.

In part three, the authors discuss the implementation of ideas presented earlier in the book. They focus on three distinct areas: 1) planned organizational change; 2) professional development focused on personal "formation"; and 3) the difficult task of assessing outcomes related to spirituality and authenticity. The authors utilize two helpful case studies (The Dallas County Community College District and Richland College) to illustrate principles of organizational change and professional development related to spirituality and authenticity. They conclude with a chapter on leadership as it relates to creating this type of institutional change. In this section, I appreciated the authors' emphasis on creating change from the inside out. That is, focusing on one's own inner life as a prelude to helping others.

This book provides a wide angle assessment of spirituality that is relevant and necessary for professionals in higher

education settings who are invested in cultivating student spirituality. The authors' unique perspectives on spirituality serves to enhance the book. At times, however, the authors seemed to repeat the same ideas, thus creating redundancy. In addition, the broadness of the definition of spirituality and the broadness of the book's stated audience is challenging for me as a reviewer, whose biases align closer to Christian spiritual formation. Although this text is written for a broad audience using broad definitions of spirituality, it provides a wealth of useful information for those of us who have in our mission the Christian spiritual formation of students.

Chickering, Dalton and Stamm's work is an important contribution to the literature that has been published on student spirituality. The author's comprehensive approach to the subject matter makes this work a valuable resource for faculty, staff, and administrators at a broad spectrum of institutional types. I recommend this read as a timely addition to the growing body of literature on this subject.

Jason Morris is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education and the Director of the Masters Program in Higher Education at Abilene Christian University.

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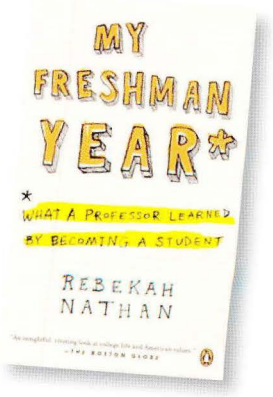
Book Review

My Freshman Year

by Rebekah Nathan

Reviewed by Heidi Johnston



In *My Freshman Year*, Rebekah Nathan (2005) describes her experiences as a freshman at a large state university. Unlike most 17 or 18-year-old freshmen, Nathan is a middle-aged college professor of anthropology. Nathan's accounts provide insights and analyses of current college culture that are unique and accurate.

Nathan's motivations for conducting this research were inspired by the many questions she had concerning the students in the classes that she taught. Nathan and her colleagues were asking:

> Were we like that? Are students today different? Doesn't it seem like they're... cheating more? ruder? less motivated? more steeped in their own sense of entitlement? Why is the experience of leading class discussions sometimes like pulling teeth? Why won't my students read the assigned readings so we can have a decent class discussion? (p. 2)

Thus, Nathan, a seasoned anthropologist, planned a research project for her sabbatical year where she would enroll as a first-year student at the same large state university at which she taught to study American undergraduate culture. In order to preserve anonymity, Nathan uses a pseudonym for herself and for her university, which she calls "AnyU."

Anthropologists, as Nathan explains, believe that culture is "something both learned and shared by others" (p. 17). Thus, she embarked upon this study with the intentions to learn about the culture of the American university. Formal interviews, focus groups, national and local surveys, activity diaries completed by students, observations of on-campus dining habits, and her experiences as a student in various classes were all used in Nathan's research. Nathan makes an argument that AnyU is generally representative of most American universities. After all, as Nathan points out, most college students in the U.S. can agree that many students sleep until noon, that the first row in a classroom fills up last, and that many students drink alcohol, even if underage. Granted, there are exceptions to these standards, but "these are cultural actors too, who are probably aware that they are contesting or flouting norms" (p. 18).

Nathan moved into a residence hall in August and fully participated in the variety of Welcome Week activities provided by the university. She was inundated with residence hall policies, university rules, freshman seminars, name games, and social events. Because Nathan spent 14 years as a professor at the same institution, she thought that she "knew the ropes." However, Nathan admits that as a student, she was completely disoriented and no longer knew the geographic and bureaucratic shortcuts of AnyU.

On her second night in the residence hall, a team of four RAs confronted Nathan for drinking beer in a lounge in her residence hall. Drinking is only allowed in private rooms with the doors closed by those of legal age, and Nathan was referred for violating residence hall policy. This incident initiated Nathan into residence hall life.

Community is an asset to many universities, although it takes many different shapes and forms. Nathan states, "Youth, pop culture, and getting a degree are pretty accurately the ties that bind together a public state university 'community'" (p. 42). As a graduate student

at Taylor University, I have noticed that whenever a Taylor University alumnus meets a fellow alumnus, the first question they ask each other is where they lived on campus. Being a graduate of Penn State, I was recently asked, "What is the first thing that two Penn State alumni ask each other?" Despite the fact that I am an alumna of Penn State, I did not know how to respond. As Nathan remarks, "Two implications follow from what can be called our 'over-optioned' public university system. The first is that there is little that is automatically shared among people by virtue of attending the same university" (p. 39). The second implication that Nathan mentions is that even though universities emphasize community, students can easily move out of their residence halls, change their majors, and join or quit different clubs, without being noticed. Thus "community" is not static or reliable. Nathan states that students genuinely want to have a close community, but that these same students are instead focused on individualism, freedom, and choice, which do not always promote a sense of community. Because students today are very individualistic, they tailor a community to fit themselves. Students create "individual communities," which are worlds of self-selected people, clubs, classes, and events, which are reinforced by the large university that offers students hundreds or even thousands of choices.

Female college students' conversations focus on topics such as boys, sex, bodies (including body image), relationships, one's childhood, one's future, television, movies, and experiences with drugs and alcohol. Today, students spend very little time discussing philosophical or political issues. Nathan was struck by the insignificant role that intellectual matters seemed to play in the lives of college students. Many students expressed attitudes such as, "classes are a small price to pay" for a college experience.

Nathan also shared the insight that she gained about college student cheating. Students and professors have different attitudes towards cheating. Nathan explains that many students think that cheating is like "'stealing signs in baseball'- practically part of the game. It's not a bad thing, everyone knows you do it, and sometimes it is too much to your disadvantage not to do it" (p. 124). Nathan cites national studies concerning cheating behaviors among college students, and the most alarming part is that students easily justify or rationalize their cheating. It is easy for students to blame their own cheating on someone else: professors, other students, or even society.

Some universities have discussed increasing the amount of classes held on Friday morning, in an effort to curb Thursday night drinking. Nathan expresses her opinion about this topic by writing:

Policies and programs like this, in my thinking, position students as errant children who must be thwarted or outwitted. I believe that policy works best when it reflects a positive regard for the judgment of those it seeks to influence and a respect for the resiliency of the culture it wishes to change. (p. 142).

Herein lies one of Nathan's best points. University services and policies need to directly connect with student culture. "Educational policy, I believe, cannot afford to rely on inaccurate or idealized versions of what students are, and student issues should be analyzed with a fuller understanding of how they are embedded in student culture" (p. 141). Instead of designing "solutions" to student issues that do not directly address the actual source of the problem, administrators need to take into account where students are coming from, what students are facing, and how students are dealing with these issues. Then, maybe they will be able to get to the root of the problem. Also, administrators must do all of this without compromising educational standards.

Nathan expresses the limitations of her research: "To the students I didn't know well, including most of the men and women on my dorm floor, I was a very much older woman who, despite getting busted for drinking, was never really one of them" (p. 15). This statement alludes to another question: Do other students who are "different" (racially, socio-economically, ethnically, or otherwise) feel this way as well? Nathan touches on this topic in her chapter about international students, but this is an issue that should be studied more. Was age the only factor keeping Nathan from being "one of them?"

From my own experiences at a large state university, Nathan's accounts of student life are accurate. From distinctive door decorations to the sparsely attended "absolutely mandatory" hall meetings to the informal classroom culture that she describes, there are norms that seem to be widely applicable in American higher education. To anyone not familiar with undergraduate student culture at large state schools or even colleges in general, My Freshman Year would be a valuable book to read. As Nathan admits, even professors and administrators at these schools do not have a complete picture of what student culture is like, and these individuals can benefit from taking a look at a student's life from a student's perspective. If administrators, professors, student development staff, academic advisors, and other university staff members can understand the culture of undergraduates, programs and classes can be adjusted to better serve the students, even without compromising academics.

I would also recommend this book to students in a Master of Arts in Higher Education program at a small Christian university. Because these future (and current) practitioners will be serving students, both directly and indirectly, the more that practitioners understand current student culture, the better.

Nathan's penetration into student culture, combined with her experience as an anthropologist and professor, create a unique perspective on a world that might seem foreign to university administrators, professors, and parents of college students. Her candid and honest look at American undergraduate culture in My Freshman Year can be an eye-opening experience for anyone interested in higher education.

Heidi Johnston is a graduate student in the Masters of Arts in Higher Education Program at Taylor University.

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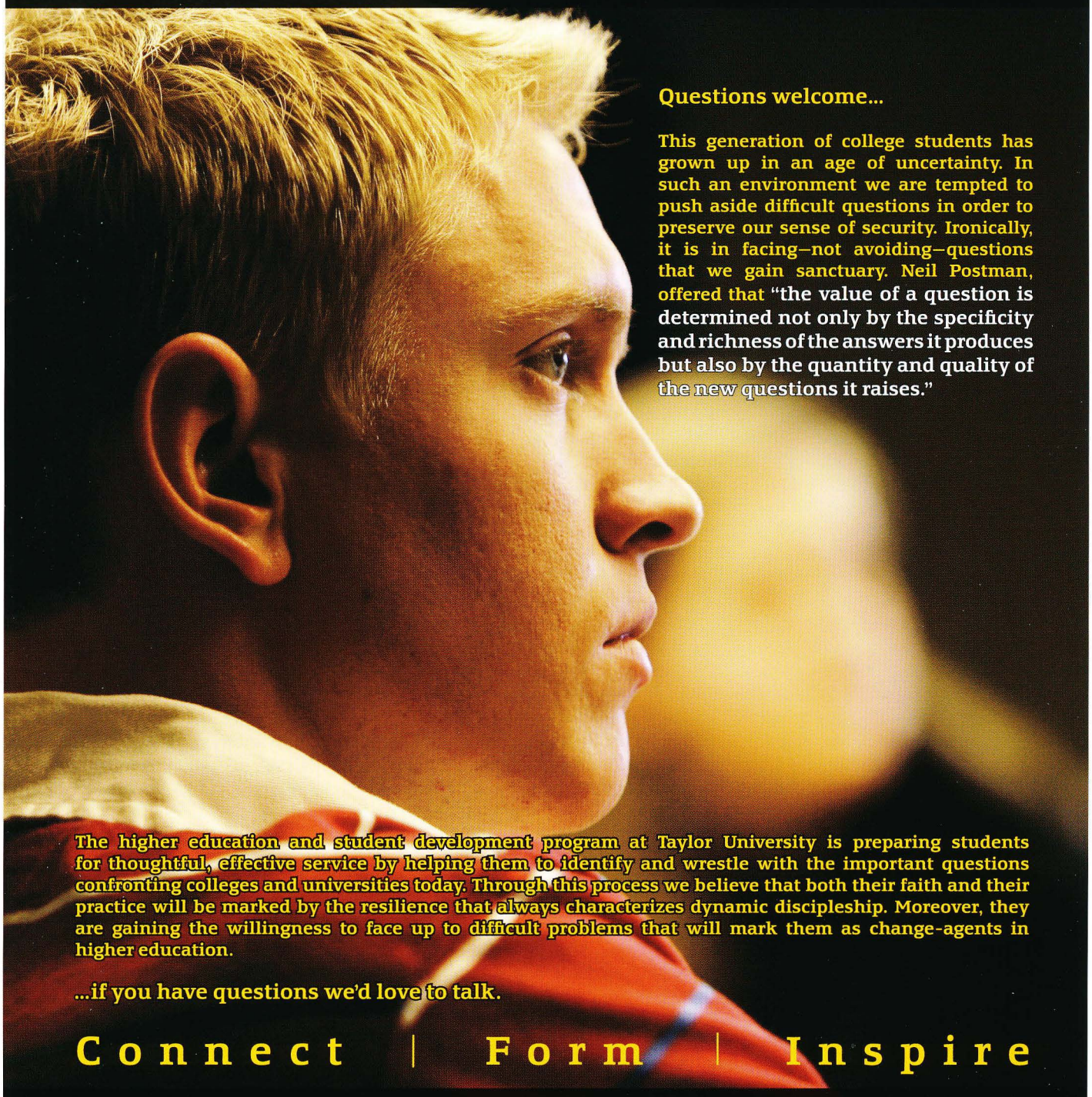
Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development



Questions welcome...

This generation of college students has grown up in an age of uncertainty. In such an environment we are tempted to push aside difficult questions in order to preserve our sense of security. Ironically, it is in facing—not avoiding—questions that we gain sanctuary. Neil Postman, offered that "the value of a question is determined not only by the specificity and richness of the answers it produces but also by the quantity and quality of the new questions it raises."

The higher education and student development program at Taylor University is preparing students for thoughtful, effective service by helping them to identify and wrestle with the important questions confronting colleges and universities today. Through this process we believe that both their faith and their practice will be marked by the resilience that always characterizes dynamic discipleship. Moreover, they are gaining the willingness to face up to difficult problems that will mark them as change-agents in higher education.

...if you have questions we'd love to talk.

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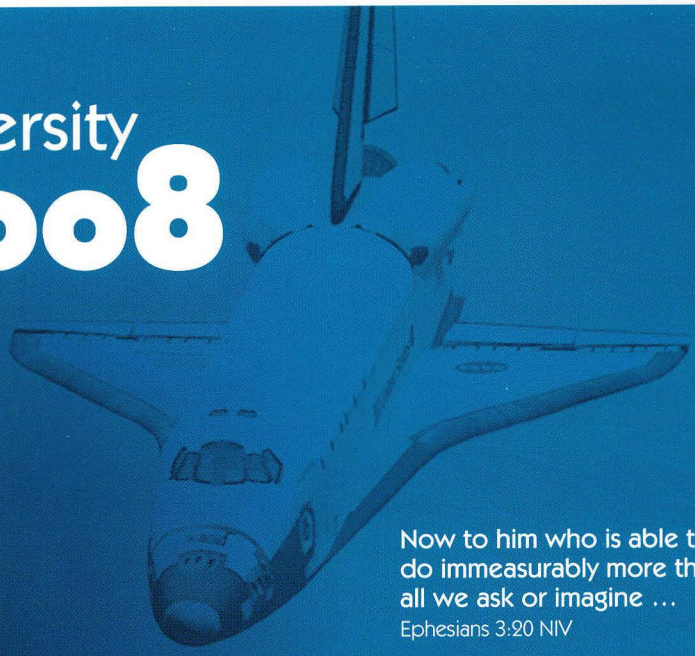

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine ...
Ephesians 3:20 NIV

12 seconds ... 120 feet ...
It Begins With A Dream

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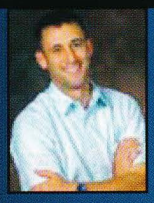
Joe Dallas is founder of Genesis Counseling, a sexual integrity ministry.



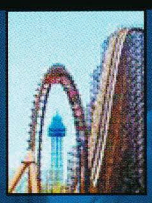
Mark Irving directs discipleship programs at Cedarville University.

Paul Isaacs leads the Navigators discipleship ministry at the University of Dayton.

Kelly Monroe Kullberg founded the Veritas Forum at Harvard in 1992.

Dr. A. Charles Ware is a nationally recognized expert on leadership, diversity, and racial reconciliation.

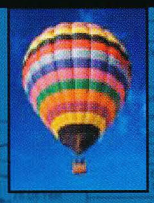
EXCURSIONS



Kings Island

Freedom Center

WPAFB Museum



Hot Air Ballooning

Creation Museum

KEYNOTE speakers

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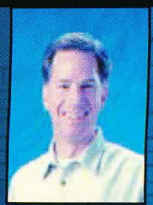

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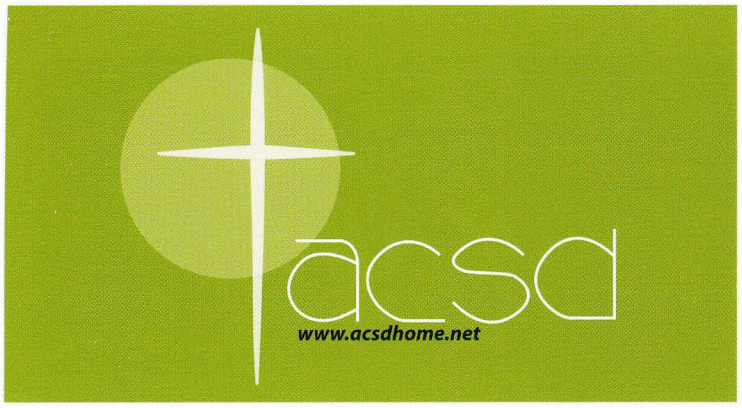

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KOINONIA is the official publication of ACSD. The purpose of this publication is to provide interchange, discussion, and communication among Christian professionals in the field of Student Development. Solicited and unsolicited manuscripts may be sent to the Editor of *Koinonia*, Steve Austin, for publication consideration via e-mail at staustin@tayloru.edu. The ideas and opinions expressed in *Koinonia* are not necessarily the views of the executive officers, or the organization of ACSD, and are solely those of the individual authors or book reviewers.

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