Factors that Affect the Faith Identity Development of
Evangelical Christian College Students

A Thesis

by

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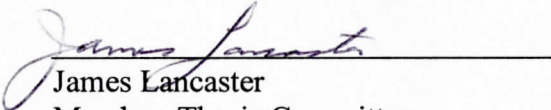Evangelical Christian College Students

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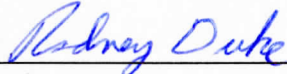
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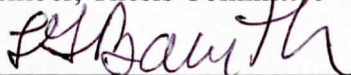Wynn Bennett Shooter

May 2004

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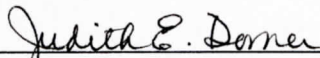Chairperson, Thesis Committee

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ABSTRACT

Factors that Affect the Faith Identity Development of

Evangelical Christian College Students (May 2004)

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There is a decided lack of research regarding the faith identity development of

evangelical Christian college students within the secular, four-year, public institution.

Knowledge of significant events that influence faith identity development is critical to

direct practice within the field of student development. In the fall of 2003, 10 college

seniors participated in open-ended interviews. This qualitative study identifies key areas

of the challenge and support of student's evangelical Christian faith identity

development. Various subcategories emerged within the broader areas of challenge and

support as experienced by evangelical Christian students at one southeastern,

comprehensive, public institution. Careful examination and interpretation of the interview

responses revealed the liberal atmosphere, exposure to new and diverse ways of thinking,

and peer relationships as some of the most salient issues affecting evangelical Christian

faith identity development. The findings of this study generate practical applications for

practitioners and a number of implications for future research.

Research Question:

How do evangelical Christian students within comprehensive public institutions

experience challenge and support of their faith identity development?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A review of relevant literature reveals that student affairs practitioners have avoided the topic of faith development among Christian college students. Considering that the foundation of student development is constructed on the premise of developing the student as whole, this lack of attention to faith development is surprising. According to the Student Personnel Point of View, first published in 1937 and revised in 1949, Student affairs practitioners should take a holistic approach to the developmental needs of students (Komives & Woodward, 1996). According to Magolda (1997), students view their lives holistically and are resistant to the compartmentalization of their lives. If students make meaning of their lives through holistic thinking, student affairs practitioners cannot afford to delete the vital aspect of faith identity development.

Practitioners approach holistic student development through the framework of proven theory. Studies of faith development theory are replete with the work of James Fowler. Since the groundbreaking work of his book *Stages of Faith* in 1981, Fowler has remained the most recognizable of faith development theorists. Our modern understanding of faith development is due largely to his dedication and persistence in interviewing hundreds of subjects. Fowler's research findings include a broad definition of "faith" that is applicable to any student, Christian or non-Christian. Fowler proposes six stages of faith development that assist in ordering, clarifying, and categorizing the

continuum of an individual's faith identity development. As with many other developmental theories, Fowler notes that some type of challenge or struggle that serves as a stimulus precipitates progression through stages of development (Fowler 1981).

Along with focusing on the need for an emphasis on college student's faith identity development, this study examines the level of challenge and support experienced by evangelical Christian students as they assume their own faith identity within a public four-year institution. While Fowler's faith stages are very relevant to this discussion, this study does not attempt to specifically categorize each student within Fowler's stages of faith. Nor does this study attempt to provide data from which to make broad generalizations regarding the nuances of how students progress through each of Fowler's stages. The purpose of this study is, however, to identify what events, circumstances, and relationships (referred to as challenge and support) serve as catalysts to enhance the faith identity development of evangelical Christian students. This study attempts to answer questions such as: In what ways is the faith of evangelical Christian students within public institutions most challenged? How do the challenges that students encounter affect their faith identity development? Do students experience a supportive environment in which they can further develop their faith identity? (see appendix A)

Developmental areas such as cognitive, psychosocial, and identity are applicable to this discussion. These developmental areas are a valuable source from which to draw conclusions about the faith identity development of evangelical Christian college students enrolled in public institutions.

Student development theorists such as Arthur Chickering have established a strong theoretical foundation for identity development. It is from this broad spectrum of

student development theory that the author enters the discussion of faith identity development. In Arthur Chickering's Theory of student development, he postulates that in order for students to experience new stages of psychosocial/identity development, they must experience some type of conflict. In order to progress developmentally, the conflict must not be too overwhelming for the individual. A well-balanced environment with an appropriate level of support provides the resources for a healthy emergence from conflict. It is within a state of conflict and disequilibrium that students both learn and develop a personal identity. As students go through the process of resolving conflicts and emerging from challenge, they have the opportunity to progress developmentally (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This concept is sharply suited to address the process of faith identity development.

Fowler (1981), Love & Talbot (1999), Love (2001, 2002), and Holcomb (2003) are among a growing list of contemporary authors and researchers who are illuminating the need to emphasize the faith identity development of college students. Unfortunately, little empirical research exists. The current compilation of research focuses on the faith development of Christian students within private, Christian institutions. This study will continue the discussion of cognitive, psychosocial, and identity development and focus specifically on the faith identity development of the evangelical Christian student within the secular institution.

The primary outlets of professional literature within higher education have yet to produce information regarding the needs specific to the development of the evangelical Christian college student on the secular campus. In order to find such information, one must turn to religious, theological, and psychological literature. There are, however, some

writings regarding a more general approach to faith development, spirituality, and spiritual development. The author will discuss these topics in light of how the content applies to the faith identity development of evangelical Christian students.

The following review of literature emphasizes current studies that are underway, considers the relevance of additional studies, and reviews the theoretical foundations used to develop a contextual understanding for studying the faith identity development of evangelical Christian college students on the public campus.

Definition of Terms

FAITH

Authors such as James Fowler (1981) and Sharon Parks (2000) have defined faith as the complex and dynamic process by which students determine their place in the world, answer questions about what life is truly about, how they should respond, and generally how they make meaning of their experiences. In this context, "faith" is the exploration into the heart, into the motivations, the values, and into the core of what compels us.

In 1981, Fowler released his book titled *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, which outlines six stages of faith development. Built on the work of Piaget (1969), Erikson (1964, 1968), and Kohlberg (1969, 1976), Fowler's work and his stages of faith development provide a valuable, contextual framework for the examination of student faith identity development. In the broadest sense and simplest form, Fowler defines faith as the process by which we "make meaning" of our experiences. This definition of faith involves the recognition of a force beyond us and includes an examination of an individual's "center of values and power". Although neither the definition nor the stages are specifically Christian, they are not humanistic, and the recognition of a "higher power" is central. According to Fowler, the nurturing of faith and values can and should be a vital educational and developmental component of both secular and private institutions (Das & Harries, 1996; Fowler, 1981).

Fowler's six stages of faith development are: 1) Intuitive-Projective, 2) Mythic-Literal, 3) Synthetic-Conventional, 4) Individuative-Reflective, 5) Conjunctive, and 6) Universalizing Faith (Fowler, 1981). Most college students are believed to be somewhere within stages two, three, or four. Stage two, Mythic-Literal, is characterized by a reliance on mythical, gut feelings and a lack of critical thinking. Constructed around what they have received from others, the faith of students at this stage is linear and lacks depth. Synthetic-Conventional, the third stage, includes conforming relationships with family, friends, and society, reliance on authorities, and predominantly shallow emotional assumptions. The beliefs and values held by the individual have not been tested or closely examined. Still not owned by the individual, this faith has been adapted from the faith of others. A student functioning at Fowler's stage four, Individuative-Reflective faith, takes an analytical approach, has examined values, norms, and standards, and demonstrates the ability for more advanced powers of cognitive reason. Surprisingly, those at this fourth stage of faith development are likely to be rigid and fundamental, will approach faith in "black and white" terms, and are prone to seek out authoritarian leaders. There is considerable agreement that the transition between stages three and four is a complicated and difficult process and could be a stage of its own. It is within this transition, referred to as stage 3.5, that students realize the gravity of their various responsibilities, recognize the impact of their beliefs and values on their lives, and eventually determine their own faith identity. It is reasonable to suspect that many traditional age senior college students are either currently addressing, or emerging from this transitional stage (Fowler 1981, G. Holcomb, personal communication, February 11, 2003).

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN FAITH

Fowler's definition of "faith" provides insight for understanding faith, but it is too broad and inclusive for the purpose of this study. Since I will focus specifically on the faith identity development of evangelical Christian college students, it is necessary to clarify and attempt to define faith as interpreted by the "evangelical Christian". In the modern United States, the term evangelical Christian holds different meaning for different individuals and is associated with a wide variety of Christian denominations. Of three identifiable sects of Christianity, the evangelicals stand in contrast to mainline and liberal Christians as being more conservative, fundamental, and outspoken (Robinson, 2003).

According to the National Evangelical Association (NEA), an evangelical Christian adheres to the following tenets:

- The Bible is the inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God
- There is one God, eternally existent is three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- Belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death, resurrection, and ascension
- Belief that Jesus Christ will return in power and glory
- Belief that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian and enables him/her to live a godly life
- Belief in an afterlife of eternal life in the presence of God for the Christian and an afterlife of eternal damnation for non-Christians (http://www.nae.net/index.cfm/method/content.A2823A13-ED59-4586-AEB8367CDCA562C4)

A review of websites such as www.nae.net, www.barna.org/ and www.wheaton.edu, reveals that definitions of the term evangelical Christian range from broad, general descriptions to very detailed and exclusive explanations of what it means to be an evangelical Christian. In order to reconcile the disparities, George M. Marsden (1991) declares five essential beliefs of the evangelical. According to Marsden, evangelicals

view the Bible as the final authority, they believe in the saving work of Jesus and that the foundation for salvation lies in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the spreading of this gospel message is of high value, and actually living a spiritually transformed life is essential (Marsden, 1991).

These five basic tenets of evangelical Christian faith stretch beyond a cognitive, confessional pronouncement of a doctrine or set of beliefs. When carefully examined, both the NEA's tenets and Marsden's explanation include the volitional and relational components of the life of the evangelical Christian. It is personal experience and relationship with the living Savior that brand-marks the evangelical Christian. Regardless of denominational affiliation or social background, it is more than simply agreeing with a list of beliefs that allows evangelicals to sit at the same table. Evangelicals believe that the Lord Jesus is a living entity and that through the Holy Spirit believers become empowered to live transformed lives and develop relationships with a living God. (Marsden, 1991).

FAITH IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The process of developing faith is a complex and dynamic process. Throughout this study, I have chosen to refer to the process as "faith identity development." Developing faith is more than establishing a set of beliefs. In this application, a blending of Fowler's definition of faith with Chickering's theory of identity development as it relates to the evangelical Christian college student becomes "faith identity development". This concept is different from solely examining faith development. Faith development is broad. It is a process that, according to Fowler (1981), all of humanity experiences to some degree. In the current study, Fowler's theory is applied to college students who are

in the process of determining their identity and this is the essential departure from faith development to faith "identity" development. This additional qualifier of "identity" development assists the practitioner by further clarifying the developmental process that is taking place both cognitively and psychosocially within the student.

CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT

A number of theorists such as Fowler and Chickering have emphasized the value and importance of challenge in the life of the college student. Nevitt Sanford (1966, 1967) first introduced the concept of challenge and support to the field of college student development. Sanford believed that a balance must be achieved between the environmental challenge that the student faces and the support that the student experiences. Too much challenge and the student will seek to escape from the challenge. Likewise, too little challenge and the student does not fully attain his or her developmental potential. Under-challenged students may be pleased with the comfortable, easy lifestyle and lack of conflict, but will fall short in the learning and development that they experience during college years (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002).

There are a number of environmental areas in which students experience challenge and support. Teachers, classroom discussions, living situations, peer groups, and other relationships may challenge students and cause them to begin to examine their own faith and identity. These same interactions and relationships may also be the vehicle through which students receive support. For the purpose of this study, challenge is something that causes the student to struggle with his or her faith identity. Challenge causes reflection and enables the student to begin asking questions about their own identity that otherwise may not be asked. Family crises, loss, or a number of college

experiences and relationships can precipitate an environment of dissonance and challenge for the student. In the current study I have tried to determine how evangelical Christian college students experience challenge and support within the secular university (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002).

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The most recent research regarding the faith development of Christian students

focuses on the faith development of Christian students within private, religiously

affiliated schools. Titled "Faithful Change", the study represents a cross-section of

developmental areas and relies heavily on the foundations laid by Fowler (Holcomb,

2003; G. Holcomb, personal communication, February 11, 2003).

For the purpose of the Faithful Change study, 20 freshmen and 10 seniors were

randomly selected from each of six institutions during the first year; a comparison group

of 10 seniors from each school was selected in the fourth year. These 240 undergraduate

subjects, ages 18-22, were enrolled in institutions that are members of the Council for

Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU). The study includes both quantitative and

qualitative components. The qualitative component utilizes Fowler's faith development

theory and interview protocol, which is semi-structured in nature. This interview protocol

is particularly helpful as it assists in evaluating the student's understanding of such

complex issues as sin, evil, the image of God, moral absolutes, and one's worldview

(Holcomb, 2003; G. Holcomb, personal communication, February 11, 2003).

At this point in the Faithful Change study, the data are collected, but has not been

completely interpreted and analyzed. As of yet, no published articles have appeared.

However, researchers have presented preliminary findings and posted some general

information. Of the 180 (120 freshmen, 60 seniors) Year 1 subjects aimed for, the project

actually has a total of 167 (111 freshmen, 56 seniors) usable interviews. These early results indicate that approximately 93% of freshman entered college at either stage two or stage three of Fowler's stages of faith. The remaining 7% were already experiencing the transition phase between stage three and stage four. Of the 56 senior students, approximately 38% were functioning at least within the transitional phase. The Faithful Change study hopes to identify the experiences that promote the more advanced stages of faith development (Holcomb, 2003; G. Holcomb, personal communication, February 11, 2003).

These preliminary findings point to a conclusion that supports previous research regarding the overall development of college students. The vital component found that acts as a catalyst or "driver" for development is crisis. In this application, crisis is synonymous with, and referred to as, a prolonged period of self-examination. It is marked by some type of challenge that the student experiences. This "challenge" comes in the form of cognitive dissonance within their lives. They become aware of inadequacies within their own ability to reason. Crises were marked by significant turning points in the lives of participants and by incidents that prompted significant self-examination (Holcomb, 2003; G. Holcomb, personal communication, February 11, 2003).

Thus far, the Faithful Change study has identified three specific categories of crises. Prolonged exposure to diverse ways of thinking, extensive multicultural exposure, and emotional crisis are the three categories noted. A likely conclusion from preliminary outcomes is that exposure to those who think and live differently are key components to a student's faith development. The third category of emotional crisis includes a wide variety of unpleasant challenges that one might face. Examples include death of family

members, mental illness of a loved one, physical illness, and parental divorce. Too much crises or challenge without appropriate support can hinder development. The right amount of challenge and communal support produces the ideal atmosphere for the cognitive, psychosocial, and spiritual development of college students (Holcomb, 2003; G. Holcomb, personal communication, February 11, 2003).

Faithful Change is examining the faith development of Christian students within private Christian schools. In the public arena, mainstream student development researchers have yet to produce a volume of conclusive, empirical research findings specifically regarding the faith development of evangelical Christian students within public institutions. There is, however, among scholars, a rising interest in the closely related topic of spiritual development. Love (2002) attempts to compare spiritual development and cognitive development. His examination of spiritual development considers the theoretical models of cognitive development offered by Baxter – Magolda (1992), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986), and King & Kitchener (1994); and attempts to draw parallels with the theories of spiritual development offered by Parks (1986, 2000), Fowler (1981, 1996) and Helminiak (1987, 1996). Vital background information of each theorist contributes to a more complete perspective of the relationship of his or her work to this comparison. Love provides contextual definitions of the terms and concepts of religion, faith, and spirituality. These definitions lead to the conclusion that true spiritual development is an integration of many complex developmental factors and focuses on the wholeness of the individual.

Park's four stages of spiritual development is the primary foundation for Love's (2002) comparison of theories and developmental stages. The four stages are

Adolescent/conventional, Young Adult, Tested Adult, and Mature Adult. During the

Adolescent/conventional stage, one makes meaning of the world and their place within it.

It is within this stage that the initial challenging of one's faith likely occurs. The

transition to "Young Adult" brings the most significant opportunity for spiritual

development. It is somewhere within this stage that most traditional-aged college students

are believed to be found. "Tested Adult" and Mature Adult" receive far less attention in

this comparison. These stages involve the ability to conceptualize one's place within the

local faith community and the world. "Tested Adult" and "Mature Adult" may receive

less attention because they are not typically relevant to the development of the college

student.

The essential component that joins both cognitive and spiritual development is the

making of meaning by the student. Student's cognitive development contributes to his or

her spiritual development. There is an inextricable connection between the two. To

effectively address the spiritual needs of students, practitioners must learn to integrate

ideas of spiritual development into their own functional, theoretical models of cognitive

development. Love concludes by exhorting student development practitioners to take a

serious examination of their own spiritual development.

While Hindman (2002) does not report statistical findings or the results of

research, he does make a strong case for the need of higher education to be involved with

the spiritual development of its students. In order to provide a contextual framework, he

reviews the foundational work offered by a number of developmental theorists and

deeply discusses the concept of spirituality. According to Hindman's definition, the word

"spirit" represents the living and bringing of life. Any human connection to something

beyond us that gives meaning to our lives is spiritual. According to this definition, spirituality is an expression of who we truly are.

The idea of spirituality is very important to students. They have expressed repeatedly that values and beliefs clarification are high on their list of priorities. Students are interested in matters of spirituality, they desire to live lives of substance, and they are seeking to make meaning. Upon arrival at college, students begin to create their own structure of spirituality (Hindman 2002). Campus workers have a responsibility to assist students in this complex developmental process.

In hopes of providing resources for faculty and staff, Hindman (2002) offers a number of very practical suggestions. Ways in which spiritual development can be enhanced are: being a part of a community that is committed to moral purpose, intentionally designed opportunities for reflection, affirmation of students, mentoring relationships, providing opportunities to display consistency of actions and beliefs, and the modeling of a life filled with spiritual purpose. These suggestions maintain that colleges and universities should be intentional about ways in which to promote students assessing and developing their own values and beliefs. Hindman emphasizes that practitioners must invest in their own spirituality and spiritual growth. Success depends on the professional's ability to give attention to their own spirituality and on the ability of the institution to make matters of spirituality a high priority.

Rather than rely on dogmatic and indoctrinating practices, the formula of successful promotion of spiritual development relies heavily on the institution's ability to promote thinking and reasoning skills within its students. It is not the goal of higher education to teach these seekers of meaning and purpose what to think, but rather to assist

them in learning how to think and reason and to develop a spirituality that is their own. Spirituality is not something to consider adding to the college campus, it already exists. The question is whether or not higher education is willing to recognize and promote spiritual development among students.

Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis (2002) address the issue of religious participation and spirituality among African-American college students as it relates to their coping mechanisms. First, the authors state that African-American students have a higher rate of religious involvement than other students do. Their religious and spiritual involvement is a contributing factor to their "greater psychological health" and is a relevant and vital aspect of both coping and social mechanisms. These religious beliefs become a filter through which all of life's experiences are sifted. As a result, in times of need, these students are more likely to seek resources that are religious and/or spiritual in nature, especially since they view their church or spiritual communities as a primary venue for psychological support. When these students encounter problems, they seek out resources that see through a lens that is much like their own.

According to Constantine, et al. (2002), some African-American students may even believe that seeking more traditional, secular coping mechanisms may reflect a lack of faith. This concept may keep such students from seeking any help at all. In this scenario, they view the seeking of additional help as taking matters into their own hands rather than trusting their Creator to provide for their every need. This reveals a trend in student involvement. Student affairs workers, counseling staff, and even faculty should be aware of this phenomenon and be prepared to direct these students to appropriate resources. If students view the institution as unaware of their situation or unable to

contribute to their faith-based lifestyle, they will be less likely to share a sense of connectedness to the institution. The authors call for counselors to be sensitive to these needs and integrate spiritual components into the treatment process.

Along with their stated findings, Constantine, et al. (2002) conclude with a list of five limitations of their study. The reader should note that the sampling of African-American students was from predominantly white institutions in a given geographic region. The authors make recommendations as to how to eliminate these limitations in future research.

Wolfe (2002) reports an increase in the interest of spirituality and religion on the college campus. He notes that most, if not all, institutions of higher education have within their history a tie to a religious denomination. There has been a clear and distinct departure from this historical relationship with religion. Even though faith is of paramount interest within the lives of students, it has remained distant from the attention of student affairs practice. There may however, be a return of religious, or at least spiritual, interest and there has recently been sharp increase in enrollment within religiously affiliated institutions. Wolfe claims that within academia, there is a notable shift in interest towards the role that religion and spirituality plays in our lives.

According to Wolfe, current trends in attitudes toward religion and spirituality are marked by a departure from the formal bonds of traditional religious ideologies and a move toward a more inclusive, more open concept of spirituality has taken place. Wolfe (2002) discusses these differences in the perceptions of religion and spirituality. Of the four books referenced within this article, no authors have yet to take a stand as to the relevance of this apparent embrace of a weaker theology and watered-down

denominational influence. That is to say, these four authors have not addressed the need to celebrate or condemn this current welcoming of the new spirituality.

Love (2001) acknowledges the surge in the interest of the spiritual development of college students. While he does not view spiritual development through a Christian lens, his work is directly relevant to the faith development of Christian students. Love evaluates the theories of student development in light of their relationship to spiritual development. To do this, he turns to Sharon Parks (2000), a major contributor to the study of spiritual and faith development. Founded in the work of Perry (1970) and Fowler (1981), Parks successfully blends many student development theories to produce an amalgamation that accounts for focus on areas that previous developmental theories have often left unattended. Relying heavily on cognitive, psychosocial, and identity development, Parks successfully notes the impact of culture, community, and society on spiritual development. Love compares Parks contribution to faith development theory with Perry's theory of cognitive development and recommends purposeful suggestions for student affairs practitioners.

Love (2001) offers definitions of religion, faith, and spirituality. There is a decided move away from the term "religion". The term religion denotes specific doctrines, a shared system of beliefs, and worship of a supreme being. In this context, Love uses the terms "spirituality" and "faith" interchangeably. Spirituality and faith are terms that represent a search for meaning, for wholeness, and for one's purpose. It is this process of "meaning-making" that receives the attention of Parks (2000).

Parks (2000) targets the transition between adolescence and adulthood and presents a four-stage model of development. This merger of stages and transitional stages

produces a focused look at forms of knowing, forms of dependence, and forms of community. These three components exist within each of the four stages of Adolescent or Conventional, Young Adult, Tested Adult, and Mature Adult. Most traditional-aged college students find themselves in the Young Adult stage. It is during this time that students experience confrontation with developing a faith identity of their own. In the proceeding stages, students will continue to struggle with this issue and ideally emerge with a tried and tested faith. The emphasis is on one's recognition of his or her interconnectedness, social interaction and community.

Love (2001) provides practical application to these theoretical foundations. He asserts that practitioners must evaluate their own spiritual development and recognize that all students are engaged in the "quest for meaning". Love reminds the reader that attention to the cognitive and psychosocial development of students, directly contributes to their spiritual development. Spiritual development of college students is important and must be recognized rather than overlooked.

Rogers and Dantley (2001) discuss exhaustively the apparent rise in spiritual awareness both in the work place and on campus. Recognized herein is the expressed need for greater meaning and purpose in our everyday lives. The authors argue that a growing number of Americans share this need.

The primary connections between faith development and this assessment are acknowledgement of the present dichotomization within higher education, the influence of relationships on faith development, and the need to focus on wholeness. The primary application drawn is the need that all humans have to make meaning of their lives and to find purpose. There is a call for departure from compartmentalization and an

acknowledgement of the need to promote and embrace spirituality within higher education.

Love and Talbot (1999) make the case that student affairs practice overlooks the spiritual development of students. They assert that spiritual development is an important aspect of one's identity development. Love and Talbot suggest for ways in which to include spiritual development into the campus environment.

The foundation of student affairs recognizes the importance of developing the whole person. Even though there appears to be increasing interest on the part of the students in spiritual issues, student affairs practice continues to disregard this developmental area both in research and in practice. Love and Talbot (1999) acknowledge that there are many accepted definitions of spirituality. In order to overcome this and provide a framework for future discussion within student affairs, they propose a framework that includes five propositions. Spiritual development is an innate need of humanity and openness to spirituality is a prerequisite to spiritual development. Components of the five propositions include a greater connectedness to self and others, a continual attempt to transcend one's self, seeking fulfillment, searching for meaning and purpose, and persistently seeking a relationship with an outside power greater than one's self.

Love and Talbot (1999) consider Maslow's (1971) hierarchy of needs and Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors in light of spiritual development. In order to form a more holistic approach to student development, these theories can be adapted to incorporate an element of spiritual and identity development. While there is a connection established between current psychosocial developmental theory, identity, and spirituality,

future research is needed to assess the needs related to the spiritual development of college students.

Thompson (1999) discusses how an understanding of cognitive development contributes to a more productive classroom environment. Her insights relate directly to this discussion of faith development. A careful balance between challenge and support is the key to creating a successful learning atmosphere. By experiencing a balance of challenge and support, students can advance along various stages of cognitive development.

In this context, development deals with a student's personal growth on a number of horizons. Interaction with their environment, positive intrapersonal change, and changes in behavior in response to changing demands are essential factors of their development. Several variables are important to developmental change. These variables are relative to Perry's (1981) cognitive stage theory. Much like the view that Perry takes regarding development taking place in the transition between stages, Thompson posits, that adaptation to growing demands and increased challenge is the process by which students experience development. In order to adapt and progress through stages of cognitive development, the proper balance between challenge and support is critical. With increased levels of challenge and a lack of proper, functional support, the balance of challenge and support is not accomplished and the goal of student development becomes compromised.

Support is a critical component and comes in both physical and psychological forms. Support comes from the teachers, peers, and others within the student's community. It involves accessibility to resources and the ability of individuals to provide

needed assistance to the adapting student. The balance between challenge and support is the essential vehicle for developmental growth. Students must experience change toward more complex behavior. This happens when they learn to respond well to increasing demands and challenges.

Along with a review of Perry's (1981) stages of cognitive development, Thompson (1999) offers helpful diagrams that outline appropriate levels of challenge and support. In order for faculty and student affairs practitioners to create the best atmosphere for students to progress through the stages of cognitive development, they must strive to provide adequately challenging and equally supportive learning environments for students.

Baxter Magolda (1999) conducts a very insightful and unique study that addresses the identity development of both graduates and post-graduates. This 12-year, longitudinal study, began with 101 traditional-aged college students entering their first year of college. When the study was complete, 39 participants remained. Baxter Magolda's study represents a significant beginning of research addressing post-graduate patterns or stages of identity development.

Three interrelated dimensions (epistemology, intrapersonal, and interpersonal) are involved in the complex process of constructing adult identities. For the purpose of her study, the intrapersonal component evolved as the focus. Baxter Magolda took a constructivist approach to this research and eventually formulated two organizing principles and two transitional phases of identity development. Participants moved from having an externally derived identity to having an internally derived identity. That is to say, they moved from primarily influenced by others to developing the ability to

internalize and articulate their own reasoning and decision-making. Rather than responding to their environments, participants developed over time to a place of responding to their own internal definition of identity. Unfortunately, most college graduates do not experience a transition to this second phase of identity development. Therefore, often unknowingly, they do not direct all dimensions of their lives.

Baxter Magolda (1999) believes strongly that students can develop to the degree that they listen to their own voices. Participants in this study experienced the development of their internal voice when they encountered a need for self-exploration, reflection, and analysis of their response to difficult situations. Self-exploration became necessary in order to achieve a level of happiness or fulfillment. Student affairs practitioners should be aware of the need to provide these important catalysts for growth and structure opportunities for the type of more advanced identity development that this study illuminates.

The findings of her study are very relevant to an examination of faith identity development. Baxter Magolda's (1999) organizing principles and transitional phases of identity development relate specifically to Fowler's third and forth stages of faith development. College students should experience the process of departing from a belief system based on others beliefs, to a belief system that is their own.

A 1997, article found in *Christianity Today* (Olsen), containing some preliminary results were revealed from a six-year study titled 'Taking Values Seriously: Assessing the Mission of Church-Related Higher Education'. According to this report, approximately 40-45% of students graduate without having their faith tested.

Most students arrive at college with a faith that is not their own or a tacit reliance on a set of values. Without an extended period of questioning these values and beliefs, students do not have the opportunity to make them their own and they are not able to properly and/or critically defend their beliefs. Recognized herein is the need for student affairs practitioners and faculty to provide opportunities for students to struggle with difficult questions, evaluate beliefs, and generally be challenged and supported in the quest to establish their own faith identity and set of beliefs (Olsen, 1997).

Das and Harries (1996) attempt to validate one aspect of Fowler's, (1981) faith development theory. They provide background information of Fowler's definitions of religion and faith, as well as a description of each of his six stages of faith development.

Most college students reside at either stage two, three, or four of Fowler's stages of faith development. Das and Harries hoped to determine if the number of college students believed by Fowler to be functioning at stage four, Individuative-Reflective, is truly representative. In order to accomplish this task, they asked 32 college students to write descriptive answers to two questions. This sample of students consisted of 12 men and 20 women and ranged in age from 21-32 years, the average age being 21.8. The sample represents a range of denominational backgrounds. Two judges who are exceptionally familiar with Fowler's work judged the answers. The judges placed each student into one of three stages according to the answers given by the students.

Results indicate a partial agreement with Fowler's suppositions. This study found a majority of students to be functioning at stage 4 faith development. When assessing gender differences, this study indicates that the number of men and women operating within stage 4 is congruent with Fowler's assumptions, but are statistically more marked.

Due to the limits of this sample, this study cannot be generalized to include all college students.

Low and Handal (1995) conducted a study to determine whether religious participation plays a roll in student's adjustment to college. For the specific purpose of this literature review, this study offers little in the way of empirical data. However, it is noted that an overwhelming number of college age adults (18-24) rate religion as being important to them. The acknowledgement of hurdles such as defining the term religion within higher education further contributes to this overview of faith development among college students. Findings of this study indicate that there is a link between adjustment to college and religious participation. Such results should prompt practitioners to heighten their awareness of the spiritual needs in the daily lives of students.

Bolen (1994) studied the faith development of Christian college students. By comparing and linking Fowler's stages of faith development with the theories of Piaget (1969), Kohlberg (1976, 1984), Erikson (1968, 1982), Chickering & Reisser (1993), and Perry (1970), Bolen makes a strong case for the role of faith development in higher education.

Bolen (1994) conducted a case study that utilized three first-year college women and two first-year college men as subjects. Through qualitative analysis, he delved deeply into faith development of these students. The author attempts too indirectly provide some pragmatic answers to questions surrounding discipline, curriculum development, and retention rates. This study alone does not produce such information. The small number of subjects allowed the researcher to dig deeply into the narratives of the subjects. Unfortunately, this small number of subjects limits the results from broad generalization.

Bolen (1994) chose subjects based on gender, religious affiliation (Christian), and site selection. He conducted two-hour long interviews on two succeeding days. The interviews took place during the first semester of the student's first-year of college. The qualitative method of evaluation was chosen because James Fowler (1981), the leading faith development researcher, postulated that this qualitative, open-ended interview format is the most effective method of research employed to study faith development.

Bolen (1994) analyzed the responses of the five respondents. He discussed and categorized the patterns uncovered within their narratives. Results indicated that while these Christian students may have held similar theological beliefs, they differed in other areas. A discussion of conflicts within their beliefs yields the outcome that these students have different ways of responding to conflicts. Some were more confident in their own identities, while others expressed indecision and lack of understanding. At any level, the results suggested that a breaking away from the faith of others and the development of the student's own faith was a timely conflict for this group. This research established a relationship between how students perceive their parents and their own personal faith development. It is important to remember that this is a very small sample of Christian students.

This review of literature reveals a lack of research in the area of faith development. Of the studies reviewed, there is not general agreement with respect outcomes. Recent studies conclude that most students enter college around stage two or three of Fowler's stages of faith, while another study indicates that the majority of students are closer to stage four.

There is growing interest in this topic of faith development, but much of the current writing is discussion oriented. Authors consistently define and re-define the definitions of spirituality, faith, and religion. There is an obvious need for agreement with respect to the definition of these terms. Although there is a need for conclusive research, the number and scope of relevant studies is steadily increasing. Faith development is an important component of the development of college students.

Rationale

The literature review revealed mounting interest surrounding the topics of spirituality and faith development within student affairs practice. The many definitions for these terms are broad and inclusive. While a few authors are giving more attention to these topics, no studies were found within recent student development literature that were specifically directed toward the faith identity development of evangelical Christian students within public institutions.

As authors and researchers consider faith identity development, there is a clear and inextricable linking of cognitive, psychosocial, and identity development. This further supports the conclusion that faith identity development involves more than merely a cognitive, confessional foundation. By recognizing the practical value and importance of the blending of a number of developmental areas, one can recognize that students integrate their faith into all areas of their lives. They actively pursue and live out their faith. The faith of the evangelical Christian student is not compartmentalized.

A common theme throughout the literature is the need for and benefit of the appropriate levels of challenge and support. Holcomb's (2003) faithful change study clearly identified the need for crises to emerge as a catalyst for challenge and growth. This finding was naturally congruent with the work of both Sanford (1966, 1967) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) regarding challenge and support. When reviewing the current literature within student development, the question arises, how do evangelical

Christian college students within secular institutions experience challenge and support of their faith identity development?

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In order to examine the complexities of student's faith identity development, I chose to utilize qualitative research techniques. The method of inquiry was open-ended interview questions (appendix A), chosen by the researcher. The questions led to an emphasis on how students perceive and interpret the challenge and support that they face in their day-to-day life on the campus of a public university. It was the intention of the researcher to utilize such methodology to uncover complex, dynamic components of student development. According to Kathleen Manning (1999), it is only through a constructivist style of inquiry into the life of college students that one has insight into understanding the depth of the student's world. Manning further established that student development theory has been birthed from qualitative research.

Participants in the present study had the opportunity to reflect on various aspects of their college careers. Areas examined included community, faith, personal story, attitudes and relationships. As well as providing the students with a chance to reflect on their own faith identity development and college experience, the open-ended interview gave students a voice. The depth of student responses revealed the heart of evangelical Christian students on one southern, secular university campus.

The sample for this study was traditional-aged (21-23) college seniors. The researcher selected participants using both purposive and quota sampling techniques. Criteria for selection in the study included such things as personal references, a statement

of faith (appendix 1), involvement in a minimum of one Christian organization, and class standing. In order to select students who had successfully developed an evangelical Christian faith identity, the criterion for inclusion within the sample was purposefully narrow.

Throughout the 2003 spring semester, the researcher attended several campus ministry meetings, met with campus ministry leaders, and observed Christian students in a variety of on-campus environments. During the 2003, fall semester, the researcher contacted potential subjects and asked them to participate. Upon their agreement to participate in the study, the researcher scheduled an initial meeting with the potential subject. During this meeting, the subject completed the consent form (appendix B), the demographics questionnaire (appendix C), and statement of faith (appendix D). With this processes completed, the researcher either scheduled the interview for a future date or proceeded directly into the interview with the subject.

In accordance with the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985), who provided a guide for conducting qualitative research, the researcher evaluated the responses and assessed themes found within the narrative. Careful readings of each transcription lead to extraction and refining of rich narrative into small bits (units) of data. These data were then sorted according to their fit within various emergent categories and subcategories relevant within the framework of this examination of challenge and support. The emergent themes revealed the major events that have influenced the faith identity development of these students during their college career. This research revealed key areas of challenge and support experienced by respondents.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Demographic Data

The researcher interviewed ten evangelical Christian college students. Of these ten students, five were male and five were female, and all were Caucasian. A number of similarities emerged among respondents. This was an anticipated result of the utilization of purposive sampling techniques. While this sampling technique allowed the researcher to target the specific type of student to include within the study, it did not intend to offer a broad view of all demographics of all evangelical students on the secular campus. Several of the respondents participate in the same campus ministry, Campus Crusade for Christ. Other on-campus and off-campus ministry includes involvement in Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship and various church groups. More often than not, this involvement represented a leadership role assumed by the respondents. Because they have successfully developed their evangelical faith identity, this sample was appropriate for the current pilot study.

Agreeably, the current sample lacks inclusive representation. Selection of respondents depended upon their involvement, dedication, and demonstrated commitment to their own faith identity. An end goal behind the purposive sampling was to interview senior students who had examined their faith and clearly demonstrated the capacity for reflection and analytical thinking. The researcher believes that these students demonstrated traits representative of individuals functioning at or close to Fowler's

(1981) early stage four (Individuative-Reflective) faith development. Of the ten students interviewed, only one student demonstrated a possible lack of attainment of early stage four faith development. Since the coding of interview according to Fowler's stages of faith development is not the purpose of the present study her responses are included within the data.

All of the ten respondents discussed their family's commitments to the Christian faith. Three indicated that they did not grow up in a Christian home, while six grew up with Christian parents and participated in regular church attendance. One respondent noted that his parents made a profession of faith when he was an adolescent. Among the respondents who grew up in church, a diverse background of Protestant denominational affiliation was present within the sample. Religious backgrounds included Methodist, Assemblies of God, Pentecostal, Episcopal, Free Will Baptist, and Lutheran.

The respondents represented a range of undergraduate majors that included such fields as business, recreation, social sciences, and education. For many of them, student involvement was not limited to Christian ministry groups, but also included participation in Emerging Leaders, intramurals, Appol Corps (freshman orientation leaders), and honor society. Some worked on campus, and served as resident assistants.

Emergent Themes

Once transcription was complete and the data sorted, a number of specific areas of challenge and support emerged. Although the interviews were open-ended, some of the themes are reflective of the fact that the interviewer asked the students essentially the same questions (appendix A). Specific areas of challenge and support experienced by respondents include the following five categories; 1) university and general campus life,

2) classroom, 3) peer relationships, 4) personal/individual areas of challenge and support, and 5) campus ministry and off-campus experiences. While the fifth category, campus ministry and off-campus experiences, does offer some challenge, the primary role of these environments is that of support and of a resource for supportive relationships. These five categories reveal an overview and summation of student response to all of the questions. The five categories of challenge and support emerged throughout rich narrative, out of complex and diverse stories.

In addition to the five categories of challenge and support, two additional salient themes surfaced as relevant to the study. The impact of experiences during the freshman year and the process of cognitive development emerged as central to this study. A consideration of these two themes will allow for greater understanding of the context in which these ten students experienced challenge and support of their evangelical faith identity.

Arrival at college and first year

Each respondent articulated the story of his or her personal faith journey. While some similarities existed, each story unfolded as unique and different. Some students arrived at the university committed to the Christian influence of their families, while others explored the freedoms of the new campus environment. Respondents who grew up attending church, demonstrated that they had some knowledge of the values and teachings of the evangelical Christian faith, but no real "relationship with God".

All of the respondents indicated having made some profession of Christian faith prior to their arrival at college. Some made this profession at a young age and others in high school. Regardless of the specific timing of such a profession, their commitment to

their family's values, or their own commitments to live according to evangelical

Christian values, it is clear that these students had not yet attained a faith that was tested,

tried, and owned. This tacitly held faith is recognizable in the following statements about

their freshman year experience.

> Everyone drank and everyone did all these things and I'm like why am I in the midst of this because I didn't really want to get on the wrong path. My relationship with the Lord, it wasn't like I was seeking out for Him, I knew I was saved, I wanted to do what was right, but we didn't have that relationship where it was like me and God…
> … Three months of my freshman year I just basically was alone and I got where I just couldn't stand it. Finally I ended up going out with the girls on the halls, well like these girls invite me and they're nice, at least they are trying to get to know me, so I'm gonna go out. That was one of my biggest mistakes I ever made because I became really caught up into the party scene here at school.
> Tape 7 lines 36-42, 43

> I didn't have a question of whether or not God existed; I just didn't know my standing with my faith.
> Tape 8 lines 44-45

> When I was younger it was more about yea let's go to church and youth group on Sunday nights and that's almost as far as it got for me. I was your typical Sunday Christian. Then I got to college and I was on my own and I had to make my own choices, I didn't have parents looking at me if I didn't go to church on Sunday. I started attending a church and a small group and I began to realize that it was something that was more of an everyday thing and not just a once a week thing, more of a relationship instead of religion.
> Tape 1, page 1, line 10

Challenge and Support

Student life at the university consists of numerous interwoven environments,

relationships, and complex situations. This study dissects such environments and

situations to uncover the specific factors contributing to the faith development of

evangelical Christian students.

Identification of the five categories of 1) university and general campus life, 2)

classroom, 3) peer relationships, 4) personal/individual areas of challenge and support,

and 5) campus ministry and off-campus experiences represent students' experiences and their perceptions of significant factors in their faith identity development. The following is a look at university and general campus life, the classroom, peer relationships, personal/individual areas of challenge and support, and campus ministry and off-campus experiences as they affect the balance of challenge and support.

Table 1 demonstrates an overview of some responses of emergent subcategories of challenge and support. Some subcategories are present due to the questions selected by the researcher and some surfaced through the open-ended interview process. This table is not meant to be inclusive, but rather to provide an overview of student response. Due to the nature of complex narrative, it is unrealistic to claim accurate charting of every mention of challenge, support, and the balance they create. However, this table does create a view of the data not otherwise accessible. Omission of a subcategory does not indicate its lack of presence within the narrative. Likewise, omission from the list of subcategories does not indicate that this theme is not relevant for the sample. Although these data intend to help tell the story, they are not the story itself. The researcher manually extracted the data included within this table from the transcriptions of all ten interviews.

Table 1: Challenge and Support

Subcategories of student responses (n = 10)

Challenge		Support	
University and Campus Life		*University and Campus Life*	
Residence hall	4	Residence hall	2
Liberal atmosphere	5	Opportunity to test faith	6
Partying	4	Pleased with the exposure	6
Evangelistic efforts	3	Noted a sense of support	6
Freedom	6		
Did not feel supported	3		
Experienced inequality	3		
Values/moral	3		
Exposure	5		
Classroom		*Classroom*	
Professor	5	Relationship with professor	3
Students	3	Create friendships	3
Exposed to opposing views	8		
Anti-Christian bias	6		
Peer Relationships		*Peer Relationships*	
Roommate	5	Roommates	7
Challenge from non-Christian peers	6	Most friends are Christian	9
Challenge from Christian peers	8	Dating relationships	4
Spends time w/non-Christians	6	Accountability	4
Personal/Individual		*Personal/Individual*	
Hurt from other Christians	2	Personal study of the bible	7
Busyness	1	Prayer	4
Trusting God	6	Relationship w/God	9
Moral Purity	4		
Sickness	2		
Spiritual battle	4		
Questioning/learning	3		
Living a repentant life	5		
Campus Ministry and Off Campus		*Campus Ministry and Off Campus*	
Summer job	2	Campus/Church ministry leader	8
Local church	1	Influence of local church	5
		Participation in Mission trip	5
		Evangelistic efforts	7
		Leadership role	7
		Parent/family	3

University and General Campus Life

> I do not think it is a good idea to be sheltered or to have a mama wing come over and cover your baby chick eyes… I guess I am assuming after college, going out into the "real world" I would say it will only get heavier.
> Tape 2, Page 14, line 32

There is strong consensus among this sample of students that this public institution has offered a glimpse of life into the "real world". They express a sense of being better prepared to maintain a strong commitment to their faith identity after college and feel that living and learning at the public university is a strong contributor to that.

The most salient challenge within this area is the liberal atmosphere of the collective university environment. Five respondents overtly described the university environment as liberal, and all respondents clearly expressed similar sentiment throughout the narrative. Within this pervasive liberal atmosphere, respondents identify several situations as challenging. These situations center on interactions with others and include evangelistic efforts and the temptation to participate in the "college party lifestyle". Various social concerns such as diversity on campus and other students expressing negative views of the Christian faith are two less mentioned challenges.

> It is wide-open man (the university). All kinds live at Appalachian. So just be prepared to see anything, you will see anything and everything.
> Tape 2, page 14, line 24

> I would tell them it (the university) is liberal and to be prepared to have your faith challenged.
> Tape 9, page 16, line 37

> I think the university itself takes more of a liberal approach, maybe not negative, but certainly not in favor of evangelical ideas…
> Tape 6, page 9, line 23

> Yea, I mean the university, they have that program Emerging Leaders and from there I really branched. They helped me with that, because I did see the views of many different people. That kind of challenged me just being prepared, like I

want to continue my Christianity I want to do that. That was my freshman year when I had tons of questions. Like even in the residence halls, we had an RA that helped us out through the year. The university definitely gave you that opportunity to be surrounded and living with other people that were not like you.
Tape 1, page 15, line 40

Meanwhile, all the girls on my hall, I was in like the biggest party hall on this campus, one of the biggest. Everyone drank and everyone did all these things…
Tape 7, Page 2, line 34

Several students discussed challenges that they faced through direct evangelistic efforts.

I have not run into too many people who are aggressively anti-Christian. I ran into a few people like that during the "I agree with Eric" campaign. Some people were pretty mad at us.
Tape 2, page 11, line 6

I don't know if you were here for the "I Agree With Eric" campaign? That was probably the biggest example of how this campus reacts towards Evangelical Christians. There are a lot of people that were verbally persecuted in and out of the classroom, dorm rooms, cafeteria. I was called a number of names just for wearing a T-shirt. This was probably the biggest example of the university as a school.
Tape 9, page 15, line 4

Students mention how pleased they are to have attended a public university.

Along with the challenges discussed above, students expressed comparable feelings of support from the university and campus environment. Often, the same situations cited as most challenging morphed into a form of support.

For example, the liberal atmosphere served to challenge their beliefs and values, but also afforded them the opportunity to test these beliefs and values and to refine them. The collective responses lean heavily toward a student attitude that reflects a sense that the university is as much supportive as it is challenging. Note the resolve with which these students acknowledge support within this category.

It's a good thing being a Christian on a secular university because there's other things to do and you see other life styles, the way other people are headed and you're like I really got it good, this really is the way the truth and the life.

Tape 4, page 18, line 13

Many of the younger guys in my bible study that aren't really strong in their walks yet, I can see for them like the challenges and the pulls that they get...At the same time, all those things have strengthened me because they have given me things to compare it to. I know people that were grown up in a really strong Christian family, really strong Christian church, really strong Christian high school, went to a Christian university, and it becomes just a way of life for them and not really their identity, you know like they do not know anything else.
Page 17, line 37

Yes, this school is, as I perceive it, a pretty liberal, open, university, so they like to help students in the development of their faith. They are very pro-diversity here so they will help a Christian out as much as they will help any faith out....line 21: I think they try and develop, they try and get the students to you know, come out of their shell more and develop in all aspects of their lives.
Tape 2, page 13, line 24

Students at such advanced developmental stages indicated that they recognized and acknowledged the need for exposure to a wide variety of views. They had become so aware of this need that they viewed the very exposure to diverse ways of thinking as a form of support for constructing a solid faith identity. In addition to this, some students cited other reasons why they felt supported by the institution. These reasons included provision of meeting space, promotion of free speech, and equitable distribution of university resources.

This sample of students viewed the university and broader campus community as providing both challenge and support. While some students felt that the university supported their Christian faith, others disagreed. Student responses favored the former. Regardless of their perspective concerning university support of their evangelical Christian faith, these students were unanimously pleased with their experience at a public institution and the exposure to diverse ways of thinking, learning to value others, and learning about themselves. This researcher believes this phenomenon of satisfaction with

the public institution was largely due to the ability of these students ability to find and

utilize a variety of resources for support.

<u>Classroom</u>

A similar but separate component of the university environment is the classroom.

The classroom proved to offer important challenges for Christian students. Professors

posed difficult questions and introduced viewpoints that the students had not considered.

Many professors reportedly promoted an anti-Christian agenda.

> I am taking a class on biblical interpretation now with a non-Christian professor
> and it is still a daily battle, even just the people in the class, not even just the
> professors, just challenging the Nativity scene, challenging the Virgin birth,
> challenging so many different things…
> Tape 9, page 5, line 31

> No, there is always a pull towards not being Christian. It just depends on where
> you are, what professor you have. Generally, there is a pull towards not being a
> Christian.
> Tape 10, page 8, line 31

Of the opportunities for support noted by students, the classroom was among the

least mentioned. When students did acknowledge the classroom as a means of support, it

was due to the professor's neutrality or the fact that they valued the exposure to diverse

viewpoints. Since every department and every teacher is different, the classroom

environment impacted students very differently. Some students barely mentioned the

classroom, but for some it was a key topic.

> Well, I am a sociology major, so, basically all we do is talk about why everything
> is ok. Any lifestyle is ok and anything you want to do is ok. I feel like our society
> is just wonderful at making excuses for anytime you cannot meet a standard and
> so we lower the standards because of fear of not being able to meet it….line 38:
> They are always pretty accepting the teachers are. The teachers are respectful of
> everyone's opinions. I can definitely tell they do not agree with me.
> Tape 10, page 7, line 18

Most of the religion department professors – you can tell they have an agenda. With Dr. Jones, you cannot tell, he says up front in the class on the first day "I'm a Christian, but I will not teach this course from a Christian perspective, I will teach it from a historical perspective."… It was just a really good class and actually.
Tape 10, Page 14, line 14

A few students connected with their professors and formed supportive relationships.

I had Dr. Clark, one of my teachers for two different classes, we probably went out to his house for class like at least a dozen times, he'd make us meals and got to know his family real well.
Tape 4, page 10, line 12

Peer Relationships

Peer relationships emerged as the most discussed form of support. Students

reported roommate issues as the most challenging of relationships. Challenge initiated

from other peer relationships manifested in the forms of interactions with non-Christians

and Christian friends who pushed them to live their beliefs or to clarify their beliefs for

themselves.

He (roommate) was just like; he sold a lot of weed to other people, just constantly smoking up in the room. He was a nice guy, I got to become good friends with him and so it didn't take long, he was always offering me a hit or whatever, so I was like yeah okay, whatever. My defenses were worn down against it and it became a real natural thing…
Tape 4, Page 2, line 19

I ended up coming to college my freshman year and my roommate was a drug dealer, definitely not a Christian. We had a lot of struggles that just kept getting worse…
Tape 7, page 2, line 14

He (friend) really started to push me into answering questions and really introspect on what I believe and how my actions were portraying and what I was saying, how they were different, the hypocrisy. So I started going to church with him and just slowly started growing and needing that kind of fellowship and realizing how important it really is to me.
Tape 8, page 2, line 7

A lot of my friends I like to challenge and I frustrate a lot of them because I want to know why they believe what they believe even if I share the same belief, it doesn't mean we got there the same way. I have very few close friends so the ones that I have they seek, they do not just accept.
Tape 8, page 6, line 26

Undoubtedly, this sample of students spent most of their free time with other Christians. The consensus among them was that they preferred the company of other Christians, but were pleased with their exposure to diverse beliefs and ways of thinking. Some stated that early in their faith development, they needed to be around lots of other Christians. As they grew, many of them began to spend intentional time with non-believers, primarily for purposes of proselytizing or maintaining previously established relationships. While some students maintained relationships with non-Christian peers, most chose to spend their free time with like-minded believers. Exposure to other views and interaction with non-Christians took place through a number of venues including residence hall, classes, group projects, student organizations, work, and other social exchanges.

Most of my friends are people from Campus Crusade for Christ. It has really changed from year to year. Living on campus last year as a RA, most of my time was spent with the guys on the floor and not really with the people from Crusade. This year, I am living off campus…I spend most of my time with my roommates and the girls next door and the guys in my bible study. I really like being on campus because I would spend a lot of time with people who were not in Crusade and were not Christians. I really am kinda missing that this year.
Tape 4, page 8, line 13

Then after I came to know Christ, I started to meet friends and spend time with those, but I also like kept on to the friendships that were not Christians in the hopes of bringing them towards it. Then kind of ¾'s of the way through I just spent all my time with Christians and that was good for me to really build myself up and strengthen my faith. The latter part I have been trying to get back into meeting people who are not so I can encourage them… Most of my friends are Christians, mostly guys. They are all Christian guys, they're really the people who had the biggest impact on my life and that's who I hang out with the most…
Tape 4, Page 9, line 18, 8

Hanging out with Christians is important because it builds me up. It helps me to focus on where I am. As a Christian, I'm not called to hang out with just Christians, not only that but I still have these friends that I love and they're still good friends and they'd do anything for me and I'd still do anything for them, it's just I'm trying to find that medium ground. Being their friend and not just trying to witness to them, it is hard.
Tape 8, page 7, line 1

...the people I work with and stuff, so as far as hanging out, it is mostly my friends that are Christians. As far as working and class, I would say most of them are not Christians.
Tape 6, page 5, line 42

Peer relationships were a very significant source of support! These students lived in close community with one another. Again, an area that provided one of the biggest challenges also provided one of the biggest supports. Respondents noted roommates as a vital source of support. Additionally, those students who have developed serious dating relationships, cited those relationships as sources of support.

The most important has definitely been my roommate. I think, we keep each other accountable. For the most part our conversations are encouraging about the Lord. We see each other as a team. We are on the same team reaching the campus for Christ. We have been able to be on the Men's Ministry Committee... Those guys have been a blessing in my life as well. It has definitely impacted me, spending time with him, because we encourage one another to grow in our faith. Being part of that men's ministry group, which is about five or six other guys, we spend a lot of time in prayer. Praying for one another, praying with one another, they have impacted me positively...
Tape 5, page 9, line 26

...when I can choose my friends I normally hang out with my boyfriend and my roommate. My roommate is a very strong Christian and my boyfriend is. Basically I do surround myself my Christians. Sometimes it annoys me that I do that and sometimes it does not because I don't want to be classified as being in that "Christian bubble".
Tape 1, page 3, line 43

I spend most of my time with well there's 3 girls, my roommate who's one of my closest friends and Erica who was one of my roommates and Kathy who is one of my residents from when I was an RA last year.
Tape 9, page 7, line 5

There is no question regarding the supportive role of peer relationships. The following quote sums up well the influence of peer relationships.

> My friends, they have become my family.
> Tape 10, page 4, line 46

Personal/Individual

Responses within this category reflect personal struggles and personal areas that students believed to have contributed to their growth. While these phenomena took place with the campus community as a backdrop, they are primarily experiences that the students had as individuals. Their individual challenges communicated their personal struggles and included freedom to make decisions, moral purity, living according to God's purpose, sickness, hurt from other Christians, the questioning of beliefs, busyness, and trusting God.

> Faith is the hard thing. I keep reminding myself of that. Really having faith is the challenge not disbelieving. That is what I have found.
> Tape 10, page 5, line 29
>
> First off, I got sick my freshman year and I stayed sick for about 2 ½ months.
> Tape 6, page 3, line 30
>
> I guess my greatest struggle is my daily spiritual battle to stay on track with the Lord and as long as I put Him first, then I am fine.
> Tape7, page 5, line 40

Students noted time alone with God and study of the Bible as the greatest means of support within their private lives. Through developing a relationship with a living God, they experienced God's involvement in their lives and communicated this as another medium of positive faith identity development.

> My experience has not been like some huge event like some tournament or anything like that. It's just been sitting up on the third floor in the Student Union up here, by myself, just praying, reading the Word, reading those three (other)

books specifically has had a huge impact on my life. I think the Lord has been just so good to me, when I think consistently of spending time with Him.
Tape 5, page 14, line 42

I had a reason to believe that there was a God and other stuff has happened to me in my life that I realize there is more.
Tape 8, page 17, line 42

Spiritually I would say I have grown since I've been in college, just the experiences I've had being in a solid group, like in bible study, digging deep into the Word.
Tape 2, page 8, line 10

Campus Ministry, Off Campus, and Church Involvement

Respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged participation in campus ministry groups as a major source of support. Over half of the respondents specifically named their campus ministry leader as being one of the greatest influences on them during college. Campus ministry served as an important place for Christian students to build friendships, participate in organized evangelistic events, take a leadership role, and participate in mission trips. There was consensus among this sample of students that participation in campus ministry is vital to successfully developing faith identity. Many students mentioned the importance of becoming connected within a campus ministry during the freshman year.

Campus Crusade, my involvement with Campus Crusade definitely has been the biggest impact during my college times.
Tape 4, page 7, line 41

…he (campus ministry leader) sought me out that first year and he asked me to come to Campus Crusade planning, he got me involved in having responsibilities… You cannot really overlook someone who has had that much influence over you…
Tape 6, page 7, line 9

…campus ministries were a springboard for me to meet my friends, my close friends that have actually supported me…
Tape 10, page 10, line 6

The few challenges offered through campus ministry centered on evangelistic events and

relationships with peers. A number of respondents had participated in mission trips.

These experiences served as a unique opportunity for exposure to a variety of challenges

within a supportive community.

> I have been on a couple of mission's trips. Those have been really interesting. They have had an impact on my life just to see how completely different other humans can live. I have been to El Salvador twice…On mission's trips, yeah, it's changed my life. Just to see the experiences, to see miracles happen. We have talked about this actually in bible study a lot…
> Tape 2, page 8, line 19

Some students cited involvement in a local church as an important vehicle for

support. The church provided an opportunity to build relationships with mentors and

peers and engaged the students in study of the Bible. Claiming that affiliation with an off-

campus Christian group was important. One student repeatedly emphasized the

importance of local church involvement.

> …the pastor of my church, he has just taken time out with me. We go get lunch.
> Tape 6, page 7, line 23

> A big support is the church. If you can get plugged in as a Christian to a church up here, it saves a lot of heartache, it really does.
> Tape 7, page 12, line 32

> I would just say maybe some advice for anyone coming up here, definitely get plugged into a church or a group of people that can support you and that you can grow with, develop relationships with and be there for you to lean on when you need them.
> Tape 2, page 15, line 28

> I went on Sunday mornings; Alliance is more of a bible-based church. Like they take the word, they describe it, and they go through it... I mean I was really eating up just going through the bible.
> Tape 1, page 3, line 13

A third area discussed within this category was camp experiences. For at lease two of these students, summer camp experiences played major roles in their faith identity development. Summer camp provided many of the same things as church and campus ministry. The only addition is that of the close community of the residential camp. Similar to the residence hall, camp staff lives closely with another and discover various differences in lifestyles and worldview. For one student, the camp experience was a major source of support, for the other, challenge.

> Well, I was in a leadership job at the camp that I worked at two summers ago. I supervised like forty people… I mean in itself it was hard just knowing that you are supposed to be in this great Christian environment and so many children's lives are being changed because of it and yet your main staff people that ran like the most important activities, like they were not living up to the expectations God has for them. So, I mean it was hard.
> Tape 1, page 8, line 14

> My camp director there has probably been the biggest influence in my life.
> Tape 10, page 2. line 31

> In the beginning of the summers at Camp Lurecrest we have a week where we just train to be counselors and at night our camp director disciples us all and those nights have been the most precious. It has taught me how to read the word and how to redirect my focus. Tape 10, page 4, line 7

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Challenge and Support

University and General Campus Life

The university and the general campus environment is a broad area in which these students have experienced both challenge and support. Clearly, life for the Christian student is much different on the campus of the public university than it is for the Christian student attending a private, Christian institution. Encountering challenge is inevitable and unavoidable on the reportedly liberal campus of the public institution. One mechanism that increased the level of on campus challenge for this cohort was the evangelistic campaign known as "I Agree With Eric".

The "I agree with Eric Campaign" is an event repeatedly mentioned by students in this cohort. Apparently, this evangelistic campaign was a big event for the entire campus community. Numerous campus newspaper articles cite the conflicts it caused and issues it raised. This event, sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ, attempted to influence others toward the Christian faith. The methodology included two weeks of promotion leading up to an open forum-style presentation in a gym on campus. The marketing style and promotion facilitated much dissention among students. Students wore bright yellow t-shirts stating "I Agree With Eric", advertisements were taken out in the school newspaper announcing the same, and an information table was manned in the student union. The newspaper ads included the date, time, and location of the event. This style of

promotion created quite a buzz on campus. Many students felt strongly that this approach was divisive and set an "us against them" barrier between Christians and non-Christians. Some Christian students maintained that the event created meaningful discussions that led to greater awareness and understanding of the Christian faith. Many Christian students who participated in the promotion of this event experienced hostile feedback from other students. Regardless of the perspective, this was a significant occurrence in the college experience of these students.

This event provided increased opportunities for examination of the students' Christian faith identity. While undoubtedly shrouded in controversy, the "I Agree With Eric Campaign" incited student emotion and introspection. It appears to have served as one of many experiences contributing to faith identity development. Whether students chose to disagree with this style of evangelism or to embrace it, they were offered a chance to consider various viewpoints and make a decision for themselves. Some Christians saw it as an embarrassing representation of their faith and others considered it a chance to proselytize. Among the greatest criticism was the lack of love shown to others and the inability of this crusade to facilitate the building of healthy relationships with others.

As first semester freshmen, these students may not have recognized the support offered by the broader campus community. Recognizing and finding such support required an expenditure of time and effort, but they regarded it as a major contributor to successful development of evangelical Christian faith identity. This sample of senior students valued the challenge offered by the collective campus environment. They

realized the need for challenge and they had a supportive network within the campus community.

<u>Classroom</u>

The classroom experience posed important questions and students identified it as a key source of challenge. One must not overlook the importance of the classroom experience. Clearly, no teacher can be completely free of bias. Agreeably the biases span the spectrum of worldviews and agendas. The students that managed to develop positive relationships with their teachers shared similar beliefs with them. This is largely the exception. However, the number of positive interactions with professors may have been comparable to that of students within Christian schools. Tuttle (2002) found that of seniors attending a variety of private Christian institutions, seven out the twenty students interviewed, noted professors as a catalyst for spiritual growth.

Regardless of the professor's personal worldview, it is inevitable that students pursuing a liberal arts education who engage their minds will have opportunities for confrontation of their personal beliefs and faith identity in the classroom. It should be the goal of faculty to create an atmosphere of neutrality and encourage students to take ownership of their own learning.

Knowing that peers influence one another, faculty are encouraged to structure learning environments that contribute to support within peer-to-peer interactions. Essentially, the classroom serves as a major source of cognitive dissonance and therefore plays a monumental role in providing challenge to the cognitive component of faith identity development. A discussion concerning the importance and relevance of the

cognitive component as foundational to the development of faith identity follows this section.

Peer Relationships

All students find themselves exposed to challenging areas of the university and campus environment and it is difficult to escape exposure to diverse ways of thinking. In contrast, peer relationships are most often developed through the student's own volition. Students find themselves thrown into the broader university community, but seek out supportive relationships on their own. That is a likely explanation for responses indicating far greater support than challenge within this category.

The fact that peer relationships within the residence halls and roommates were the most consistently discussed peer relationships leads to the conclusion that these experiences are invaluable. Relationships with roommates offered important challenges. As freshmen, Christian students lived with the attitudes, worldviews, and lifestyles of their roommates, and nearly every respondent found himself or herself pushed to examine their own structures of meaning-making. Later in the students' college careers, they carefully selected roommates that served as a primary mean of support.

Students who were successful at finding and establishing such a network of support were likely to be more successful in establishing a strong evangelical Christian faith identity. This finding comes as no surprise. The volume of conclusions regarding the influence of students' peer groups points sharply toward peer influence as a major authority over students' decisions. Astin, (1993, 1996) has conducted extensive research on the influence of student peer groups. He maintains that a student's peer group is likely to influence cognitive and affective development more significantly than any other single

factor and contributes greatly to academic success in college. Furthermore, Astin cites that his findings indicate that students assume the values and beliefs of their peer groups. Astin's assertions are in agreement with the current study. Peer influence played a major role in the development of evangelical faith identity.

It is important to note that without the balance of challenge, a close and influential network of friends can hinder ones faith development. In this scenario, the individual surrounds themselves with like-minded individuals, resulting in a lack of challenge. The individual remains at earlier stages of cognitive and psychosocial development and does not develop a faith of their own. An example is a student who strives to interact only with other Christian students and is not open to the new, challenging environment. This is one major advantage of Christian students attending the public university; it is very difficult to escape exposure to diverse ways of thinking and meaning-making. As is the case for these ten students, who embraced the challenges offered by the classroom and campus life, they found the vital vein of support they needed through close, meaningful peer relationships. Findings led to the conclusion that personal relationships with peers and mentors are likely the greatest supportive balance for the challenges offered by the broader university environment.

Personal/Individual

It is within this area that students develop the relational aspect of their evangelical Christian faith identity. This is not the building of horizontal relationships, but the building of a relationship with a living God, which evangelicals believe to be central to their faith. This category focuses on the time students spend alone with a risen Savior. As challenges arise, students learn to depend on their creator as a source of life. Respondents

learned to trust God and they discovered that the greatest support comes from ones creator. Personal study of the Bible provided a foundational source for learning about God. Students' personal faith identity was strengthened as they began to see biblical principles in action in their daily lives. They experienced God's involvement in their lives first-hand.

The challenge in this category is clearly an expression of how students individually deal with the external environment. The environment caused a confrontation of values, morals, and beliefs within the student's structures of meaning-making. With no exposure to a challenging environment, one is hard-pressed to locate a means for personal struggle. This category brought the personal struggles of each respondent to the surface. When confronting personal struggles such as moral purity, sickness, and avoidance of sin, students made a variety of decisions. By choosing to live according the biblical principles that guided their faith, not from a list of rules passed on from an arbitrary, external authority, but from deep personal conviction, they became strengthened in their faith identity.

Campus Ministry, Off-Campus, and Church Involvement

A sense of belonging is important to everyone. These three areas of this category provided a sense of belonging, a resource for establishing relationships, and opportunities to engage in evangelism. As a requirement for inclusion within the sample, each student had to demonstrate involvement in some type of Christian group. This allowed the researcher to confirm that the sample of students was committed to their Christian faith identity. Each respondent clearly communicated the impact that involvement in a Christian group had on their faith development.

As noted in the results, challenges arose through evangelistic efforts. The "I Agree With Eric" campaign is one example of evangelistic efforts. Others include mission trips, spring break trips, and a host of evangelistic methods. One unique component to such challenge is that it occurs while a supportive community surrounds the students. This is good example of balanced challenge and support, all within one program.

Both campus ministries and local churches take college students on short-term mission trips. One study cites the short-term mission trip among the top five influences on spiritual growth during college (Tuttle, 2002). The current study asked no specific questions regarding the influence of mission trips. However, all of the students interviewed commented that mission trips or evangelistic efforts, organized or informal, contributed to their faith development. The tool of organized evangelism and mission trips deserves a closer look. No known research exists linking spiritual growth of college students at public institutions to such experiences.

Respondents placed emphasis on the support provided by local churches and campus ministry groups. On the campus of the selected university, there are a number of campus ministries and many adults invest their time in these ministries. Some have full-time campus ministers and some operated on a volunteer basis. Campus ministers offer themselves willingly in service to students. Respondents have taken advantage of the offer. When ach student answered the question, who at the university has most influenced you?, eight of ten students identified church leaders, camp directors, or campus ministry leaders. These role models provided validation, encouragement, advice, accountability, bible teaching and a listening ear. The opportunity to develop a relationship with a

mentor who had successfully developed a Christian faith identity helped these students do the same.

Within campus ministries, Christian camps, and local churches, Christian students have an opportunity to participate in a culture that they assume as their own. Integration into such a culture that encourages them to live by biblical principles stands in sharp contrast to the liberal atmosphere found in the broader campus community. Ideally, Christian organizations on campus are safe places for the student to explore beliefs, discuss ideas, develop lasting relationships, worship, learn, and discover their place within community.

Arrival at College and First Year

The transition from high school to college is often difficult and students find diverse ways of coping with such challenge. Many authors have stressed the importance of the first year in college. In response, most institutions offer programs designed to assist students with this transition. Such programs include orientation, freshman seminar courses, specialized advising, and learning communities to name a few.

As the respondent's stories unfolded, it became evident that their freshman year experiences played a sizeable role in their faith identity development. Some students sought out others who could support them in the faith and some students began to experiment with their newfound freedom.

> I was fortunate that I had a kind of circle of friends when I got up here that I could connect with and check out the different ministries on campus with. My freshman year I went to CCF and Campus Crusade for Christ.
> Tape 2, page 3, line 23

> I just like loved freshman year, meeting a ton of people and jumped right into the party scenes and like bragged about like how fast I could, I could bong a beer faster than anybody else. I'd never smoked weed before in high school, but my

freshman roommate, one of his first questions, his first question was like, do you want to split a fan at Wal-Mart or something, the second question was have you ever seen this much weed.
Tape 4, page 2, line 8

They arrived on campus and found themselves immersed in a milieu of varied situations. Some moved into the residence hall and found their roommates living a lifestyle very different from their own. Some became immediately involved in campus ministry and even began to assume leadership roles during their first year as a college student. Regardless of the circumstances, each student discussed memories from their first year on campus. They recalled specific situations from their freshman year that led them in a specific direction. Some of these directions remained throughout college and some directions changed. These students, now seniors acknowledged that they arrived into a pluralistic environment and suddenly were required to make decisions on their own.

I was not in a hall with all Christians. I had always lived in one home with this one Christian family.
Tape 1, page 16 line 12

I just knew God would give me just one Christian roommate at college. I ended up coming to college my freshman year and my roommate was a drug dealer, definitely not a Christian. We had many struggles that just kept getting worse...
Tape 7, page 2, line 13

It was great, you have more freedom and you can choose whatever you want to. Faith wise I had many friends here already...I got here the first Sunday and Jason said come on you are going to church with me. So, as far as a lot people come to college they see the party scene they start seeing the freedoms of do whatever you want, not having to go through your parents or worry about them, I didn't have to worry about that, I just got plugged into Campus Crusade for Christ immediately. Within the first semester, I was involved in planning Cru meetings...Yeah and so it was, it was great when I got here. I just skyrocketed in my faith and devotions became just amazing, because, I don't know what it was about being here and just kinda being different from the whole high school setting and feeling restricted, but I think if you're put into a more free role and you take it in the right direction, you can fly in that direction. If you go in the wrong direction, you can fly in that

direction. It is just about being plugged into the right direction. I was fortunate enough to have friends here to look after me.
Tape 6, page 2, line 28, 34, 44

By the end of my freshman year, well, by the middle of my freshman year it got like pretty bad, I was smoking (marijuana) like everyday and just like the whole numbness and not feeling and just drinking and trying to fit in.
Tape 4, page 2, line 34

These excerpts demonstrate the variety of directions, circumstances, and situations in which freshman find themselves. It is not difficult to recognize the cognitive dissonance that freshman confront upon their arrival on the university campus.

Cognitive Development

When designing the current study, the researcher relied on faith development theory and psychosocial development theory as a framework for construction. Results led to the conclusion that the cognitive component plays a foundational role with the development of evangelical Christian faith identity.

Along with stating that college students arrive on campus with a faith that is not their own, Horn (1983), confirmed the link between cognitive development and faith identity development. Citing his own experience as a college minister and the results of his own qualitative research, Horn connected the work of William Perry (1970), foundational cognitive development theorist, to the faith identity development of Harvard college students. The results of the present study are in agreement with both Horn and Perry that students learn by encountering crises and they enter the pluralistic, university environment both confused and challenged. Numerous studies confirm this axiom.

The stated purpose of the current study was to evaluate the balance of challenge and support as it relates to the development of a faith identity among evangelical Christian college students on a public university campus. The research question proposed

was, "How do evangelical Christian students within four-year public institutions experience challenge and support of their faith identity development?" While focusing on this psychosocial phenomenon known as identity development, it is impossible to diverge from the foundations of cognitive development. There is absolutely no disparity between these developmental theories. Overtly evidenced here in the data, cognitive and identity development among college students were inextricably linked.

Evidenced in many of the preceding quotes, students began to experience a new environment, conflicting viewpoints, and lifestyles very different from their own. As this process unfolded, these students had adequate support and were, therefore, able to confront the various challenges encountered to successfully develop their own faith identity. Students either confronted new challenges, or retreated and evaded the opportunity for development.

Respondent's reflections of their own development reveal that, as freshmen, they possessed limited ability to analyze diverse ways of thinking, and depended upon outside authority as a source for knowledge. Through the process of encountering various forms of challenge and support, these students, as seniors demonstrated the ability to analyze and reflect. They had examined their own faith, and had come to realize that they had the ability to discern knowledge and opinion for themselves. Consistent with all other related studies cited in the literature review, the current sample represents these findings regarding both the inextricable link to cognitive development and the stages of development in which these students functioned. The following comments characterize the early stages of cognitive development.

I thought what if I come to this school and there is like, because I heard it was a partying school, and I was like what if I come up here and there is just a bunch of drunks and crazies and everything else imaginable?
Tape 3, Page 3, line 30

I just grew up in the church, I knew all the Sunday school answers, so I guess I would say that I probably became a Christian then...
Tape 5, page 1, line 28

My freshman year. I don't remember the exact first time, but I remember it was when I got up here you find out real quickly that people's views are a lot different, and there's a lot of different views here. I was probably really offended the first time. I can see myself, you come in, you are a freshman, you are yeah God I am on charge and you are charging hell with a water pistol, then the first opposition you are like wait a minute!
Tape 6, page 6, line 11

When I first was a Christian, all I knew was I could not do this. I put all my hope in this checklist of what I had and had not done and not in Christ. My identity was in what I was and was not doing and not in what Christ had already done.
Tape 10, page 3, line 3

Responses illuminating the more advanced stages of cognitive development are even more recognizable. Students articulated that now, as seniors they valued others opinions, thought for themselves, made their own decisions about what they believe and what sources of authority to which to submit. Notice the shift in ownership of knowledge, the ability to accept others opinions, and the analytical nature of these statements.

I do not want my focus to be on me, I want it to be on Him and my relationship with Him, trusting that He is who He says He is.
Tape 10, page 3, line 21

But, I do let myself question the actions and stuff. I have changed a lot of mine because of that...A lot of my actions. I am less reluctant to just buy into what is on the bandwagon.
Page 5, line 43

It became a reality, I can't really describe it, it was over the course of a few months, but I just started to believe the things that I had known my whole life in the back of my mind, but really believe them for myself, instead of believing them because my parents or Christian school teachers told me to.
Tape 7, page 4, line 20

Its hard because you did not know me before, but that is really, honestly how I feel. This is not the answers I have been fed since I was 7 years old. This is me speaking. I do not know how to tell you otherwise.
Tape 7, Page 6, line 1

I think debate is a good thing. If we're all in agreement, then we're like a communistic society. We want to have differences and we cannot learn from one another if we do not have disagreement. I think that is a good thing.
Tape 7, Page 10, line 44

I was probably down right offended the first time I ever faced something like. The Pagan Club started when, last year? If they had started my freshman year I would've been oh my gosh all these heathens are running around here with their own club. This year, they called me and they said hey we just want to get an honest opinion from everybody. The Pagan people, the Pagan Club actually called me we want an honest opinion, we know you are involved in Campus Crusade, would you like to come out to our meetings? I said if I can clear up my schedule, I'll come out.
Tape 6. page 11, line18

The idea of sources of authority is particularly relevant to a discussion of the cognitive component of faith identity development. Early stages of cognitive development represent authority resting outside of the individual. This is a dualistic approach to meaning-making in which right and wrong stand as sharply dichotomized with the experts holding the answers. The individual functioning at early stages of cognitive development does not own their faith, because they depend on others for answers. Once faith is tested, analyzed, carefully considered, reflected upon and examined, one can begin to determine the validity of a variety of authoritative sources. This process requires the ability to get outside of oneself and critically examine a wide variety of sources of knowledge and authority.

For evangelical Christians, these sources of authority have primarily become the Bible and their creator, God. The difference is that now, these students understand that they have the ability to interpret the scripture. They no longer blindly rely on others to

tell them how to behave or what to believe. They now know that they have access to a variety of resources. They employ numerous tools when making decisions regarding actions and beliefs. They understand what they believe and why. Their actions reflect this belief and they display tolerance and acceptance of others' beliefs and opinions.

Foundational, cognitive capacity alone, however, does not epitomize a mature faith. Dudley (1999) organizes mature faith under the three primary categories of cognitive, affective, and behavioral. These three categories agree with Marsden's (1991) definition of evangelical Christian faith. In Marsden's definition, he explains that cognitive, relational, and volitional components make up evangelical Christian faith. While the cognitive component is important and clearly recognizable, it does not stand-alone. Dudley states that the cognitive component of faith development is foundational to the other components, is highly complex, and is deserving of extensive focus in any consideration of faith development. Furthermore, Dudley posits that a "thinking climate" promotes faith development. Agreeably, the university provides such an environment.

These postulates regarding the importance and relevance of cognitive components of evangelical Christian faith identity emerged within the data. Responses demonstrate that this sample of students have engaged in all of the above-mentioned aspects of faith identity development. The following excerpts reveal the relational, volitional, affective, and behavioral components of a faith that is tested and now owned.

> It is exciting. I feel like they (relationships) have changed to a certain extent. Yeah, I think they have. Definitely just gotten deeper, because we no longer have to sit around and talk about so, what did you do, where did you go to high school at? We do not have to do that because we already know that. We do not have to talk about the small talk things anymore. I can just jump in straight with my closest friends and say, how is your relationship with the Lord? and they can do the same for me.
> Tape 9, page 9, line 26

I think people pick up a whole lot more just by watching you and watching your character than the words that you preach showing through. Like what I am like in my recreation management classes, that is the most time that I am around real non-Christians, just the way that I carry myself and the way I respect other classmates and I respect teachers and just like my attitude towards things like as far as attitude towards a teacher. More for me, it is more of the lifestyle, the way you live instead of actually the words you speak.
Tape 1, page 4, line 31

…you are doing a lot of your own stuff, you are making your own schedule, you do not have people telling you when to go to bed, so you get in the mentality of "I'm doing all this" and Christians are not exempt from that thought process. So, having faith that God exists is one thing but I think to really excel in college and really excel in life you have to have faith that He can take care of you on a daily basis and that He will lead you in the right direction…
…It was just like I said, really busy, I was busy like every night of the week. I worked with Campus Crusade planning, going to Campus Crusade bible study, I led one, I went to one, and just kinda took God out of the whole equation. Though a lot of what I was doing was about God, and I thought I was doing it for God, so just seeing God, forced me to rely on Him is probably one of the biggest things you can sum it up.
Tape 6, page 16, line 2, 17

Making that change over from where my focus is. I don't want my focus to be on me, I want it to be on Him and my relationship with Him, trusting that He is who He says He is. Believing his promises is so much harder.
Tape 10, page 3, line 21

… just becoming secure in my identity in Christ and the more that I trust His promises to me, the less important other people's opinions become…line 38: I know that no matter what I have done I can go to Him and no matter what state. Where as before I probably would have tried to earn back my salvation for a couple of days
Tape 10, page 6, line13

Well, I hope to do some stuff with an orphanage, maybe some missions work. I would really like to get married one day and have family. I don't really have a lot of fear or anxiety…I can't imagine moving on without that. That I know that God really does have a purpose; I do not really have to stress out about that.
Tape 10, page 9, line 28

Examination of the data revealed a complete cycle of cognitive development.

Students entered the university having previously made a commitment to their

evangelical Christian faith identity. However, finding themselves in a dynamic, challenging, and diverse environment led them through a process of challenge and support, which ultimately resulted in a new, different, and personalized commitment to an identity consistent with that of a much more mature evangelical Christian faith.

Advanced stages of both cognitive and psychosocial identity development manifest in the fact that this sample of students completed college actively engaged in giving to others, many feel called into full-time ministry, they have learned to value others opinions, and they embrace challenge and recognize it as an opportunity to grow. As seniors, the respondents have engaged in the difficult process of addressing various stages of both cognitive and psychosocial identity development and near the end of college with an awareness of their own faith identity.

A notable difference in the source of authority for these students is that at first glance, one may not recognize the process through which they have passed. It is very likely that these same ten students, as freshman, may have agreed to the same tenets of evangelical Christian faith as articulated in Appendix C. Again, the difference is that these students confronted developmental opportunities.

Traditional cognitive development theory implies that individuals functioning at more advanced stages of cognitive development essentially become their own source of authority. These individuals demonstrate their tried and tested ability to utilize a variety of sources to construct their own knowledge and meaning, analyze, reflect, and now act on this implied humanistic center of knowledge. Within the advanced stages or positions of traditional cognitive development theory, there is no accounting for, or acknowledgement of, an authority greater than self. Faith identity development

recognizes the fact that Christian students, although they do exercise this same capacity

to progress through positions of cognitive development, progress through the same

positions of cognitive development to an advanced stage that includes looking outside of

themselves to a greater authority. They experience the same process of cognitive

dissonance and resolution as others and engage in progressing through identical stages or

positions. The difference is that as they emerge from the times of cognitive dissonance,

and they are either more or less convinced of such cornerstones of their faith as, the

authenticity of scripture, the existence of God, and His involvement in their lives.

Evangelical faith identity requires a dependence on God, a deep submission to His love,

and deep abiding in the presence of a living God. Consider the following statements that

illuminate these student's source of authority.

> I do believe that the Bible is the infallible word of God.
> Tape 9, page 18, line 21

> I would have to say what it all boils down to obviously when you're challenged
> you overcome it, to overcome it you have to depend on God. I think it can also be
> summed up in that you can have faith that God exists, but to really succeed in life
> and learn from life you have to have faith that He can take care of you. I think that
> is where a lot of Christians, and I think that is where a lot of people in college, a
> lot of Christians in college struggle.
> Tape 6, page 15, line 41

> I think of myself as someone who just needs the grace of God to breathe.
> Page 10, line 34
> I hope that the older I get and the more I mature in my faith, the more I will want
> to discuss meaningful things being Christ, just being stuff about spiritual,
> Christianity, the Bible, what Christ is doing, how he is changing me and so forth.
> Tape 5, page 15, line 15

> My identity is found in Christ I believe. I think it applies to everybody, like even
> if you do not have Christ, you still have these things that define who you are and a
> lot of times that comes with things that we don't necessarily see as who we are.
> Through realizing that my identity is in Christ, I have been able to go back and
> see who I am as a college student…
> Tape 8, page 8, line 16

…I have a hope in Christ now that I have a relationship with Him.
Tape 8, page 7, line 18

Yeah totally man, my identity is wrapped up in and totally consumed in Christ…
That is like the coolest thing about knowing Christ, is like He is your everything.
Tape 4, page 16, line 12, 30

All of the above quotes from the interviews create a picture of the developmental

stages within this sample. Their personal identity is encapsulated in their ability to

depend on a living God for purpose, fulfillment, and direction. While Fowler's theory of

Faith development asks questions regarding one's "center of values and power",

traditional cognitive development theory does not consider the role of "faith based

authority" in the advanced positions of cognitive development.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

An examination of the findings suggests that the primary sources of challenge arise from within the liberal atmosphere of the broader university community. These challenges specifically include cognitive dissonance in the classroom, informal peer interaction, life in the residence hall, and all means of general exposure to diverse ideas and worldviews.

Major support that balances the challenge of a liberal atmosphere occurs in the form of relationships with peers, Christian mentors, and dependence upon God. Likewise, findings suggest that the areas providing the greatest challenge often provided the greatest support as well. Student comments regarding peer relationships, experiences with roommates, and experiences with their own evangelistic efforts exemplify this assertion.

Students consistently expressed that their first year experiences influenced and shaped the future of their faith development. The fact that the freshman year is a critical, transitional time for students is no surprise. Many studies have confirmed this assertion (Noel, Levitz, and Saluri, 1985). Students confront new and monumental levels of challenge during their first year, and during the first months in particular. Student affairs professionals should continue efforts to assist students in the establishment of adequate peer support.

Having identified specific areas of challenge and support that contribute the development of positive evangelical Christian faith identity, and having acknowledged the relevance of the first year as essential in promoting holistic growth of evangelical students, this study returns to the theoretical foundation upon which it was structured. Psychosocial and faith development theory created a foundation and context within which to approach faith identity development of evangelical Christian students. Through the process of interpreting qualitative data, the researcher acknowledged the fundamental, pre-eminent value of cognitive development theory as essential in any study of faith identity development.

When considering a theoretical context through which to approach evangelical Christian faith development, one should recognize that traditional cognitive development theory does not account for faith development. Fowler's theory of faith development is applicable within the framework of psychosocial identity development, but no known cognitive development theory within the field of student development explicitly accounts for God as final authority. While separate theories do exist acknowledging the emergence of God as a final authority for advanced developmental stages, there is a need for a cognitive development theory that accounts for the cognitive component of faith development. Although there are a number of components of faith identity development such as affective, relational, behavioral, and volitional, the cognitive component is the foundational piece within faith development. Understanding the place of the cognitive component as fundamental allows practitioners to approach faith identity development within an accurate and effective context.

When conducting faith development research, it is helpful to identify at what developmental stage subjects currently function. Much research exists regarding the typical stages of psychosocial and cognitive development of college students throughout the college career. In many cases, such as the current study, researchers make assumptions based on previous research findings and data content about the current developmental stage at which respondents function. However, it is highly beneficial to identify the stages of faith development prior to assessment of research results.

There is a growing body of research to support assumptions regarding the stages of faith development experienced by Christian students within private Christian institutions, but little research exists regarding Christian students within public institutions. Hence, there is a need for more research to identify the faith maturity of Christian students within public institutions throughout various stages of cognitive and psychosocial development. Additionally, such research should place emphasis on identification of factors contributing to their faith development and maturation.

Utilization of quantitative assessment tools available for this purpose of "stage identification" would support the current accumulation of qualitative data. Comparison studies utilizing quantitative numbers that indicate faith maturation of students within Christian schools and public schools would assist in determining how the two environments affect faith development. A lack of research regarding Christian students at public institutions prohibits current correlation and comparison of the two environments. The question arises: Do students within these two environments experience similar means of challenge and support? The need exists for future studies to answer this question.

This pilot study focused narrowly on senior students who have successfully developed an evangelical Christian faith identity. What about the students who arrive identifying themselves as Christian, and emerge from college assuming other identities? Future studies should focus attention on the students who are not successful in developing a faith identity. Recognizably, these students are difficult to identify and locate. Another major limitation of this study is the lack of minority representation. In hopes of determining accurate generalizations, future studies should incorporate minority students and target a much larger sample.

Now that many specific areas of challenge and support and varies subcategories are identified, research should broaden to include students within every class standing. Administration of a quantitative faith maturity scale would allow researchers to conclusively identify the faith maturity of the sample. As a means of increasing sample size, future researchers could expand the qualitative component to include focus groups. Additionally, obtaining longitudinal data would provide an opportunity to chart the cycle of cognitive growth from the freshman to senior year. Such a study may confirm the current assertion regarding the cycle of cognitive development and the return to authority residing outside of the Christian. There is clearly a need for quantitative data of various types. The findings of the current study, with the identification of key areas of both challenge and support and the various subcategories as identified by the sample, contribute significantly to the future design of a new quantitative assessment tool.

Through the examination of rich qualitative data, a number of suggestions for future research have taken form. Each subcategory emerges as a potential topic for future research of faith development. For example, mission trips and evangelistic efforts have

now emerged unsolicited by researchers in two very separate qualitative studies. Clearly, mission trips and organized evangelistic efforts are a valuable contribution to faith identity development and should be researched and further understood.

The role of the respondent's private life as a significant source of support deserves a closer look. The quite time that they spent alone emerged as surprisingly valuable source of support. What role does the process of reflection play in faith identity development, how can campus ministers increase this type of support through programming efforts, are introverts more likely to be successful within this category, and what factors hinder students from taking advantage of their relationship with God as a major source of support? How does one's level of introversion or extroversion affect the process of faith identity development? Hopefully, future faith development research will answer these questions.

As evidenced in the current literature within the field of student affairs, the topic of spiritual development is re-gaining momentum. Narrowing the focus of study to the faith identity development of evangelical Christian students facilitates understanding of one specific aggregate of students. This understanding and the identification of specific areas of challenge and support assist student development professionals, campus ministers, faculty, and other campus leaders in decision-making and the structuring of programs and environments. Furthermore, an understanding of the milieu in which this aggregate of students encounter challenge allows those charged with the task of assisting and supporting students through the developmental process, to know how to best increase both the level of challenge and the level of support.

Faculty and student affairs practitioners should give special attention to the developmental contribution of peer and mentor relationships. Knowing the monumental impact of this factor regarding student success and development encourages the structuring of classrooms and programs that increases peer interaction and supportive faculty relationships. The implications of student responses encourage and remind campus workers that this aggregate of students find themselves challenged within the liberal atmosphere of the public university campus. In practice, faculty and stuff should carefully consider the importance of engaging students in cognitive challenge, the need for supportive peer and faculty relationships, and the importance of the first year experience.

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APPENDIX A
Interview Questions

Interview Questions
(Appendix A)

Describe your faith, how did you become a Christian?

Has your faith been tested in college, how?

What is the most memorable event of your college career?

What single event has impacted you the most?

With whom do you spend most of your time? How would you describe your friends?

What are your most significant relationships and why? How have these relationships impacted you?

Have any significant changes in your relationships with others occurred since you began college?

Who at the university has most influenced you?

What is the biggest challenge that you have faced?

How have you changed since you began college?

Describe your identity, who are you? What experience(s) has led you to this conclusion?

Describe the classroom environment.

Describe the attitude toward evangelical Christians at this university.

How do other students respond to your views?

How do teachers respond to your views?

How do you fit into the university community?

Do you feel supported in your faith at this university? How?

With what current issues are you most concerned?

What would you have liked to know about the climate or atmosphere of this university before you arrived?

What are your expectations about the future?

Do you have anything to add regarding your faith development throughout your college experience?

APPENDIX B
Informed Consent

APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects
(Appendix B)

Title of Project: <u>Factors that affect the faith development of evangelical Christian students</u>

Investigator(s) <u>Wynn Shooter</u>

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this study is to explore the balance of challenge and support, as it relates to the faith development of evangelical Christian college students within a four-year, public institution. Less than twelve subjects will respond to interview questions. The sample for this study will be traditional-aged (21-23), college seniors. The researcher will select participants using both purposive and quota sampling techniques. Criteria for selection in the study will include such things as personal references, a statement of faith (appendix 1), involvement in a minimum of one Christian organization, and class standing.

II. Procedures

During the 2003, fall semester, and the 2004, spring semester, the researcher will contact potential respondents and ask them to participate. Upon their agreement to participate in the study, the researcher will schedule an initial meeting with the potential respondent. During this meeting, the subject will complete the consent form, the demographics questionnaire (appendix 2), and statement of faith (appendix 1) Once this processes is complete, the researcher will schedule the first of two, one-on-one interviews with the subject. The two interviews will take place within one week's time. All meetings and interviews will be conducted on the campus of Appalachian State University.

The researcher will ask participants to respond to open-ended interview questions, chosen by the researcher. The questions will direct participants to reflect on various aspects of their college career. Areas examined include community, faith, personal story, attitudes and relationships. This interview process requires participants to freely, openly, and honestly share their thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and ideas with the researcher.

III. Risks

Participants may find the interviews to be challenging and/or uncomfortable. Personal disclosure is a requirement for participation. The nature of the interview questions could potentially direct participants to discuss private and personal aspects of their lives.

IV. Benefits

As well as providing the students with a chance to reflect on their own faith identity development and college experience, the open-ended interview responses will give

evangelical Christian students a voice. The depth of student response will reveal the heart of evangelical Christian students on one southern, secular university campus. Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on various aspects of their college career. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants will receive no compensation. Respondents may contact the researcher to obtain a summary of the research results.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

All of the information provided by respondents will remain confidential. The researcher will maintain respondent's confidentiality and anonymity, and will posses all research data. The researcher will collect and store data using audiotaped recordings of the interviews. The researcher will transcribe audiotaped interviews and will maintain personal possession of all audio tapes. Only the researcher will have access to the audio tapes. The researcher will destroy all audiotaped interviews at the completion of the study.

In the reporting of data, respondent's names will be either changed or deleted. Respondents may be quoted, but will not be identified or identifiable by any quoting of comments. Respondents can withdraw from the research project at any time without notice or penalty and likewise the researcher can eliminate respondents from this study without prior notice.

In some situations, it may be necessary for the researcher to break confidentiality. If current child abuse is known or strongly suspected, investigators are required to notify the appropriate authorities. If a respondent is believed to be a threat to herself/himself or others, the researcher is responsible to notify the appropriate authorities. Under these conditions, the researcher may break confidentiality.

VI. Compensation

There is no compensation available for participation in this study. No funds have been set aside for any injury or illness resulting from this project.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

Respondents are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. Respondents are free not to answer any questions.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board of Appalachian State University.

___10/13/03_____   ____10/12/04_____
IRB Approval Date   Approval Expiration Date

IX. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- Participate in a brief (no more than fifteen minutes) initial interview.
- Participate in a maximum of two one-hour interviews.

X. Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____Date_____
Subject signature

_____ Date _____
Witness (Optional except for certain classes of subjects)

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Wynn Shooter   265-4952   ws53330@appstate.edu
Investigator(s)   Telephone/e-mail

Dr. Catherine Clark   262-2448   clarkcr@appstate.edu
Faculty Advisor   Telephone/e-mail

Robert L. Johnson   **828-262-2692**   **johnsonrl@appstate.edu**
Administrator, IRB   Telephone   e-mail
Graduate Studies and Research
Appalachian State University
Boone, NC 26608
Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.

APPENDIX C
Demographics Form

Demographics Form
(Appendix C)

Interviewer's Name: _____   Date of Interview: _____

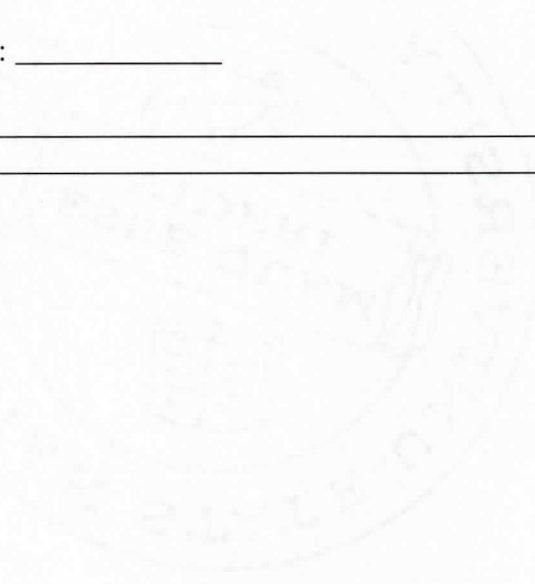Respondent's Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Gender: _____   Race: _____   Age: _____

Religious Background: _____
_____

Undergraduate Major: _____

Anticipated graduation date: _____

Student Involvement: _____
_____

APPENDIX D
<u>Statement of Faith</u>

Statement of Faith
(Appendix D)

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN FAITH

According to the National Evangelical Association (NEA), an evangelical Christian adheres to the following tenets:

- The Bible is the inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God
- There is one God, eternally existent is three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- Belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death, resurrection, and ascension
- Belief that Jesus Christ will return in power and glory
- Belief that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian and enables him/her to live a godly life
- Belief in an afterlife of eternal life in the presence of God for the Christian and an afterlife of eternal damnation for non-Christians

George M. Marsden declares five essential beliefs of the evangelical. According to Marsden, evangelicals view the Bible as the final authority, they believe in the saving work of Jesus and that the foundation for salvation lies in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the spreading of this gospel message is of high value, and actually living a spiritually transformed life is essential.

I agree with these tenets of evangelical Christian faith and I attest that I am, according the above definitions, an evangelical Christian. My personal relationship with the living Savoir, Jesus Christ is of extreme value and importance. I believe that being an evangelical Christian involves more than agreement with a list of doctrines and is epitomized in the believers dependence upon and relationship with a living and holy God, through Jesus Christ alone. It is through this dependence and ongoing relationship that the believer is empowered to live a godly life.

Name: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E
<u>IRB Approval Letter</u>

Appalachian
STATE UNIVERSITY

TO: Dr. Catherine Clark
               HPC
               Mr. Wynn Shooter
               HPC

FROM: Robert L. Johnson, Administrator
               Institutional Review Board

DATE: October 16, 2003

SUBJECT: Institutional Review Board
               Request for Human Subjects Research

REFERENCE: "Factors that Affect the Faith Development of Christian College
               Student"

               IRB Reference #04-5

               Initial Approval Date - October 13, 2003
               End of Approval Period – October 12, 2004

Your request for Review of Human Subjects Research has been approved.

OHRP Guidelines stipulate that projects may be approved for a maximum of one (1) year. During
this period, you should contact this office to:
1. report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others,
2. request modification in the approved protocol,
3. request an Extension beyond the one (1) approval, and/or
4. inform the IRB of the completion of the project.

Best wishes with your research.

RLJ/lab

VITA

Wynn Bennett Shooter was born in Fayetteville, NC, on January 20, 1971. After graduation from high school and traveling throughout the United States for two years, he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Outdoor Recreation from Montreat College, Montreat NC, in 1995. Upon graduation, Wynn married Lesli Reeves, with whom he held seasonal positions for Genesis Account American Outdoor Schools, Vail Associates, and Blue Ridge Backcountry. In 1998, Wynn accepted the position of Group Camping Coordinator at YMCA Camp Greenville, Cedar Mountain, NC. In 2002, as Assistant Fall/Spring Director Mr. Shooter resigned from Camp Greenville and began working toward a Master of Arts degree in College Student Development at Appalachian State University. Wynn will commence work toward his Ph.D. in Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, with an emphasis in outdoor experiential education, at the University of Utah in August of 2004.