ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF A RESIDENTIAL LEARNING COMMUNITY IN THE
FAITH DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLIC COLLEGE STUDENTS

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The college years are a transformative period for undergraduate students, especially in their spiritual development. J.W. Fowler initially proposed the stages of faith model, and S. Parks clarified the unique faith-journey experience of college students. There are many aspects in the lives of college students that influence faith development. Residence halls have long been known as having a great impact on student learning and development. This study examined college-student spiritual development by exploring the impact of a residential learning community on the faith development of Catholic college students.

This qualitative study examined the impact of a living-learning community situated in a private residence hall at a public university on the experiences of 13 college students. Data were gathered using a series of three individual interviews with each participant. Data were then analyzed through a thematic coding process.

Defining terms was an important introduction to this study. Participants described spirituality as an individual, personal relationship with God and religion as an organized community following a common set of principles and beliefs. Participants viewed faith as the way to put their belief into practice, to make meaning of their actions.
Several environmental factors within the residential community emerged as impacting the faith development of college students including opportunities for invitation, peer mentoring, faith-development programming, discernment support, and preparation for faith life after college. Participants also described several factors that influenced their decision to live within the residential community including the facility and amenities, the dining program, and the Catholic nature of the living community. From these findings, several recommendations for student affairs educators were suggested to enhance practices on campus in order to empower spiritual conversations and development. Suggestions for future research also emerged from this study’s results.
THE ROLE OF A RESIDENTIAL LEARNING COMMUNITY IN THE FAITH DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLIC COLLEGE STUDENTS

BY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is a significant experience in the ordinary life of most Americans. Although a number of recent studies have documented the rise in numbers of adults who have no specific religious affiliation, these same reports also have documented a lack of change in spiritual beliefs or practices of American adults over the past several decades. In fact, nearly all adults still believe in God (Americans’, 2013; Hout & Smith, 2015; Newport, 2011; “Nones,” 2012), and most continue to describe themselves as religious, spiritual, or both (Keysar, 2013; “Nones,” 2012). In addition, recent Pew Research surveys found no change in the percentage of Americans who said that prayer was an important part of their daily life; it was 76% in 2012, the same as it was in 1987 (“Nones,” 2012). Though today’s young adults pray less often than their elders do, the number of young adults who said they pray every day is comparable to the portion of young people who said the same in prior decades (Religion, 2010). Another recent report by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life documents that 77% of respondents described religion as being somewhat or very important in their life (America’s, 2015). While decreasing slightly over the past 2 decades, these measures of spiritual belief and engagement in prayer have remained relatively constant over the past half century (“Nones,” 2012).

Issues of spirituality and the clarification of identities and beliefs are significantly affected by the college years, a time of personal growth and development of one’s beliefs,
values, and commitments (J. Dalton & Crosby, 2007; E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) documented that most students enter college with some form of faith, spiritual belief, or value system that guides their life. The Spiritual Life of College Students, a multiyear national research study on college students’ search for meaning and purpose, found that college students have very high levels of spiritual interest and involvement (Higher Education Research Institute, n.d.). Study findings reveal that college students were “actively engaged in a spiritual quest and in exploring the meaning and purpose of life. They are also very engaged and involved in religion, reporting considerable commitment to their religious beliefs and practices” (Higher Education Research Institute, n.d., p. 2). The researchers found that 80% of first-year students attended religious services during the year prior to entering college, more than 77% said they believed in God, and more than 69% prayed (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011).

“Individually and collectively, the voices of campus leaders, of faculty, of student affairs personnel, and of students themselves have begun calling for an exploration of ways to better integrate students’ search for meaning and their spiritual quests with their academic preparation in the classroom and through campus activities.” (Stamm, 2003, Abstract, para. 1)

The spiritual development of college students continues to be a relevant topic for student affairs professionals. Issues of spirituality and religion have been present in colleges and universities since their inception (Rockenbach, 2011). Colleges and universities are being called upon to once again reaffirm their primary mission of promoting student learning and holistic personal development (American College Personnel Association, 1994), and a resurgence of interest in engaging the college campus in issues of spiritual development and religion as part of the academic experience can be detected on many fronts (English, Fenwick,
& Parsons, 2003; Stamm, 2003). Policy centers such as the Hardee Center for Leadership and Ethics in Higher Education have been introduced to discuss issues relative to spirituality. Professional associations have formed task forces and published special-edition journal volumes to provide resources and professional development opportunities for student affairs staff members (Craft, 2014; Jablonski, 2001). Measures of church-related activities and participation have been added to national student surveys such as the National Survey on Student Engagement (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). The definition of student success at college has even been expanded to include developing the ability to reconsider and internalize what a student believes and values (Upcraft et al., 2005). Now, more than ever, colleges and universities are working diligently to structure purposeful student learning opportunities through which students can develop into mature adults, discover the purpose and meaning of their lives, and determine a vocational pursuit through which they can support themselves following graduation (S.D. Parks, 2000). Astin et al. (2011) documented the positive outcomes of these efforts noting, “spiritual growth enhances other college outcomes, such as academic performance, psychological well-being, leadership development, and satisfaction with college” (p. 10).

James W. Fowler’s (1981) theory of faith development provides a theoretical framework for understanding this notion of personal search for spiritual meaning and purpose. Fowler framed his discussion of spiritual development from the psychological perspective and focused on the spiritual or faith development of the individual. Fowler and his associates interviewed over 350 individuals and identified six stages of faith: Intuitive-Protective Faith, Mythic-Literal Faith, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, Individuative-Reflective Faith, Conjunctive Faith, and Universalizing Faith.
J.W. Fowler (1981) argued that faith was what gives meaning and direction to people’s lives. As such, Fowler’s use of the term faith was both connected to institutionalized religion and independent of it. Fowler suggested that one’s religious faith unfolds in a linear, stage-like sequence that is similar to Piaget’s cognitive development theory (Wadsworth, 2004) and Kohlberg’s theory of moral development (Lande & Slade, 1979). Fowler’s theory provides a valuable conceptual framework for thinking about the study of faith development.

Among student affairs professionals, there is also interest in the effect of residential living experiences on college student development. There is an extensive body of research documenting the benefits that college students receive from living on campus during their time of attendance (E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Studies generally indicate that students who lived in on-campus residence halls had more positive and inclusive racial-ethnic attitudes and openness to diversity, were more likely to complete their studies, and were more likely to graduate. On-campus residence halls provide exposure to different cultures and lifestyles, access to a variety of educational support services, and opportunities for enhanced cocurricular learning that enriches the educational experience of residential students. Schroeder and Mable (1994) wrote, “Residence halls have the potential to challenge and educate students as they connect their learning experiences to their living realities” (p. 1). In effect, residence halls situate learning in the students’ experience, thereby fulfilling the first of Baxter Magolda’s (1999) principles of engaging students in active learning.

The demand for purposefully designed residential communities that promote integration of the student’s living environment with his or her classroom learning environment has resulted in the development of intentional living-learning communities (LLCs) on many college campuses (E.T. Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994). Student learning, academic
achievement, and retention are significantly enhanced by residential LLCs when compared with a traditional residence hall experience (Inkelas, Szelényi, Soldner, & Brower, 2007; Kuh et al., 1991; E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Evidence pertaining to the influence of LLCs on dimensions of student development other than general measures of cognitive and personal growth was less clear (E.T. Pascarella et al., 1994). One possible explanation for the mixed results that have been reported about noncognitive dimensions such as aesthetic and cultural interests is that the LLCs might have an indirect influence on resident-student growth and development. E.T. Pascarella et al. (1994) wrote that various research findings indicate that “the impact of structural residence arrangements such as LLCs are indirect, being mediated by the peer and faculty interactions they foster and that, in turn, exert strong, direct influences on various dimensions of student growth and development during college” (p. 34).

Clearly, LLCs effect change in residential college students, yet only one study was found that explored LLCs and spirituality, and it was conducted at a private, faith-based institution. Izmirian’s (2008) study described the impact of a faith-based residential learning community at a Catholic university on the spiritual and faith development of first-year residents. Although the community had no formal learning outcomes, the author identified a number of significant influences including weekly formal gathering times for sharing and reflection and both formal and peer-initiated mentoring (Izmirian). Izmirian (2008) used the case study method to study first-year students who lived in a campus ministry-sponsored LLC at a small, Catholic university. Residents at this institution were assigned to small communities of 10 to 35 members that offered a spiritual-development-focused program led by a university-ministry staff member. Study findings suggest that students experienced growth in their
spiritual development, and that growth may have resulted from formal reflection periods held within the LLC and the influence of peer mentors within the community. These findings may have limited applicability in other settings because participants had been actively involved in a faith community in high school and had enrolled in a faith-based university.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Researchers have attempted to study and categorize spirituality and faith as being the result of a traditional developmental process with typical or standard periods or stages of growth (J.W. Fowler, 1981; S.D. Parks, 2000). Additional spirituality-focused studies have examined the effect of a well-developed sense of spirituality on an individual’s health and wellness (Adams, Bezner, Drabbs, Zambarano, & Steinhardt, 2000) and quality of life (Baker, 2003; Muller & Dennis, 2007). Developing a better understanding of how individuals develop spiritually and make sense of faith-related issues has application within many aspects of the human experience.

One particularly important period of spiritual growth and development is the traditional-age college student years. Developing an understanding of the factors that influence the spiritual and religious development of college-aged adults is essential to understanding how students learn to make meaning, develop values, and embrace a sense of purpose. While available literature describes college students’ faith development as mostly a linear psychological process, scant information could be found to understand how perceptions of faith become integrated in personal development and in the effects on the processes of maturation and social integration; “In contrast to the rich documentation of how the college student experience transforms students’ personal and social life, there are few systematic studies of the
influence of college on changing students’ religious and spiritual beliefs and practices” (Stamm, 2006, p. 81). The purpose of this study was to better understand the residential-student experience and its influence on the spiritual and faith-development process of traditional-age undergraduate college students who self-identified as Catholic.

This study examined the developmental influence of an intentionally designed LLC experience on the spiritual and faith development of upper-division Catholic students who lived in this type of residential community at a large public university. This study developed a better understanding of the residential experience by providing a rich description of a specific living environment and exploring emerging implications for student affairs research and practice. This study was conducted with Catholic students who were living or had lived in a Catholic-focused, living-learning setting at a large public institution for several reasons. First, Catholics are the largest faith group in the United States, with approximately 23% of adults self-identifying as such (Gray & Cidade, 2010). Second, new Catholic-focused student residences are in development at public colleges and universities across the country (Smith, 2007). Participants in the study intentionally chose to live in the learning community rather than being randomly assigned by the institution as in the Izmirian (2008) study.

The following questions guided the investigation:

1. How do traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic define and differentiate the concepts of spirituality, religion, and faith?

2. What factors influence traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic to reside in a Catholic-focused living-learning community at a large public university?
3. What are traditional-age college students’ who self-identify as Catholic perceptions of the characteristics of a Catholic-focused living-learning community at a large public university that contribute to faith development?

In order to examine the nature of Catholic-student spiritual development at a large public university, a qualitative study was conducted. As Chickering (2006) stated, “only qualitative data get to a level of human detail that helps us understand how diverse individuals are actually influenced” (p. 224).

Significance of the Study

J.C. Dalton (2004) recommended that it is time for student affairs organizations to “take a stronger role in advocating for the place of spirituality in the mission and culture of higher education and as an essential aspect of holistic student learning.” J.C. Dalton’s advocacy initiative will be difficult to undertake without necessary supporting data. Numerous authors have decried the lack of empirical research and knowledge in the area of college-student spiritual development and have reiterated the need for focused research on this topic (J.C. Dalton; P. Love & Talbot, 1999). This study adds additional depth to existing knowledge in the college-student affairs and adult education literature by enhancing understanding of the spiritual and faith-development process of emerging, college-aged adults.

This study also reveals and highlights ways to support the spiritual growth of college students. Ethnicity, gender, and religion have been ranked as the most salient identities among undergraduates (Garza & Herringer, 1987), yet one aspect that has been largely neglected in student-development research is how an institution may support and enhance college students’ spiritual development. This study adds to the impetus to redesign and refocus efforts by
institutions and the student affairs profession to focus more intentionally on this aspect of college-student development.

A third emphasis of this study was to examine how and why residential college students learn as they participate in a structured LLC experience and how they apply this learning to their personal development, especially to the development of their spiritual identity. Gaining a better understanding of the residential college experience yields information and themes that may provide new insight into the spiritual-development process. This study also furthers our understanding of the influence of LLCs on a developmental aspect of young adults that has rarely been studied. Understanding how this type of residential community can challenge and support the growth of residents enhances institutional efforts to intentionally influence the development of college students in a positive way.

Summary

In summary, student affairs professionals embrace their responsibility to provide students with a holistic education that has practical application not only while students are members of the university community but also to the external communities in which they will participate after graduation (Jablonski, 2001; P. Love & Talbot, 1999). Intentionally developing the whole student—intellectually, emotionally, recreationally, culturally, vocationally, and spiritually—is their professional duty (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1987). Yet, the spirituality component is rarely included when holistic development is discussed and studied. The lack of services for and assessment of spirituality is especially true at large public institutions (Skavlen, 2003). This study provides new insight that
may lead to changes to the manner in which students engage the institution in terms of their spiritual growth and development.

Definition of Terms

Discernment—“The ability to judge wisely and objectively…an important and common trait of religious and spiritual tradition and education, and, as such, is a key characteristic in discussions of religious and spiritual development” (Dillon, 2006, p. 122).

Faith—“An orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one’s hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions” (J.W. Fowler, 1981, p. 14).

Identity—“One’s personally held beliefs about the self in relation to social groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation) and the ways one expresses that relationship” (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 121).

Identity Crisis—“A necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation” (Erikson, 1968, p. 16).

Living-learning Community—A residence-based learning community in which students “partake in coordinated curricular activities, but also live together in a specific residence hall where they are provided with academic programming and services” (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003, p. 335).

Religion—“Institutions and systems consisting of organizational structures, codes of behavior, and symbol systems defining assumptions and beliefs designed to create in people powerful, comprehensive, and enduring world views and attitudes” (Oser, Scarlett, & Bucher, 2006, p. 953).
Spiritual Development—“The process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental ‘engine’ that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs and practices” (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003, pp. 205-206).

Spirituality—“The quest for understanding ourselves in relationship to our view of ultimate reality, and to live in accordance with that understanding” (Gorsuch, 2002, p. 8).

Theology—“The study of God, ultimate reality, or religion, including the relationship with people and the ethics resulting therefrom” (Gorsuch, 2002, p. 9).
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter documents the literature that guided the current research and its effort to address the following research questions:

1. How do traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic define and differentiate the concepts of spirituality, religion, and faith?

2. What factors influence traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic to reside in a Catholic-focused living-learning community at a large public university?

3. What are traditional-age college students’ perceptions of the characteristics of a Catholic-focused living-learning community at a large public university that contribute to faith development?

The literature review begins by examining the ways in which researchers have attempted to define college-student spirituality and the inherent challenges therein. A review of developmental theories follows, with particular attention paid to Erikson’s psychosocial development theory, Fowler’s faith development theory, and Parks’s expansion to include college-aged students. Several national research studies are also considered in an examination of the status of spirituality research. This chapter also reviews and critiques the extensive body of research concerning the effects of residential community living on traditional college-aged
students. It reviews the development of specialized LLCs and the research studies that document the contributions that these academically-focused living environments offer to students. The research findings are synthesized and critiqued, and gaps in the literature are identified in an effort to better understand the residential experience and its influence on the spiritual and faith-development process of traditional-age, undergraduate college students.

Spirituality Defined

Effectively and accurately defining the concept of spirituality is essential to understanding the processes of spiritual and religious development. This review of the literature begins with an examination of several studies that have attempted to identify the fundamental characteristics of spirituality and religion as conceptualized by participants. These studies have made focused attempts to define spirituality as a construct so that further measurement and data collection can occur.

Hill et al. (2000) conducted a comprehensive analysis of existing research on the constructs of spirituality and religion from a number of disciplinary perspectives. The authors documented the need for developing defining and measuring criteria that can be used in future research on spirituality and religion. The authors concluded that while the phenomena are inherently interrelated, identifying a comprehensive definition is a daunting task and efforts to measure one without the other is difficult. “Both spirituality and religion are complex phenomena, multidimensional in nature, and any single definition is likely to reflect a limited perspective or interest” (p. 52). The authors withheld drawing any firm conclusions about a specific operational definition of spirituality and religion and instead settled for proposing a set of criteria for judging the value of existing definitions.
Bryant and Astin (2008) used factor analysis to develop a spiritual-struggle scale to be used as a dependent variable in their research to identify the circumstances that enhance or encourage spiritual development. The scale was based on five items dealing with questioning one’s spiritual/religious beliefs; feeling unsettled about spiritual and religious matters; struggling to understand evil, suffering, and death; feeling angry at God; and feeling disillusioned about one’s religious upbringing. The instrument was administered to students as part of the 2003 College Students’ Beliefs and Values (CSBV) survey (Bryant & Astin). The authors argued that their scale represented “a better measure of the construct than using one or two items as other studies have done in the past” (Bryant & Astin, p. 12). While the scale’s reliability was enhanced a year later when two additional items were added, these researchers were more interested in understanding the types of spiritual struggle that college students encounter than in defining the broader notion of spirituality and, consequently, also failed to identify a suitable definition.

Qualitative studies have also been employed in an effort to develop a clear, concise definition of spirituality and spiritual development. After interviewing several adult educators about their approaches to classroom teaching, Tisdell (2003) concluded that spirituality is a process of making meaning where principles, a higher power, greater forces, or higher values organize a person’s meaning-making processes. In another qualitative study, Mayhew (2004) proposed a definition based on the experiences of a group of students representing multiple worldviews. Mayhew’s phenomenological analysis resulted in a description of spirituality as “the human attempt to make sense of the self in connection to and with the external world” (p. 666). While the personal views of eight college students may not provide a definitive answer
about how to define spirituality, Mayhew’s creative study increased understanding of how students from a variety of backgrounds made sense of this challenging construct.

Multiple approaches have been used in an effort to develop a commonly accepted definition of spirituality, yet none exists in the literature to date. Researchers have either glossed over the need to establish a clear definition, or they have proposed their own untested version. However, lack of a generally accepted definition has not inhibited research efforts to better understand the impact of faith and spirituality in a number of sociological and psychological environments. It does, however, require the reader to critically analyze the concepts and theoretical frameworks that these current and future studies are attempting to measure.

Developmental Theories

Discovering one’s abilities, goals, and effectiveness is part of creating a sense of identity that prepares students for entering adulthood. Developmental theories serve a primary role in college student affairs because practitioners strive to understand and intentionally enhance the growth and development of students. Stages within each of these theories often focus on the life tasks associated with students who are engaged with higher education settings and the positive change that may occur in students while they are enrolled (Jones & Abes, 2011). Two types of student development theories are appropriate to consider in relation to this study. Psychosocial theories provide a lens for examining the content of development, and cognitive development theories describe the process of development. Brief summaries of Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development and Fowler’s faith development theory are provided in order to explicate the theoretical framework for this study.
Psychosocial Development Theory

Psychosocial development theories are rooted in the work of Erik Erikson and focus on the interaction of the individual with his or her social world (Erikson, 1980). Psychosocial theories examine the content of development: what individuals are most concerned about in different time periods of the lifecycle. This content includes “values, identity, relationships, career and work, and family” (Jones & Abes, 2011, p. 7). Psychosocial theories aid in understanding development across the lifespan and include content areas that are on the minds of adolescents, college students, and adults.

Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development

In 1959, Erik Erikson offered a psychoanalytic theory that expanded on Freud’s thinking about identity development. Erikson’s theory identified eight stages/phases through which individuals should pass during their lifecycle. In each stage, the individual encounters, and hopefully masters, a series of new crises or challenges in order to arrive at a resolution of a major developmental task. Each stage builds upon the successful completion of earlier stages and results in a change in perspective. Erikson (1980) believed that human ego development is governed by a combination of biological and environmental influences that determine the direction and timing of development. As each subsequent environmental conflict is resolved, an individual moves forward to the next stage of his or her development.

Erikson’s model was developed from his psychotherapy experience rather than through experimental work. Reflecting on this experience caused Erikson to propose a lifespan model of development that incorporates five stages to the age of 18 years, followed by three additional
stages leading into adulthood. Erikson (1980) believed that as an individual matures, he or she creates a “succession of potentialities for significant interaction” (p. 54, italics in original) that function together to give the individual autonomy. A brief summary of Erikson’s 1959 model follows.

1. Trust vs. Mistrust: Hope. Described by Erikson (1980) as “an attitude toward oneself and the world derived from the experiences of the first year of life,” this first stage centers on the infant’s needs and the level of trust the infant has in the parent meeting those needs. If the parent fails to provide a secure environment from birth to age 2, a sense of mistrust will result. The developmental task in infancy is to learn whether other people will satisfy basic needs.

2. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt: Will. As parents provide a strong base of security, a child will begin to explore his or her surroundings in Erikson’s second stage. Appearing in children ages 2 to 4, the significance of this stage lies in the maturation of the muscle system and in learning when to hold on and when to let go. A sense of freedom begins to develop for toddlers who are able to feed themselves and independently use the bathroom. Confidence from parental encouragement and support results in a growing autonomy within the child.

3. Initiative vs. Guilt: Purpose. The development of courage and independence is what sets preschoolers, ages 3 to 6, apart from other age groups. Early attempts to take initiative may lead a child to engage in risk-taking behaviors and will certainly result in some failures. Developing a sense of guilt allows a child to learn self-control and to begin developing a conscience. Erikson describes this stage as discovering what kind of person one is going to be.

4. Industry vs. Inferiority: Competence. The early school-age years (5-12) are characterized by a growing interest in becoming productive, responsible, and literate. Fundamentals of technology are developing, and an increased interest in more complex skills
such as reading, writing, and telling time is becoming evident. Proficiency in these tasks leads to the development of self-confidence and the ability to successfully engage with a peer group. Developing a balance between celebrating one’s achievements and modesty leads to a well-developed sense of competence.

5. Identity vs. Role Confusion: Fidelity. This stage marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, and adolescents aged 12 to 18 begin to ponder the roles they will play in the adult world. Erikson proposed that most adolescents achieve a sense of identity regarding who they are and what they will do with their lives during this period. He cautioned, however, that the danger at this stage is identity diffusion and suggested that tolerance of identity exploration is important to the resolution of this stage.

6. Intimacy vs. Isolation: Love. Early adulthood brings identity confusion to an end and the search for a long-term committed relationship becomes important. Individuals at this stage are capable of forming long-term intimate relationships with someone other than a family member and willingly make the sacrifices and compromises that such relationships require. Success at this stage leads to love and a sense of commitment, safety, and care within a relationship.

7. Generativity vs. Stagnation: Care. During middle age, the primary developmental task is gaining an understanding of one’s contribution to society and helping to guide future generations. Productivity and accomplishments are signs of successful transition to this stage. Creating a family of one’s own is often an outward sign of this productivity.

8. Ego Integrity vs. Despair: Wisdom. The final developmental task is introspection; the ability to reflect back on a life well lived and its associated accomplishments. Contentment and
integrity result from a satisfying, productive life. A sense of closure permits individuals at this stage to accept death without fear.

**Additional Psychosocial Development Scholarship**

Jeffrey Arnett (2011) proposed a new stage of development during the late teens and twenties called emerging adulthood. Focusing on ages 18-25, emerging adulthood exists only in cultures that allow young people a prolonged period of independent role exploration following their typical years in secondary education. This new period of development is directly connected to sweeping demographic shifts for this population in industrial cultures such as an increase in the median age of marriage, delay of first childbirth, and increases in participation in higher education (Arnett). This new stage is distinguished by “relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations” (Arnett, p. 150) that are commonly in place for adolescents who are still living at home with their parents.

Arnett (2011) acknowledged the contribution of Erikson’s psychosocial development theory to the creation of his new stage. Erikson (1968) described a period of prolonged adolescence that is typical in industrialized societies and explained a psychological moratorium granted to young people in such societies that allows a great deal of role exploration without identifying a distinct developmental stage. However, Arnett’s research documented that emerging adults understood that they were no longer adolescents but couldn’t describe themselves as having completely entered young adulthood. Until they were able to take responsibility for themselves and make independent decisions, participants found themselves in a new, not yet defined, stage of life that Arnett called emerging adulthood.
Robbins and Wilner (2001) interviewed more than 100 individuals that they called twentysomethings and found that those who did not successfully navigate this stage of emerging adulthood experienced a quarterlife crisis. Identifying this population as virtually invisible in the marketplace, the researchers described this crisis as a “response to overwhelming instability, constant change, too many choices, and a panicked sense of helplessness” (Robbins & Wilner, p. 3). Their view that completing college no longer marks the transition from childhood to adulthood aligns closely with Arnett’s notion that a new stage of emerging adulthood must be considered when examining psychosocial development in the lifecycle.

**Cognitive Development Theory**

Cognitive development theories focus on the structure of thinking applied to the content of those psychosocial issues outlined previously. Cognitive-structural-stage theorists argue that conventional development offers elements of a “structural, hierarchical, sequential, and irreversible logic of development” (Streib, 2001, p. 155), with each stage representing a more complex way of making meaning of one’s experiences. These theories describe a dimension of student development and the phases of movement along a specific continuum. The most thoroughly developed structures for studying spirituality examine its characteristics through the lens of cognitive-structural-stage development theory. Fowler’s faith development theory and Parks’s work on extending this theory to the college-student population have been selected from the family of cognitive-structural theories to provide a theoretical foundation for the current study because they deal with human faith development.
Fowler’s Stages of Faith

In *Stages of Faith* (1981), James W. Fowler, the father of the modern faith-development movement, offered a comprehensive framework to address the nature of faith as a developmental process. Fowler believed that faith was “a consequence of the universal human burden of finding or making meaning” (p. 33) and saw meaning-making as both a spiritual and cognitive process. In an effort to gain a better understanding of this universal burden, Fowler developed a matrix of aspects to differentiate and trace developmental patterns and processes of faith. Taken together, these aspects provide an operational depiction of faith that can be used to study faith development. The aspects were built on the structural developmental traditions of psychology including form of logic (derived from Piaget), perspective-taking (derived from Selman), form of moral judgment (derived from Kohlberg), bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function (J. Fowler, 2004; S. Parks, 1986). Fowler used this set of structural descriptions of stages as the basis for his research and the framework for the interpretation and analysis of his faith-development interviews (J.W. Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004).

Fowler trained his graduate students to conduct faith-development interviews using this framework and developed a semistructured interview questionnaire and a set of interpretation and analysis guidelines that evolved into a validated scoring manual for conducting faith development research (J.W. Fowler et al., 2004). Over a period of 9 years, Fowler and his team of young researchers conducted and analyzed over 350 interviews with participants ranging in age from 4 to 84. Analysis of the results of this landmark study resulted in the development of Fowler’s faith development theory (J.W. Fowler, 1981). The Fowlerian stage model provides
“an interpretive framework from which to organize and understand the complex strands of spiritual development” (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004).

J.W. Fowler (1981) theorized that faith unfolds throughout the entirety of the human life span and follows a predictable stage process encompassing a prestage and six sequential stages of faith development. The stages are related to each other both sequentially and hierarchically. Each successive stage builds upon and incorporates the previous faith-development stage. A new stage of faith emerges when one becomes aware of the limitations of the previous stage and seeks a new understanding of meaning-making within his or her world in a more differentiated and complex manner. A brief summary of Fowler’s model follows.

**Stage 0: Undifferentiated Faith.** The faith pilgrimage begins in infancy with a prelanguage disposition of trust and relationship with the primary caregivers. The quality and strength of this trust relationship creates the foundation for the oncoming faith journey and all of its inherent threats.

**Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith.** This is the stage of initial self-awareness. The young child (4-8 years old) begins to explore the surrounding environment and the objects within it. Although he or she continues to rely on and reference significant others, primarily parents, the child begins to make sense of his or her surroundings from an egocentric perspective. Using his or her imagination, he or she begins to give meaning to experiences at this stage, and God is thought of in magical terms.

**Stage 2: Mythic-Literal Faith.** At this stage, community stories, beliefs, and observances begin to be internalized. Generally coinciding with the elementary school years, children at this stage rely on the external structures of fairness and justice based on reciprocity. Caring and just authority figures and parents are expected to consistently reward goodness and punish
disobedience. Story, drama, and myth begin to emerge as ways of creating coherence and giving meaning to family and faith-community experiences. There is now a greater awareness of the differences between the self and significant others. The divine is pictured as a presence with human characteristics and patterns of behavior.

**Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith.** The adolescents at this stage have extended their experience beyond the family to include school, peers, community, media, and perhaps religion. Faith is defined by a worldview derived from the accepted authorities in these spheres, and how these authorities perceive the individual forms his or her identity. Self-worth relies heavily on the approval and affirmation of authorities, and autonomous decision-making is rare. Faith provides the coherent perspective that unifies this diverse array of relationships. For many adults, this stage becomes a permanent place of equilibrium. J.W. Fowler (1981) stated that individuals at Stage 3 have created a personal ideology, “a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs” (p. 173), but they are unaware of this development.

**Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith.** Late adolescents or young adults at this stage begin to take responsibility for their beliefs, values, and lifestyle. Rather than accepting single, authoritative truths, the individual is beginning a process of critical self-reflection in an effort to select from among a number of equally compelling beliefs and values. At this stage, an individual often challenges previous myths and ideologies and makes a conscious choice about membership in a faith tradition and community. Rutledge (1989) described this stage as a shift in responsibility for meaning-making from “relying on conventional authority or authorities to taking personal responsibility for commitments, life-style, beliefs, and attitudes” (p. 20). This shift results in a greater sense of autonomy and personal integration or identity.
Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith. For adults who attain this faith-development stage, there is a greater internalization of their faith identity. J.W. Fowler (1981) stated that conjunctive faith involves “the integration into self and outlook of much that was suppressed or unrecognized” (p. 197). The individual begins to recognize and appreciate the coherence of his or her social unconscious and accepts the myths and beliefs of his or her social sphere. There is also an increased willingness to accept life’s ambiguities that is accompanied by openness to the beliefs and viewpoints of others.

Stage 6: Universalizing Faith. The aspirational qualities of this stage require one to decentralize one’s judgments from a focal point of self-identity and to focus instead on the ultimate reality of a greater good. Idealized figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King, Jr. are examples of this generally unattainable stage. J.W. Fowler (1981) described this stage as a “disciplined, activist incarnation – a making real and tangible – of the imperatives of absolute love and justice” (p. 200). Universal faith is the terminal stage of faith development according to J.W. Fowler’s faith development theory.

Depending on their previous life experiences, most traditional-age college students enter higher education at Stage 3 and begin making progress toward Stage 4 during their time in school. Several years after the Fowler interviews, Parks attempted to better define the development that college students go through during this time of significant life transition.

Parks’s Extension of Fowler

In *The Critical Years* (1986) and *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (2000), Sharon Daloz Parks supported and extended Fowler’s faith development theory by proposing a seventh stage for the faith-development model. Situated between Fowler’s third stage (synthetic-conventional
faith) and fourth stage (individuative-reflective faith), Parks posited that the process of moving from adolescence to adulthood included a stage of young adulthood that typically occurred during the traditional college-aged years. Parks’s research detailed the unique contributions that higher education makes to this developmental process by focusing on the search for meaning by college students.

S. Parks (1986) offered four processes of faith development within this stage: forms of knowing, forms of dependence, forms of community, and role of imagination. Parks focused attention on the presentation of these issues in the transition from synthetic-conventional faith to individuative-reflective faith, which is a critical stage for young adult students between the ages of 18 and 30. A brief summary of Parks’s processes follows.

**Forms of Knowing.** Forms of knowing refers to the ways in which young adults cognitively understand themselves, their surroundings, and God. S. Parks (1986) described four ways of knowing: authority-bound and dualistic, unqualified relativism, probing commitment, and tested commitment. Students move from belief in an unambiguous truth to having to reconcile multiple truths, to understanding that truth is relative and sometimes circumstantial.

**Forms of Dependence.** This process refers to the locus of authority in a young adult’s life. S. Parks (1986) identified four aspects of dependence that increase in complexity: dependence or counterdependence, fragile inner-dependence, confident inner-dependence, and interdependence.

**Forms of Community.** S. Parks (1986) indicated that young adults are still in formation and that mentoring communities and social groups play an integral role in any spiritual development that occurs. S. Parks identified five movements between communities along which the individual’s faith matures through his or her interaction with others: conventional
community, diffuse community, ideologically compatible groupings (mentoring), self-selected class or group, and community open to others.

**Imagination.** A central task for the young adult student is the formation of a dream (S. Parks, 1986). People give form to their ultimate meanings with images and symbols. S. Parks identified five common imaginative roles in the young adult: a period of conscious conflict that describes the person who is aware of conflicting tensions and is uncomfortable in the present situation, a period of pause when a person is aware of inner stress but unable to resolve it, a period of achieving a new image that resolves the conflict and establishes a uniquely new perspective, a period during which various aspects of life are patterned, and a period in which the person interprets, celebrates, and acts out a new understanding by sharing personal experience with others in some form of acknowledgement and celebration.

**Criticisms of Fowler**

A review of the literature revealed several areas of concern regarding Fowler’s theory of faith development. Some of the criticisms surround his methodology (Broughton, 1986). However, many of these issues such as researcher bias and the use of cross-sectional rather than a longitudinal design are common in qualitative research and can be minimized with appropriate research techniques. More problematic in Fowler’s study are the difficulty in defining faith so that it can be measured and the conclusions that he draws about the characteristics of Stage 6.

**Definition of Faith.** One of the primary criticisms of Fowler’s faith development theory has to do with how faith is defined (Dykstra, 1986; S.D. Parks, 1991). The difficulty in identifying a universally agreed upon definition raises fundamental questions regarding what
type of development is actually being measured. Nelson and Aleshire (1986) argued, “Fowler’s subject of inquiry – belief, values, and faith – includes some of the most difficult human phenomena to operationalize and investigate” (p. 184).

J.W. Fowler (1981) drew a distinction between belief and faith. Belief involves intellectual assent to concepts or propositions set forth in a specific religious doctrine and creed. Any attempt to measure development of one’s religious beliefs requires the recognition of the variations among different religious traditions. As the more inclusive term, faith calls attention to the similarities between different traditions and the manner in which people engage with them. J.W. Fowler (1986) believed that by concentrating on the process rather than the content of faith, comparisons could be made within and across different faith traditions.

Dykstra (1986) claimed, “Fowler cannot define faith any differently and still have a structural developmental theory of growth or change in faith” (p. 53, emphasis in original). Yet it is unclear whether all of Fowler’s student researchers shared a common understanding of this challenging construct and whether it has been adequately designed to allow additional follow-up research to occur.

**Universalizing Stage of Faith.** A second common criticism of Fowler’s work surrounds his data analysis and has generally focused on the shift that occurs at Stage 6 (Broughton, 1986; S.D. Parks, 1991). Earlier stages are identified after analyzing data from a range of participants, with the stages emerging directly from the empirical research method of the semistructured interview. Stage 6, however, is found in only one case of a reported 359 individuals studied, and the results of that interview have never been shared. Instead, J.W. Fowler (1981) identified a number of exemplars of Stage 6 who he had clearly not interviewed. Broughton (1986) stated, “When Fowler gives examples of stage 6, he ignores the exceptional individual located by his
own study and refers instead to well-known figures (e.g., King, Hammarskjold, and Gandhi)” (p. 95). As a result, Stage 6 does not appear to be a natural evolution of the faith-development structures described by Stages 1 through 5. Instead, the reader is expected to simply accept that the behavior and writings of these exemplars represent the culmination of the faith-development process. As Broughton stated, it is unfortunate that “in these exemplary cases, the appropriateness of the theoretical interpretation of the ‘data’ of their lives is beyond validation” (p. 96).

Fowler might have done better if he had left the question of development beyond Stage 5 open to further research that could be congruent with the methodology supporting the first five stages. S.D. Parks (1991) believed that “until there is empirical validation in continuity with the methodology underlying the first five stages, ‘stage 6’ and the question of mature faith will continue to be a primary and crucial point of theoretical debate” (p. 109).

Additional Faith-Development Scholarship

The value and application of Fowler’s faith development theory have been widely scrutinized in the literature, yet his interview protocols and resulting theory have been used in a number of follow-up studies on either a particular period of the lifecycle or a particular professional or religious constituency (Slee, 1996). Streib (2003) reported in a literature review that nearly 100 dissertations were completed in the last quarter of the 20th century using Fowler’s faith development theory as their theoretical foundation. The majority of these dissertations were empirical studies, with nearly half applying Fowler’s Faith Development Instrument or some variation thereof. Many of these studies were conducted with more diverse populations than the White men that Fowler and his colleagues studied. In reviewing the
studies that focused on women’s religious development, Streib stated, “Most of the studies on women’s faith development conclude with a clear proposal to revise the concept of faith and faith development, especially for the Individuative-Reflective stage of faith” (p. 27). A review of the smaller number of cross-cultural faith studies leads to the conclusion that there is insufficient evidence to support Fowler’s conclusion that the developmental process is universal (Slee, 1996; Streib, 2001).

While many others have used his faith development theory as the theoretical underpinning of their research, Fowler has been reluctant to provide detailed evidence of the empirical basis of his theory, and there have been very few attempts to replicate his findings across the entire lifecycle (Slee, 1996). Fowler has acknowledged that the interviews that he and his students conducted were with a select, not necessarily representative, group of individuals and that the theory guided the process of data collection (Nelson & Aleshire, 1986). There are also significant questions regarding Fowler’s claims of universality and openness to cultural and religious diversity (Slee, 1996). Despite these criticisms, Fowler’s model continues to provide a useful foundation for student development theory and practice in student affairs.

Spirituality and College Students

In their examination of How College Affects Students (2005), E.T. Pascarella and Terenzini found a small set of studies that drew on nationally representative samples to explore changes in religious values during the college years. The researchers found small increases in the value students attached to religion as the students approached graduation. They also found some evidence to suggest that religious values are often reexamined and reconstructed in ways that differ from traditional denominations but were cautious in drawing too many conclusions.
due to limitations with the studies that they identified. In summary, E.T. Pascarella and Terenzini acknowledged that the net college effect on religious attitudes and values is an area of scholarship that needs more empirical attention. Bryant (2008) offered an explanation for the lack of relevant, meaningful spiritual-development data about college students by stating, “The challenging assessment task before us involves finding ways to measure effectively aspects of campus climate and practice that purportedly make a difference in the lives of our students and colleagues” (p. 2).

Yet, the study of college-student spirituality and spiritual development has significantly improved from the days when P. Love and Talbot (1999) argued, “by failing to address students’ spiritual development in practice and research we are ignoring an important aspect of their development” (p. 362). In order to gain a better understanding of the college-student spiritual-development process and influencers, investigations have also been completed with groups of gay and lesbian students (P.G. Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005), women (Buchko, 2004), African American students (Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002; Dennis, Hicks, Banerjee, & Dennis, 2005), and first-year students (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003). Gaining a better understanding of the relationship between spiritual development and higher education is currently a significant focus area for many in the academy.

Interest in the spiritual development of young adults and their search for meaning has been well-documented in the higher education (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006) and adult education (English et al., 2003; Tisdell, 2003) literature. Several major projects were designed to gain a better understanding of the composition of the student population, their spiritual experience, and the effect that any correlation may have. These works describing the spiritual lives of college students began to address the lack of scholarship and
the need for empirical evidence about the effect of college on student’s religious attitudes and values. These studies have contributed to the larger discussion and research in order to enable all types of educational institutions to better meet the needs of students who are striving to make sense of their spiritual experiences. A brief explanation of these studies highlights the breadth and depth of the current spirituality research in higher education.

**Faithful Change**

The Faithful Change project was a multiyear study of faith development of students attending evangelical Christian colleges that was designed to “explore and assess the undergraduate faith and spiritual maturation that occurs during a typical student’s experience at Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) campuses” (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004, p. 93). The longitudinal study incorporated qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to ensure the broadest sampling possible (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004). The study included 240 subjects randomly selected from six liberal arts campuses who subsequently participated in over 600 semistructured faith interviews using a modified version of the interview protocol developed by Fowler (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004). Participants also completed a number of instruments in preparation for their interviews including the Self-Discovery Tapestry Instrument (Meltzer 1997); the Faithful Change Questionnaire (FCQ; Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004), a compilation of various existing spirituality inventories; and the Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), a measure of personality style. Validity of the FCQ and BFI was confirmed by having three people who knew a student well verify the responses (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004). Lastly, the students were reinterviewed as seniors after they watched the videotape of their freshmen interviews.
Faithful Change interviews were coded blindly using criteria outlined in *Faithful Change* (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004). This document was developed by J.W. Fowler et al. (2004) to clarify the theoretical foundation of faith-development research and to provide standardized tools to enhance the study of spirituality. The manual includes preparatory exercises such as the Self Discovery Tapestry Instrument, instruction on conducting faith-development interviews, and a well-developed transcription and coding scheme for analyzing the interview data. The authors even developed identifying characteristics and relational stages for each identified aspect and designed questions that feed into each established aspect. While these blind coding criteria are helpful in promoting standardization of spiritual-development research, they presume that most of the qualitative interview results will fall into the seven aspects they identified through ongoing testing. The authors acknowledged that not all participants will respond in a like manner and developed separate analyses for those who come from a predominantly fundamentalist orientation (J.W. Fowler et al.). Yet, the researchers do not adequately account for responses that deviate from the anticipated responses they proposed in their key aspects. In addition to blind coding, the authors encouraged multiple scoring of the data in an effort to increase interrater reliability of their results.

One of the goals of Faithful Change was to broaden the sample of participants and examine the generalizability of Fowler’s faith development theory. Preliminary findings suggested that crisis is a key driver for spiritual development (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004). Additional consideration of the findings are discussed later in this chapter, but it is important to note that limiting the study to only CCCU institutions, a very specific, unique group of institutions, clearly prevents the generalizability of the study findings.
Research on college-student development has concluded that the time and energy students commit to participating in educationally purposeful activities are an excellent indicator of their subsequent learning and personal development (Astin, 1993; E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Kuh et al. (2005) found that “what students do during college counts more for what they learn and whether they will persist in college than who they are or even where they go to college” (p. 8). And what students are doing is increasingly related to religiousness and spiritual development. Astin et al. (2011) found that 80% of incoming college students attended religious services in the year prior to entering college and more than two thirds (69%) pray (p. 82).

Researchers from the HERI at the University of California, Los Angeles are using the CSBV survey, a questionnaire that examines issues of meaning, purpose, and spirituality, to conduct a large-scale research project. This instrument was formulated by The Spirituality in Higher Education project (Higher Education Research Project, n.d.), a major, multiyear program that seeks to explore the “inner lives of college students: the values and beliefs that guide them, the meaning they derive from their education and the world around them, and the patterns of spiritual development that characterize their college years” (Bryant & Astin, 2008, p. 8). While the analysis of these data is ongoing, this study offers a wealth of possibilities and data for continuing to seek understanding about the spiritual development of college students.
Students in Crisis

One of the major findings of the current spiritual-development research indicates that efforts toward crisis resolution propel students forward on their spiritual-development journey (J. Fowler, 2004; Ma, 2003). The Faithful Change project defined a crisis as anything that “challenges people to examine what they believe and why” (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004, p. 100). Research indicates that the entire college-student experience might be one of disequilibrium. Three categories of crisis that drive student development in the spiritual realm have been identified: substantial multicultural exposure, general emotional crisis, and significant exposure to diverse perspectives (Bryant & Astin, 2008). This central role of crisis resolution makes a convincing argument for continuing to develop and fund comprehensive longitudinal studies. It is difficult to identify specific periods of struggle and crisis that can lead to spiritual growth using cross-sectional instruments. To be successful, the researcher may need to encounter students mid-crisis to accurately capture their resolution and development experience.

The notion of spiritual struggle has also been associated with a plethora of differing student characteristics, perspectives, and experiences. Whether this type of spiritual struggle leads to spiritual development is unclear. The relatively short time frame of the collegiate experience may make it difficult to perceive the growth that may be occurring. Crisis can refer to “a prolonged period of active engagement with, and exploration of, competing roles and ideologies” (Holcomb & Nonneman, 2004, p. 100). Some research findings indicate that students who struggle spiritually in college often have some meaningful connection to
spirituality or religion through their religious tradition, the religious affiliation of their campus, contemplative spiritual practice, or faculty support of spirituality (Bryant & Astin, 2008).

These findings seem to contradict other studies that found no effect or perceived growth as an outcome of a crisis. For example, Muller and Dennis (2007) found that college students who experienced higher levels of life change had less spirituality, yet were actively seeking deeper meaning in their lives. Johnson and Hayes (2003) found “certain characteristics that distinguish students with and without considerable distress connected to religious and spiritual problems” (p. 415). They also wondered whether confusion about beliefs and values was not just a natural consequence of the age of the participants and believed that questioning one’s faith may be considered a common type of religious or spiritual problem for this age group. They believed that much of the distress comes from experiencing changes in students’ support and social networks.

Mission trips and cultural immersion opportunities provided the types of substantial multicultural exposure that Bryant and Astin (2008) described in their study. Ongoing integration with people who successfully lived differently from a student caused him or her to reconsider his or her worldview. Study-abroad opportunities and long-term service-learning programs may provide rich environments in which to study college-student spiritual-development because they offer long-term exposure to communities in another culture.

Research findings indicate that these periods of spiritual struggle are associated with experiences in college that challenge and disorient students. These experiences often affect a student’s psychological well-being negatively in the short run, but over time they increase students’ acceptance of individuals of different faith traditions (Bryant & Astin, 2008). For example, one study revealed significant differences in scores of students who lived on and off
campus that indicated, “living on campus has an important influence on the spiritual growth of students” (Ma, 2003, p. 332). This result seems to indicate that significant exposure to people who think differently in a residential setting provides more opportunities for spiritual growth and development.

The Residential Experience

The literature contains a significant amount of research on the effects of living in a residential community at a university. This portion of the literature review examines the research on a number of these effects including involvement, satisfaction and adjustment, retention rates, academic performance, cognitive growth and development, personal growth and psychosocial development, and beliefs and values. A look at the enhanced effect of residency in an LLC follows.

In their report on undergraduates who work, Horn and Berktold (1998) found that only 14% of their respondents reported living on campus in a university residence hall. This statistic is particularly significant when coupled with reports on the growth in community college attendance (“Community Colleges,” 2000) and the ongoing financial challenges faced by many traditional-age undergraduates. It appears increasingly possible that living in a residence hall at an American college or university will one day become an antiquated experience. In addition, housing professionals across the country are regularly challenged by students, boards of trustees, and the general public to demonstrate the efficacy of their residential environments. It is imperative that colleges and universities continue to collect and report about the data necessary to support their academic missions, their residency requirements, and their requests for residence hall renovation funding and ongoing financial support.
Unfortunately, much of the research on the contributions of university residence halls was conducted several decades ago (Blimling, 1989; Chickering, 1974). While these studies continue to be routinely referenced in journal articles and books, the lack of recency of these investigations poses a challenging dilemma for the housing profession. Colleges and universities are being called upon to reaffirm their primary mission of promoting student learning and personal development (American College Personnel Association, 1994). Housing professionals must be able to reliably demonstrate the contributions of their programs toward these institutional efforts.

An additional development in the residential community-living literature is a focus on studying the contributions of LLCs. The National Study on Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) was developed in 2002 to study the impact of living-learning programs on various student outcomes (Inkelas et al., 2007). In addition to shedding new light on traditionally studied student-development outcomes, the study data have also been used to consider the effect that residing in a living-learning program has on lesbian, gay, and bisexual students (Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007), underage drinking (Brower, 2008), and civic engagement (Rowan-Kenyon, Soldner, & Inkelas, 2007). The work of principal investigator Dr. Karen Inkelas and her colleagues has truly revitalized residential community-living research.

**Residential Student Living Experiences**

The college-student development literature identifies multiple developmental theories that seek to explain and predict how individuals develop, especially during their collegiate experience (Astin, 1993). For example, Erikson emphasized the important role of social
context on identity formation (Erikson, 1968). Erikson argued that any developmental changes could be largely attributed to students’ interaction with the college environment. This environmental effect may help to explain some of the confusion surrounding college-student spiritual development. The limited spiritual-development research that exists has historically indicated that religious importance to students has declined during the college years (E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Other studies attribute any changes in identity and religious values to the complex environments that college students encounter (E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

We know that where college students live matters. It is well-documented that college and university residence halls, as well as the programs and services offered by these residential communities, influence student growth and development (Astin, 1993; E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Residence halls also significantly impact the overall quality of a student’s collegiate experience. On-campus living affects levels of student involvement, satisfaction, retention, academic performance, cognitive growth and development, personal growth and psychosocial development, and student beliefs and values. Compared to their counterparts who live at home and commute to college, students living in on-campus residence halls:

1. Participated in a greater number of extracurricular, social, and cultural events on campus
2. Interacted more frequently with faculty and peers in informal settings
3. Were significantly more satisfied with college and are more positive about the social and interpersonal environment of their campus
4. Were more likely to persist and graduate from college
5. Showed significantly greater positive gains in such areas of psychosocial development as autonomy and inner-directedness, intellectual orientation, and self-concept
6. Demonstrated significantly greater increases in aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual values, social and political liberalism, and secularism (E.T. Pascarella et al., 1994, p. 39)
For several decades, on-campus residence halls have frequently served as the research locations for studies on these and many other student-development-related topics.

**Involvement**

Nearly all aspects of an undergraduate’s cognitive and affective development are enhanced by active involvement in the college environment (Astin, 1996), and the residential community-living literature has shown that one of the most effective ways for a student to become integrated into the campus environment is through living in a residence hall community. Residents are more likely to participate in student activities, have a more positive perception of the campus social climate, spend more time relaxing and socializing, and use campus services and facilities more frequently than their commuting classmates (Chickering, 1974; Gonyea, Graham, & Fernandez, 2015; E.T. Pascarella et al., 1994). Berger (1997) speculated that this enhanced involvement might be the direct result of the safety net that residence halls provide so that the student could venture out more broadly into the greater campus environment. Astin (1993) cautioned that any effects of campus residency on student integration might not be the result of living in a residence hall. Rather, Astin suggested the effect may be due to an indirect relationship between the distance from home to school and argued that most of the direct benefits to students may be from leaving home rather than living on campus.

Whether the involvement effect is due to direct or indirect causes, the literature is clear that the more frequent opportunities for interaction with faculty members and peers that result from the time residents spend on campus and in and around the residence halls is what generally leads to higher levels of integration and student involvement (Astin, 1993). Astin
(1996) explained, “the peer group is powerful because it has the capacity to involve the student more intensely in the educational experience” (p. 126). Naturally, a student’s ability to identify with and connect to his or her peer group also has a significant effect on the student’s level of involvement (Berger, 1997). Gonyea et al. (2015) found that more first-year students living on campus reported high-quality interactions with other students than those who commuted. The living-learning-program literature indicates that students participating in LLCs also experience increased levels of interaction with faculty and peers above even the levels of residents in traditional residence halls (Edwards & McKelfresh, 2002; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; G. Pike, 1999; G. Pike, Schroeder, & Berry, 1997; Shushok & Sriram, 2010; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1999).

Beyond the immediate peer-group effect, student involvement is also enhanced by the availability of focused, student-centered residential programs and services. G. Pike et al. (1997) found that residence hall-based educational programs and intentional academic interventions, such as residential freshman interest groups, significantly affected the quantity and quality of resident students’ interactions with faculty and peers. Similarly, Inkelas and Weisman (2003) found that LLC participants were more involved than nonparticipant residents in campus activities that were the focus of their living-learning experience.

The residential involvement literature raises some question as to the effect of student attributes and precollege characteristics on the extent to which on-campus living influences campus involvement. It seems likely that the influence of residence halls on student involvement persists even when controlling for differences in student precollege characteristics and institutional demographics (Berger, 1997). E.T. Pascarella et al. (1994) reported significant effects even when controlling for “aptitude, socioeconomic status, and secondary
school extracurricular involvement, as well as size, private/public affiliation, and student body selectivity of the institution attended” (p. 26).

E.T. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) summarized the residential student involvement literature by stating

Place of residence has a clear bearing on the extent to which students participate in extracurricular activities, engage in more frequent interactions with peers and faculty members, and report positive perceptions of the campus social climate, satisfaction with their college experience, and greater personal growth and development. (p. 604)

This increased student involvement often leads to higher student satisfaction and increased institutional retention for students.

Satisfaction and Adjustment

The higher education literature has documented a direct correlation between a student’s level of involvement and his or her level of satisfaction with his or her college experience (Astin, 1993). The corresponding residential community-living literature indicates that residents who have more opportunities for involvement tend to be more satisfied with their campus environments than students who commute (Astin, 1993; Garrard, 2006). In addition, residence hall students were found to report greater satisfaction with their living conditions and felt safer and more secure with them than students who resided in off-campus Greek housing (Long, 2014). LLCs have been found to exert a similar positive effect on student satisfaction, probably due to their participants’ more extensive interaction with faculty and peers (E.T. Pascarella et al., 1994; G. Pike, 1999; Terenzini et al., 1999). However, Stassen (2003) found that holding residents’ precollege characteristics constant eliminated any significant effects from enrolling in an LLC on any of the social adjustment or satisfaction variables. This may be
due to the relatively unstructured LLC programs that she studied and the lack of additional faculty and peer contact that they provided. Li, McCoy, Shelley, and Whalen (2005) found that students’ characteristics did not offer much explanation of patterns of variation in perceived satisfaction.

The unique nature of the social and physical climate in a residence hall and a resident’s level of satisfaction are also significant factors in a student’s successful adjustment to college (Kaya, 2003). Inkelas and Weisman (2003) found that perceptions of supportive residence hall environments were correlated with a successful transition at three large public institutions. This result may be due to levels of group cohesiveness that evolve from the presence of a residence hall climate that aids students in developing a sense of belonging in a fairly challenging college environment. Berger (1997) also found that students who experienced a strong sense of community in the residence halls were more likely to feel positive about their campus experience and subsequently be more engaged with other campus groups.

Higher levels of satisfaction have also assisted LLC participants in their transition into college. In their pilot study for the NSLLP, Inkelas et al. (2007) found that LLC participants had “significantly more positive perceptions of their residence hall climates (both academically and socially) and tended to use their residence hall resources more often than traditional residence hall students” (p. 63). Longerbeam, Inkelas, and Brower (2007) found that even non-LLC participants who lived in an LLC residence hall expressed higher levels of satisfaction with their environment.
Retention

The residential community-living literature provides strong evidence that students who live in residence halls, at least for their first college year, are significantly more likely to return to college for their second year and are also significantly more likely to complete their studies than students who commute (Ishler and Upcraft, 2005; E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Stassen, 2003). In fact, several studies have concluded that the most important environmental characteristic associated with graduating from college is living in a residence hall during a student’s freshman year (Astin, 1993; Chickering, 1974; E. Pascarella et al., 1993). Research has indicated that this effect holds true in traditional residence halls regardless of the residents’ precollege characteristics (E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Inman and Pascarella (1998) found that “living on campus as opposed to commuting is significantly and positively associated with persistence even when precollege factors such as high school grades, academic major, and socioeconomic status are taken into account” (p. 558). Participating in an LLC has also been found to positively impact student retention (Edwards & McKelfresh, 2002; E.T. Pascarella et al., 1994). However, these studies found that living in an enhanced residential learning community did not directly improve students’ retention rates over traditional residence halls after controlling for other factors. G. Pike et al. (1997) found that LLCs appear to indirectly enhance retention by significantly increasing faculty-student interaction.

Berger (1997) found that a student’s perception of his or her residence hall community and level of social involvement within the community were reliable predictors of his or her subsequent institutional commitment and likelihood of graduation. These findings seem to suggest that the quality of the residence hall experience, although difficult to measure, also
plays an indirect role in affecting student retention. Gonyea et al. (2015) found that in general, living on campus is associated with higher perceptions of the institution’s emphasis on providing opportunities to be involved socially, providing support for their overall well-being, and for attending campus events and activities. Unlike the previously mentioned studies, Berger also found that student precollege background played an important role in determining likelihood of graduation. Berger argued that students who self-selected on-campus residency were more likely to graduate even before moving into the residence halls, and his research supports this conclusion.

Thompson, Samiratedu, and Rafter (1993) found that African American students who elected to live in university residence halls were generally retained by the institution at a higher rate than their residential classmates from other races. The researchers speculated that the social environment in the residence halls on their particular campus might have been especially supportive of African American students. This research is supported by the work of others (Galicki & McEwen, 1989) who also studied the retention of African American students. While further investigation is clearly needed, Thompson et al.’s study seems to reinforce the findings of the Berger (1997) study that identified an indirect effect from the student perception of the residence hall community quality on student retention. Similar to the previously mentioned studies, after controlling for precollege characteristics, Thompson et al. found that student progress and retention were significantly higher for all on-campus residents “regardless of race, gender or admission type” (p. 46).
Academic Performance

The residential community-living literature about whether students who live on campus earn higher grades than those who commute provides mixed and inconclusive results. Some studies indicate that residents perform better academically, and others found no statistically significant differences. In an effort to bring some resolution to this uncertainty, Blimling (1989) conducted a meta-analysis of over 20 completed studies that examined the influence of college residence halls on academic outcomes. After controlling for differences in the students’ past academic performance, Blimling found that living in a college residence hall had little direct effect, either positive or negative, on residents’ grades in comparison with those of commuting students. Blimling’s research is supported by the work of others (Garrard, 2006) who are studying the academic performance of residential students. Researchers speculate that the absence of differences in grade performance is probably due to the similarity of students’ in-class experiences, regardless of where the students live (Terenzini et al., 1999). E.T. Pascarella et al. (1994) offered an alternate explanation, hypothesizing that “the normative social milieu of residence halls may provide greater opportunities for socializing than studying” (p. 30). Webber, Krylow, & Zhang (2013) found that senior-level students who lived on campus earned better grades than those who did not. The researchers speculated that the benefits of living on campus might be cumulative over time.

Participants in these academic-outcome studies were regularly admitted students living in traditional residence hall settings. Thompson et al. (1993) found that developmental students who were specially admitted earned a significantly higher grade-point average when living on campus than developmental students who were commuting. Students in the study were
required to complete remedial coursework prior to enrolling in standard courses for credit, and living on campus appears to have provided them increased access to faculty members and additional academic support services.

Research has shown that students in LLCs perceived greater academic and social support in their residence hall environments than residents who lived in standard residence halls (Inkelas et al., 2007), and that they earned higher grades even after controlling for precollege achievement and other demographic variables (Edwards & McKelfresh, 2002; Pasque & Murphy, 2005; Stassen, 2003; Terenzini et al., 1999). Inkelas and Weisman (2003) found that “the supportive residence environment that living-learning programs strive to enhance for their students is important in influencing positive academic outcomes” (p. 359). Students in LLCs were also significantly more likely to “have contact with peers around academic work, engage in group projects, report positive academic behaviors, study more hours, perceive a positive learning environment, and have course assignments that require the integration of ideas” (Stassen, 2003, p. 602). Results about interaction with faculty have been mixed with Stassen (2003) finding no significant difference for LLC participants in the amount of faculty contact they experienced when compared with students living in traditional residence halls while Shushok & Sriram (2010) reported a significant effect.

Cognitive Growth and Development

Higher education researchers have often studied the outcomes for students living in university residence halls in order to gain a better understanding of undergraduate student cognitive growth. “The largest body of research on the relation between students’ out-of-class experiences and academic and cognitive development examines the influences of living in a
residence hall as opposed to somewhere else” (Terenzini et al., 1999, p. 611). Research about the development of critical-thinking skills during the college years has generally suggested that

(a) college attendance positively impacts the development of critical thinking skills;  
(b) special programs, courses or instructional styles can target improvement in critical thinking skills; and
(c) there is little independent variation in critical thinking development attributable to different curricular interests or experiences such as physical sciences in comparison with social sciences. (Inman & Pascarella, 1998, p. 557)

E. Pascarella et al. (1993) found that freshman residents made larger gains on cognitive measures such as critical thinking than those who lived off campus and commuted. These differences persisted after controlling for differences in demographic characteristics, entering ability, and coursework. The researchers also found that residence hall students had higher reading comprehension scores, but no differences were found in students’ math skills.

Results from other studies measuring the direct effects of residence halls on general cognitive growth of students are mixed and generally inconclusive. After controlling for students’ ability levels, demographic characteristics, and college experiences, Inman and Pascarella (1998) found that student living arrangements were not related to performance on a standardized test of critical thinking. Inkelas et al. (2007) reported no statistically significant difference in perceptions of growth in cognitive complexity among LLC residents and students living in traditional residence halls.

**Personal Growth and Psychosocial Development**

A substantial body of higher education and human development literature exists about how students grow and develop during the college years as well as about what college
experiences appear to shape those changes. The effect of residence hall living on student outcomes is particularly strong in the area of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968). Living in a residence hall has been documented to enhance values development, tolerance, empathy, and self-esteem (Longerbeam, Inkelas, & Brower, 2007, p. 20). The effect from living on campus was generally true even after controlling for gender, ability, and precollege characteristics. Research has shown that residence halls exert their influence by “shaping the nature of the student’s social/interpersonal environment…much of the developmental influence of place of residence during college reflects this general causal mechanism” (E.T. Pascarella et al., 1994, p. 28).

Leinwall (2006) found that students living in an LLC had greater psychosocial gains than those who did not. In fact, studies about LLCs have shown that LLCs have a significant positive effect on a number of student outcomes, including ‘student gains in autonomy and independence, intellectual dispositions and orientations, and generalized personal development” (E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 261). Stassen (2003) also discovered positive LLC student outcomes on “student performance, persistence, and increased academic engagement, general satisfaction, and personal development” (p. 584).

**Beliefs and Values**

A wide range of residential living-community research studies have focused on the effect of on-campus residency on the development of student beliefs and values and the corresponding behaviors that accompany them. For example, studies have shown that campus residence halls provide a supportive environment for encouraging openness to diversity, perhaps because residents are more likely to develop diverse friendships. Hu and Kuh (2003)
stated that providing intentional opportunities among students with diverse backgrounds has a positive impact on students across institutional characteristics. The effect of the benefits may be even stronger in situations in which students are in close proximity to one another. Residence halls offer concentrated exposure to students from a variety of backgrounds and geographic regions, and they provide “the ideal opportunity for students to develop greater appreciation of their cultures, respect for diversity, and commitment to community building” (Hughes, 1994, p. 191). Although some researchers have found differences in prior attitudes toward diversity (Wawrzynski & Yao, 2013), as with many of the previous studies discussed in this chapter, this finding of openness to diversity holds true even when controlling for student precollege characteristics. “Living on campus is positively related to openness to diversity, and this result is not the product of differences in the backgrounds of students living on and off campus” (G.R. Pike, 2002, p. 294).

Martin and Hoffman (1993) examined the relationship between living environments and alcohol-drinking behavior. The researchers found that students living on campus with peers were more likely to consume alcohol than students who commuted from home. They speculated that alcohol consumption might be a normative behavior in these living communities. Brower, Golde, and Allen (2003) found that the socially supportive environment of LLCs might make it less likely for LLC residents to binge drink when compared to non-LLC residents. Stronger peer accountability and more positive perceptions of the residence hall environment also seemed to lead to lower rates of second-hand alcohol-related effects such as property damage and sleep disruption:

Despite the high drinking rates on our campus, the peer culture that developed within our residential [L]LCs significantly reduced both problem drinking behaviors and their associated consequences. [L]LC students not only drank less, they also suffered fewer
consequences from their own drinking and from the drinking of others. (Brower et al., p. 144)

Schaeffer and Nelson (1993) explored the impact of living environments on the reduction of rape-supportive attitudes of college men. The researchers found that the type of living environment had a direct effect on the male students’ attitudes. Similar to the appreciation for diversity findings noted above, coed residence halls provided opportunities to interact with members who were different, in this case the opposite sex in a coed residence hall. It appears that this interaction leads to a challenge of existing perceptions of the opposite sex and a greater awareness of the consequences of sexual assault.

These three topical areas provide examples of the types of outcomes on college student beliefs, values, and behaviors that have been shown to be affected by residential community living. In most cases, the opportunity to be exposed to students with different values and beliefs had a positive outcome for students. Generally, the research indicates that living in an LLC further enhances these benefits. “On most educational outcomes considered, the evidence suggests that residing in an LLC is more educationally beneficial to students than living in a conventional residence hall” (E.T. Pascarella et al., 1994, p. 32).

Living-Learning Community Experiences

This literature review would be incomplete without specifically emphasizing the significant role that LLCs play in the residential living-community experience of college students. These intentional communities are university-housing programs developed around academically based themes that build community through integrated learning experiences, and they have specific learning outcomes. E.T. Pascarella et al. (1994) described typical features of
LLCs as increased contact with staff and faculty, cultural events and lectures in residence halls, and students taking a set of courses together.

Brower and Inkelas (2010) described the historical roots of LLCs as the social clubs of Oxford and Cambridge that were later replicated in the early Ivy League schools. LLCs were more widely introduced during the rapid expansion of higher education in the 1950s and 1960s, and comprehensive programs still exist today at many institutions including the Universities of Illinois and Michigan (Brower & Inkelas).

The LLC literature generally indicates the accomplishment of the primary objectives of LLCs: enhanced student learning and student retention. Many institutions are seeking to create seamless learning environments that promote student engagement and intellectual development, and these efforts are frequently embodied in a residential learning community (Longerbeam, Inkelas, & Brower, 2007; G. Pike, 1999). As indicated previously, enhanced opportunities for greater student involvement, improved faculty-student interaction, and a supportive peer climate often creates a more productive student-learning environment. The study of these communities, often partnerships between academic and student affairs, has generated most of the new residence hall-related research over the last 20 years (Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam, & Leonard, 2008). For example, Li, Shelly, and Whalen (2005) found that membership in a residential learning community predicted a significantly higher preference for returning to residence halls.

Most LLCs exhibit a set of common characteristics including shared living space in a coeducational residence hall unit, a common academic interest, exclusive use of certain residence hall resources, and intentional social and academic activities within the residence hall that stress student learning and academics (Inkelas et al., 2007). There is often an application
process or some type of participant screening that may lead to a resident population that is significantly different from the diverse, more random population in traditional residential communities. It is often these structural differences compared to a conventional residence hall setting that facilitate enhanced student learning.

In addition, other researchers have documented the role of the dining hall in bringing a sense of tradition and ritual to students’ everyday experiences in the LLC. In their examination of the culture of an LLC, Davis, Hinkle, Kranzow, and Muthiah (2015) found “the dining hall is a key element to fostering a sense of community” (p. 19). When asked what was unique about their community, respondents overwhelmingly cited the cafeteria as being vitally important to the development of their community.

The primary source of LLC research data is the NSLLP, a 50-institution study conducted during the spring of 2004 and again in 2007 (Inkelas et al., 2007). The NSLLP research consisted of two datasets: the first contained information collected from students about their backgrounds, experiences, and perceived outcomes, and the second contained information collected from housing and LLC-program staff about the structures and features of LLC programs (Inkelas et al., 2007). The study filled an empirical void for national, multicampus data relating positive student learning outcomes to specific institutional factors—such as the mission, culture, policies, and program offerings. Many institutions are already using the data to identify and implement best practices in living-learning programs.

**Summary**

The residential living-community literature clearly shows that living on campus significantly enhances student effort and involvement in the academic and social environments
of college (Astin, 1993; E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This effect is most likely influenced by the enhanced interaction that residents experience with faculty, peers, and their community environment.

Every aspect of the student’s development—cognitive and affective, psychological and behavioral—is affected in some way by peer group characteristics, and usually by several peer characteristics. Generally, students tend to change their values, behavior, and academic plans in the direction of the dominant orientations of their peer group. (Astin, 1993, p. 363)

Thus, the quality of the residential living experience and the types of relationships that develop with peers also have a significant effect on student-learning outcomes.

This literature review identified positive student-learning-outcome effects for residents on levels of student involvement, satisfaction and adjustment, retention, personal growth and psychosocial development, and several student beliefs and values. In most cases, living in an LLC enhanced these positive outcomes. The literature is mixed about the student-learning effect of residence halls on student cognitive development. The impact of a residential learning community on intellectual growth and development is an area that requires additional study. Residence hall living does not appear to have a direct impact on student academic performance, unless a student lives in an LLC or benefits directly from the increased access to campus personnel and services that is often reserved for specially admitted students.

One of the clear challenges in considering the research about residential living communities is determining how much of the various effects are directly caused by living in a residence hall and which effects are indirectly realized from the enhanced interaction with peers and the campus community that is more likely by on-campus residency. Many of the studies that have examined residence hall impact have not adequately accounted for student precollege
demographics and characteristics and other environmental variables (Brower et al., 2003; Galicki & McEwen, 1989; Kaya, 2003; Martin & Hoffman, 1993; Schaeffer & Nelsen, 1993; Thompson et al., 1993). As a result, these researchers can identify a correlation between on-campus residency and the effect they are testing, but they must be careful about claims of causation. Failing to account for precollege characteristics may result in the appearance of a causative effect where none truly exists. These confounding variables are inherent in the nature of research about students who have chosen to live in a university residence hall. In the vast majority of situations, random assignment of participants was impossible because students generally self-selected into different residential arrangements during college (E.T. Pascarella et al., 1994). This lack of randomness creates significant difficulty in separating the student characteristics and traits that cause students to select different residential options from those options’ environmental impact. In his review of the literature, Astin (1993) found only three effects that could be directly attributable to living in a residence hall: “positive effects on attainment of the bachelor’s degree, satisfaction with faculty, and willingness to re-enroll in the same college” (p. 367).

A second challenge identified in the residential living-community literature is that many of the studies are dated, come from single institutions, or are narrowly focused on identifying specific effects from living in a residence hall. As a result, generalizability to other institutions or for broader effects may not be appropriate. Several of the widely referenced national studies that have been conducted (Astin, 1993; Chickering, 1974) are now several decades old and may not be an accurate reflection of today’s residential experience. Many of the more current studies are focused on a specific developmental effect or are conducted at an individual
institution, and the researchers caution against overgeneralizing the results (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; G. Pike, 1999; G. Pike et al., 1997; G.R. Pike, 2002).

A third criticism of the residential living-environment literature has to do with methodology. Nearly all of the published studies to date utilize quantitative measures (Blimling, 1989; E.T. Pascarella et al., 1994; Terenzini et al., 1999). In order to better understand the residential experience on college campuses, it seems appropriate to begin conducting research using in-depth interviews and other appropriate qualitative techniques. “An important direction for future research will be a greater dependence on qualitative and naturalistic methodologies…such approaches may be particularly sensitive to the individual social and interpersonal realities that exist for diverse students in residence halls” (E.T. Pascarella et al., 1994, p. 43).

These challenges clearly highlight the existing gaps in the residential living-experience literature. The profession is relying on arguably stale national data that were collected about environments that existed more than 20 years ago (E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Studies that are more current have focused on specialized living environments (Inkelas et al., 2007) or narrowly focused effects (Brower et al., 2003; G.R. Pike, 2002). The studies have utilized a one-dimensional methodology that makes controlling for individual differences difficult. The influence of residential living on student spiritual development has been scarcely examined at all. It is time to begin conducting qualitative research that assists practitioners in the field to more clearly understand what is happening in collegiate residence halls as it relates to student spiritual development.
Conclusion

In his book on the commercialization of higher education, Bok (2003) lamented the loss of traditional American educational values. Bok believed that the traditional undergraduate collegiate experience was in danger of becoming extinct. Many aspects of the student affairs profession will irrevocably change should that happen, particularly in the residence hall communities that are so closely tied to the first-year experience. Curricular and cocurricular offerings such as executive education programs, extension services, and online and distance courses generally do not require the services that residence halls provide.

Today’s college students also have different expectations of higher education. How and where they learn is different from the students of the 1990s.

Scholars no longer regard learning solely as an act of acquiring or absorbing a set of objectively verifiable facts and concepts and, subsequently, incorporating them into long-term memory. Instead, they argue that the learner actively constructs a substantial amount of knowledge. (E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 3)

Residence hall environments must develop in tandem with the evolving needs of students in order to be educationally purposeful out-of-class learning locations.

Given the multifaceted nature of today’s college experience, no single initiative is likely to fundamentally alter the nature of American higher education (G. Pike, 1999). Schroeder and Mable (1994) have proposed a residence hall curriculum that provides a framework for educating the whole student. One of their primary curricular objectives is to “promote growth and development of students as whole persons with coherent views of knowledge, life, integrity, and intellectual and social perspectives” (p. 14). They argued that measurable learning outcomes can and should include skills such as leadership and teamwork and values
such as ethics and caring. Effective residence halls should be able to measure their success in fulfilling these student-learning objectives.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the residential experience and its influence on the spiritual and faith-development process of traditional-age undergraduate college students. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic define and differentiate the concepts of spirituality, religion, and faith?
2. What factors influence traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic to reside in a Catholic-focused living-learning community at a large public university?
3. What are traditional-age college students’ who identify as Catholic perceptions of the characteristics of a Catholic-focused living-learning community at a large public university that contribute to faith development?

Using qualitative research, this study examined the influence of an intentionally designed LLC experience on the spiritual and faith development of Catholic students at a large public university. Participants had the opportunity to share their definitions of spirituality, their journey to participation in an LLC, and their understanding of the residential influences that shaped their spiritual development.

This chapter outlines the research methodology utilized in conducting this study. It describes the research procedures that were used for sample selection, data collection, and data
analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the efforts made to ensure the reliability and validity of the data and to minimize any effect that researcher bias may have had on the identified outcomes of the study.

Design of Study

In order to more effectively understand the spiritual and faith development process of traditional-age undergraduate college students and the uniqueness of the residential setting in which participants wrestled with these issues, participants were empowered to share their experiences and tell their stories through a qualitative study design. Merriam (2009) described four characteristics that define the nature and advantages of qualitative research: a focus on understanding meaning-making, the researcher as the primary research instrument, the use of an inductive process to analyze results, and data that are primarily rich description rather than statistical figures.

This study explored the process of spiritual growth and the influences that shape faith development. This study was not intended to rate or measure the level of spiritual development of the participants. Rather, it accounted for the contextual elements of a faith-based learning community at a public higher education institution, which may lead to a different developmental process from those who commute and those who attend private and religiously affiliated schools. Merriam (2009) explained the purpose of qualitative research: “to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making and describe how people interpret what they experience” (p. 14, emphasis in original). This suggested that a qualitative research design was
the most effective way to examine this complex phenomenon. This study was designed to understand the meanings that participants ascribed to their experiences within this LLC.

In referring to their earlier work, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the benefits of having the researcher be the study instrument in a qualitative design. Advantages they identified include responsiveness, adaptability, holistic emphasis, the ability to expand the knowledge base, processional immediacy, opportunities for clarification and amplification, and the opportunity to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses. Utilizing a qualitative approach in this study enabled the researcher to use both verbal and nonverbal communication, to review data with respondents to ensure accuracy, and to explore unusual or unanticipated responses (Merriam, 2009). In order to better understand the complex environment in the study, one-on-one qualitative interviews were utilized rather than generic questionnaires or other quantitative instruments that are impersonal in nature (Creswell, 2007).

A qualitative study allowed for inductive analysis in which common themes and categories were constructed from the data by the researcher. Creswell (2007) explained, “Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the ‘bottom up,’ by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (p. 38). A qualitative approach to the study using inductive analysis enabled the participants’ perspectives to guide the researcher to a better understanding of college-student spiritual development. Stake (2010) called this personalized approach to qualitative research microinterpretation, a concept he defines as “giving meaning in terms of what an individual person can experience” (p. 39).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) encouraged research in a natural setting because the phenomena in many studies “take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves” (p. 189, emphasis in original). A qualitative approach to this study allowed the
generation of rich, descriptive data that were gathered directly from the participants and also considered the influences of the environment on the participants. Creswell (2007) stated that qualitative research provides the opportunity to “collect data in the field at the site where participants’ experience the issue or problem under study” (p. 37).

**Qualitative Research Type**

Creswell (2007) explained that early selection of the type of research is an essential component of the research design because a study should be designed to fit the type of research selected. A number of authors (Creswell; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) have attempted to categorize various types of research. Unfortunately, there is little consensus regarding the standardization of forms of inquiry. Merriam (2009) indicated that qualitative research studies are the most common form of inquiry found in education, and this is the approach that was identified and implemented for this study.

**Qualitative Research Principles**

A qualitative design was appropriate for this study because the underlying philosophy of this approach is constructionist in nature (Merriam, 2009), and this approach is used when “the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved” (p. 22). This study reflected an effort to gain a better understanding of the meaning that the students made of their residential experiences and the resulting influence on their spiritual development. Consequently, this meaning needed to be socially constructed within their residential environment, and this study focused on describing how the students interpreted their experiences. Stage and Manning (2003) concluded, “the constructivist paradigm is a
highly effective perspective on which to rest research when individual, idiosyncratic meaning and depth are the goals of the effort” (p. 20).

This study was also conducted from an interpretive perspective. Creswell (2007) defined interpretive qualitative research as an approach that recognizes the self-reflective nature of qualitative research and emphasizes the role of the researcher as an interpreter of the data and an individual who represents information. It also acknowledges the importance of language and discourse in qualitative research, as well as issues of power, authority, and domination in all facets of the qualitative inquiry.” (p. 248)

This constructivist/interpretive approach enabled the researcher to better understand how the participants made sense of their lives and their experiences.

Merriam (2009) stated, “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people’s lives” (p. 1). Residents were interviewed about their residential community-living experience and the impact that they perceived this experience had on their spiritual development and religious identity. As rapport was developed with the participants, a richer understanding of their residential experience emerged. Using a qualitative methodology was most appropriate given the nature of the research because that approach provided information through interviews about participants in detailed formats in order to address the research questions.

Participant Selection

A purposeful sample was implemented for identifying participants in this study. Patton (2002) stated,
the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful* sampling. (p. 230, emphasis in original)

In this study, campus ministry staff from a Newman Catholic student community located at a 4-year public university in the Midwest were asked to identify students to participate in the study. Naturally, the students that the ministry staff was able to identify were those who were frequently engaged in the LLC and the campus ministry program on their campus. Many of the suggested students had served on the student ministry team (SMT), a leadership committee that planned events and activities for other student parishioners including faith-enrichment presentations, game nights, and retreats.

Participants were chosen based upon the following criteria: (a) self-identified as Roman Catholic and (b) currently living or had recently (within the past 2 years) lived in a Roman Catholic LLC at a 4-year public university in the Midwest. Participant selection concentrated on students who had been out of the community for a year or 2. It was hoped that this time away would provide participants the necessary time to reflect on their experiences within the community without allowing too much time to elapse. The researcher had intended to supplement the initial convenience sample by using the snowball technique. Initial participants were encouraged to identify current or former community members who might also be willing to participate in this study. Unfortunately, participants were either unwilling or unable to identify peers who could join this study. The campus ministry staff at the institution therefore identified all participants. It should be noted that the researcher had no authority over or responsibility for the private residence hall that served as the LLC residency for the participants in this study.
Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that sampling should continue until informational redundancy is reached (p. 202; see also Kvale, 1996). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) identified four criteria that guide the decision to stop collecting data: exhaustion of sources, saturation of categories, emergency of regularities, and overextension. This study began with individual interviews of 10 student participants who currently or recently lived within the LLC. Three additional participants were added one at a time until no new themes or concepts were revealed during the interviews.

Study Setting

This study took place in a private residence hall at a large public university in the Midwest. The university had a first-year residency requirement, so students could live in the private residence hall after living in a university-owned residence hall for 1 year, or they could enter directly as a transfer student. At the time of this study, the private residence hall had a capacity for nearly 1,000 residents, and approximately half of those residents attended the university. Other residents attended a local community college or were friends of the students who lived in the facility.

The Catholic LLC was located on one of 20 floors in the residence hall. Each floor housed approximately 50 residents. The size of the LLC varied over the decade in which it was housed in the private residence hall, but at no time did it comprise more than half of one floor. The LLC was a partnership between the local Newman Center community and the private residence hall.
Data Collection

Prior to the commencement of data collection, the researcher obtained authorization to proceed with this study through an appropriate Institutional Review Board. Participants were asked to complete an informed consent form during a brief orientation that occurred prior to the first interview. The primary means of data collection for this study was focused, in-depth semistructured interviews. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggested, the interview process began with general, open-ended questions in order to establish rapport and to bring focus and organization to the conversation. As the study proceeded and some questions regularly generated more relevant data than others, the questions became more focused and narrow (Bogdan & Biklen). In addition, later interviews included questions that explored emerging themes that were revealed in earlier sessions. These interviews provided sufficient data to address the research questions.

Creswell (2007) explained that the goal of research based on a constructivist philosophy is to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (p. 20). Meaning is formed through the individual’s historical experiences and his or her interaction with others. Seidman (2006) explained that it is the process of “selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience” (p. 7). In this study, individual interviews enabled this meaning-making to be constructed and shared with the researcher through the use of Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series structure.

This model of interviewing involves conducting a series of three interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2006). This structure allowed the researcher to better understand the
context in which the participants’ behaviors occurred. It also enabled the researcher to better explore the meaning of the participants’ experiences. Seidman (2006) described the purpose of the first interview as establishing the context of the participant’s experience. The participant shares as much as possible about him or herself in relation to the established topic by recalling his or her early family, friend, and school experiences. The purpose of the second interview was for participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it was occurring. It focused on the specific details of the participant’s lived experience related to the topic area of study at that time. The third interview asked the participant to reflect on and share the meaning his or her experience had for him or her. Participants made sense of the meaning of their experience by reflecting on the past to better understand the events that led them to their circumstances at that time and by examining the concrete details of their experience at that time. The use of this three-interview series technique enabled the researcher to understand the lived experience of the participants and the meaning they made of those experiences (Seidman).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the purpose of interviewing as obtaining here-and-now constructions of events, activities, and feelings; reconstructions of past experiences; and projections of expected future experiences. The research interview is an intentional conversation that is designed to elicit the rich data that the researcher seeks to obtain. While several authors described a continuum of structure for the interview (Lincoln & Guba), semistructured interviews are most common and appropriate for a qualitative study because they utilize broad, general questions that allow the participant to construct his or her own meaning of the situation.
Although Seidman (2006) urged caution and encouraged an interviewer to avoid imposing his or her interests on the experience of the participants, an interview guide was used in this study to indicate the topics and the sequence of the semistructured interviews. The guide includes a list of questions that were asked of all of the participants and the open-ended questions that were used to initiate some broader reflection that was followed-up on throughout the course of the interviews (see Appendix B for the specific questions). The interviews were conducted in-person and were digitally recorded and transcribed following the interviews. Nearly 30 hours of fieldwork was conducted.

Data Analysis

Following each interview, preliminary data analysis occurred. Merriam (2009) stated that the preferred method of data analysis in a qualitative study is to consider the data simultaneously with the data collection (see also Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Ongoing analysis avoids a situation of having overwhelming, unfocused data resulting from wasted interviews that don’t contribute to the overall findings.

Merriam (2009) described data analysis as “the process used to answer your research question(s)” (p. 176, emphasis in original). The answers to the questions are referred to as patterns, themes, and findings, and the goal is to make sense of the collected data. Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested seven phases for the analytic procedures: organizing the data, immersion in the data, generating categories and themes, coding the data, offering interpretations through analytic memos, searching for alternate understandings, and writing the report.
Fieldnotes

Following each interview, the researcher documented the interview and noted any emerging themes or substantive categories that were immediately evident. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined fieldnotes as “the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (p. 119). The researcher also documented any nonverbal communication thought to be significant to the ongoing data analysis. Finally, the researcher recorded any initial thoughts or impressions that seemed noteworthy to the researcher, and these notes served as a source for follow-up interview questions.

Organizing the Data

The data set consisted of a collection of semistructured, transcribed interviews. These recorded interviews were reviewed weekly during this study and transcribed by the researcher and a paid transcriptionist in order to accurately reflect the content of the discussions. The transcribed data were stored in a password-protected word processing file on the researcher’s home computer. Backup copies were stored in a locked file cabinet. Each file includes the necessary identification information to make the data useful: dates, names, times, and places where the interviews occurred (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Coding

The data were analyzed by the researcher using thematic coding procedures. Coding facilitated the categorization of the data by creating an inventory of the entire data set that
assisted with organizing the data into broader themes and issues (Maxwell, 2005). Merriam (2009) defined coding as “assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data” (p. 173). The data were coded and recoded utilizing the constant comparative method until themes began to emerge. Creswell (2007) defined the constant comparative method as referring to “the researcher identifying incidents, events, and activities and constantly comparing them to an emerging category to develop and saturate the category” (p. 238).

Generating Categories and Themes

A thorough analysis of the transcribed data was performed by the researcher in order to identify thematic patterns that emerged from the experiences of the participants. Emergent themes were identified and tested throughout the study. Whenever possible, emergent themes and perceptions were also shared with participants for validation. Analysis was inductive and comparative with the intent of developing common themes, patterns, or categories that cut across the data (Patton, 2002).

Validity and Reliability

In a qualitative study, the reader will not be able to generalize in the statistical sense. However, that does not mean that the study does not have validity and reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued, “the trustworthiness of the human instrument is assessable in much the same way as is the trustworthiness of any paper-and-pencil instrument” (p.194). Maxwell (2005) described validity as “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106). Maxwell perceived validity as a
goal rather than a product of the study, and the use of Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series structure incorporated features that enhanced the accomplishment of study validity. An audit trail was utilized to document the interviews that were conducted. In addition, rich, thick description of the findings increased the validity and reliability of the data. Strategies used to identify and rule out alternative explanations that threaten the validity of this study are listed below.

**Member Checks**

Member checks were conducted with each participant to further confirm internal validity, or what Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to as establishing credibility. Merriam (2009) described member checks as “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible” (p. 229). Interviewing participants three times over several weeks allowed for a check of internal consistency of what participants were sharing throughout the process (Seidman, 2006). In addition, the interview transcriptions and preliminary analysis and a final explanation of findings were given to the participants for review to ensure accurate interpretation of their comments and to determine whether they would suggest adding to or modifying any of the findings. Also called respondent validation, Maxwell (2005) described member checks as

> the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings of what you observed. (p. 111)
Discrepant Analysis

Maxwell (2005) identified a crucial issue in addressing validity as “demonstrating that you will allow for the examination of competing explanations and discrepant data” (p. 126). In fact, Patton (2002) suggested that the researcher seek out alternative explanations and negative evidence to support contrary interpretations. This study allowed for adequate engagement within the LLC and the data collection such that trust was built with the participants and saturation of the data was achieved. Following the initial coding activity, the transcript was reread by the researcher to see whether any portion of the discussion conflicted with any subsequent findings.

Audit Trail

While it is nearly impossible to replicate a qualitative study, providing a detailed audit trail is an effective strategy to ensure consistency and dependability of the data (Merriam, 2009). This study included details about how data were collected, how data were coded, and how decisions were made throughout the process. As Merriam (2009) suggested, a research journal was maintained to document personal reflections, emerging questions, and the thought process behind significant decisions. The use of the audit trail, combined with rich, thick description, enables readers to determine whether the results are correctly applied from the data collected.

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

Maxwell (2005) stated that
qualitative research is not primarily concerned with eliminating variance between researchers in the values and expectations they bring to the study, but with understanding how a particular researcher’s values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding the negative consequences. (p. 108)

A number of assumptions and beliefs may have had an impact on the objectivity of this study, and they are addressed below.

The researcher is a student affairs administrator. His academic training and professional experience confirm his belief that the collegiate experience significantly influences the personal growth and development of college students. The researcher also believes that the on-campus residential housing experience plays a significant role in positively influencing college-student development. In this case, the researcher believes that an intentionally constructed living-learning environment could be a solution for meeting the spiritual-development void that seems to exist at many public institutions of higher education.

The researcher is also a practicing Roman Catholic. His faith was significantly influenced by positive experiences encountered through a Newman Center at the college he attended as an undergraduate. The researcher is intrigued by the faithfulness that many college students exhibit through their religious behaviors and practices. He has an appreciation for the many challenges to retaining established beliefs during the college years, and he is interested in understanding the influence of living with one’s peers.

The researcher works at a large, Midwestern university where he is a member of the local Newman Center community. However, the researcher does not know or have any responsibility for the students who live within the faith-based LLC that is located in a private residence hall at the studied university. As part of the introductory comments of each initial
interview, the researcher emphasized to participants that he had no stake in how they perceived their experience at the private residence hall or whether they continued to practice their faith while at college.

Limitations

This study has limitations. The convenient nature of the participant sample and the use of qualitative research techniques limit the generalizability of its results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that qualitative research should strive for rich, thick description that enhances transferability to other situations rather than to seek generalizability. As a result, every effort was made to gather and report about the type of description that will enable future readers to determine the level of similarity and the likelihood of transferability to the context they are considering.

The cross-sectional nature of this study also limits the ability to measure student spiritual development longitudinally and to control for extraneous influences beyond the residential community. Theorists (J.W. Fowler, 1981; S.D. Parks, 2000) have demonstrated that spiritual development is a linear process that can be examined over time, but there are inherent difficulties in examining the developmental process while it is occurring. “Research on college’s effects on attitude and value change thus confronts the reality that one cannot simultaneously control for the confounding effects of aging, cohort, and period” (E.T. Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 272). Efforts were made to conduct interviews and perform fieldwork throughout two sequential academic years in order to mitigate some of these effects.
Conclusion

Best practices for the student affairs profession include assisting students to develop as whole persons (Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999). Spiritual development is an important dimension of this holistic development that is often overlooked on college campuses. In order to be effective, student affairs professionals need to better understand how to effectively facilitate students’ spiritual development. The results of this study may provide additional information and insight into this essential element of the college-student experience. Van Manen (1990) stated, “lived experiences gather hermeneutic significance as we (reflectively) gather them by giving memory to them” (p. 37). This study may enable practitioners to learn from the lived experience of students in order to better meet the spiritual-development needs of college students. This knowledge may assist in the creation of intentionally designed residential learning communities that can foster enhanced spiritual development for their student residents.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined how students understand faith, religion, and spirituality and what, if any, that influence residing in a Catholic LLC had on their spiritual development. The research questions addressed through this study were:

1. How do traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic define and differentiate the concepts of spirituality, religion, and faith?

2. What factors influence traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic to reside in a Catholic-focused living-learning community at a large public university?

3. What are traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic perceptions of the characteristics of a Catholic-focused living-learning community at a large public university that contribute to faith development?

This chapter presents the results of this study established through individual interviews as described in Chapter 3. This chapter begins with an overview of participants’ demographic information, followed by a presentation of the underlying results regarding students’ understanding of and relationship with spirituality. The data are then discussed so that readers better understand the influence of various factors on students’ decision to live within this
study’s site LLC and student perceptions of any communal experiences that subsequently influenced the students’ faith development.

Participant Demographics

As Table 1 shows, all of the participants were either current or former students at a large public university located in the Midwest. The institution had a first-year on-campus residency requirement for incoming freshmen, so all of the participants had been out of high school for at least 1 year. Seven women and six men participated in the study, and participants ranged in age from 22-28 at the time of interview. Seven of the participants were current students at the time of the interviews, and six were alumni. Four of the participants lived on the LLC floor of the residence hall at its time of inception in August 2007. Four of the participants lived on the floor during academic year 2012-13 when this study’s interviews occurred. Five of the participants lived on the floor during the intervening years. Three of the participants were exempt from the institutional first-year residency requirement upon their admission to the university, and they moved directly into the private, off-campus facility with two moving directly into the LLC floor community being studied. The other 10 participants lived in university-owned residence halls prior to moving into the community; most of them selected an on-campus LLC as their housing choice during their freshman year.

Comments made during the interviews spanned responses from nearly a decade on the floor yet were relatively consistent. All participants were either currently or previously actively involved at a Newman Center on the campus. All of this study’s participants were Caucasian. Other than their lack of racial diversity, participants were similar to other students who attended this institution. All of them haled from geographically close communities. Some were
from larger suburban areas, some from smaller rural communities.

Defining Spirituality, Religion, and Faith

Before addressing this study’s questions related to the LLC, it was important to understand how the participants defined and experienced spirituality, religion, and faith in their lives. This section illustrates how student participants responded to questions about their definitions of spirituality, religion, and faith and their perceptions of their spirituality and what that meant to them. Participants provided further clarification of the items including the relationships between spirituality, religion, and faith that they viewed as essential to defining

Table 1
Description of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age at interview</th>
<th>Years in community</th>
<th>Student/Alumni</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2010-12</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2010-12</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2009-13</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2007-09</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maureen</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2011-13</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2009-11, 2012-13</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
their spirituality and how they perceived one’s spiritual self relating to other areas of one’s life and development.

**Defining Spirituality**

In order to gain a better understanding of how college students understand the concept of spirituality, participants were asked to define the term and to explain what spirituality meant to them. Most respondents described spirituality as an individual, personal way to think about relationships. They described spirituality as being about relationship with oneself, about one’s relationships with others, and about one’s relationship with God. Frances said, “I think everyone is spiritual because if I think that spirituality is, like, what moves you and what orients you as a person, everyone has a spirituality.” Participants frequently placed a strong emphasis on the individualized nature of spirituality, viewing spirituality as unique for each person. For example, John described spirituality as “a very personal thing. It’s the thing that a lot of people have, but it can be different and different forms of spirituality are good. For me, it’s the way I think about other people.” In their own ways, each of the participants defined spirituality as the way that an individual expresses what he or she believes and the way that he or she lives out those beliefs in his or her relationships.

**Personal Reflection**

When asked to identify words that they associated with spirituality, several of the participants responded with concepts that were inwardly focused on ways so that they could better understand who they were and how they could improve themselves. For example, Theresa responded, “when I think of spirituality, I think of conscience and meditation,
stillness, knowingness, kind of knowing who you are and what you’re here for, and morality, and I guess, like, spirit or soul.” John connected his spirituality with opportunities for individual reflection stating, “I mean, we do need some time to grow spiritual. We need quiet time to think and to pray. So thinking and meditating are kind of the two things I would use to describe spirituality.” For these and other participants, there is an element of development and self-awareness that they understood as being part of their spirituality.

While many of the participants commented on their understanding of spirituality as getting to know themselves better, several also indicated that they viewed spirituality as more than simply personal reflection. For example, Mary described spirituality as providing motivation for personal change: “To me, spirituality is being the best person you can be, and if you have guidance from a religion to follow that, but really just always looking for self-improvement and ways you can improve.” Other participants used the concept of service to others or their participation in service projects as a way to define spirituality. Stephanie used words such as “faith, compassion, and caring” to describe her understanding of spirituality. These participants didn’t disagree with the inwardly focused definition of spirituality; they simply found it to be incomplete. They envisioned a certain level of sharing their gifts with others in connection with their spirituality. As Stephanie responded during her interview, she believes that “residence halls should reach out to different organizations and help out in the community in addition to floor activities.”

Belief in God

Belief in God and engaging in some type of relationship with that God were also described by most participants as essential components of spirituality. For example, Theresa
defined spirituality as “a connection to whatever made all this happen, as in life, and me, and us, and a connection to what is right, or what is best.” In a similar way, Michelle used words such as “praying, believing in God, serving God, just beliefs in general” to describe her understanding of spirituality.

Organized Religion

While there was considerable consensus from the participants around the connection of spirituality as a concept and related to their relationships, whether individual, with others, or with God, there was less consensus about whether spiritual practice needed to be connected to some type of specific, organized religion or whether simply participating in individual meditation or prayer was sufficient to develop one’s spirituality. Those who described spiritual practice as being connected to organized religion generally described their spirituality as the individual expression of their belief in their Catholic religion. Mark stated,

Spirituality is kind of the way you act it out. So somebody who’s, like, “well I don’t believe in God, but I connect with the world, and that’s my spirituality,” I just don’t really understand how they’re connected if you don’t have a religion.

Other participants viewed spirituality as distinct from any organized religion. These participants often described spirituality as being so personal and so individualized that one need not participate in an organized faith community to be spiritual:

I think of it as being very unique to the individual and really inside them. You don’t need to go to church to be spiritual. You don’t need to join a Bible study. I think those things are all ways to help you find that connection to whatever you think of as God or the Creator. They’re there to help you find that in yourself. (Mary)
This differentiation between a unique, individualized spirituality that is completely independent of a church or religious community and a personal spirituality that is more directly connected to the formal, Catholic faith tradition seemed to often be associated with the participant’s current level of comfort with the Catholic church and his or her level of commitment to it.

Finding Meaning

One other element of note that was described by several participants in their definitions of spirituality was the manner in which their sense of spirituality assisted them with making meaning of their life experiences. Several participants discussed the need to look for deeper meaning within their experiences in an effort to maintain and support their understanding of spirituality:

I think spirituality is the way that a person finds meaning and expresses that meaning, and so I don’t think you necessarily need to have a religion to be spiritual. I think it’s whatever helps you find meaning in, like, animation to your life is probably what I would say. (Frances)

The significance of the participant’s ability to connect his or her sense of spirituality with meaning-making in their life is explored more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

It is clear that many of the participants had an understanding of spirituality and believed that it is a significant influence on their lives. David provided perhaps the best summary by sharing his understanding of spirituality:

It means a lot more than just going to Mass and having a prayer life, and it’s really more of an interior thing. It’s almost hard to describe actually. It’s not this mystical, like, ahhh feeling. It’s more like a state, and it encompasses what you do. I mean, I go to Mass. I pray every day, and as much as I am able to, as the opportunity presents itself, I share my faith, and that to me is kind of a part of spirituality. It has to be a little more multifaceted than just a prayer life, or going to Mass, or helping out at a church. There is a lot more involved. It is really also how you conduct yourself as well.
Participants were then asked to define and explain their understanding of religion and then to contrast the nature of religion with that of spirituality. Most participants were more readily able to define religion than define spirituality; they collectively described religion as more organized, hierarchical, and structured than spirituality:

You have the spirit to believe in God, and then your religion is kind of just like the umbrella under spirituality. I kind of believe that it is like spirituality is on top and then your religion is underneath it. (Stephanie)

It’s Communal

Participants generally described religion as being a community of individuals who gather together around a common set of core principles or beliefs:

It’s concrete. It’s factual. It’s traditional. It’s communal, far more communal than being spiritual. That is probably one of the-going back to the spiritual-spiritual is more individual. Religious is more communal. It’s organized. It’s institutional, and it’s more; it doesn’t change over time as much as I think, like, being spiritual. (Anthony)

The essential difference from spirituality that most participants described is their view that religion is defined by participation in a co-ordinated, organized faith community rather than something that is individually practiced. John stated, “spirituality is more of an individual thing, while religion’s more of a community thing, to me.”

Participation in a religious community was generally described by respondents as bringing with it an organization that establishes the core principles or beliefs and a structured set of church doctrine and teachings that govern the way the community works together, the way that members should behave, and what they should believe. As such, most participants viewed
religion as some type of church that promulgates teachings that serve as a guidebook, a set of rules and regulations or guidelines that provide insight into how a member should engage with the norms and customs of the religion:

I believe that whatever you choose, that is your choice, and I don’t have any discrimination against a religion, but I believe once you pick a religion, you should abide by their rules and just follow what they believe in. (Stephanie)

Rules and Obligations

Frances had clearly spent some time reflecting on the many rules and obligations that most participants described as being connected with religion, and she described them very differently from the other participants. Rather than seeing the rules as proscriptive, she viewed them as emanating out of God’s love for the religion’s followers. Rather than seeing them as rigid restrictions on what is right and wrong, she saw the rules as a gift designed to help guide the faithful and their community by creating order and structure within the organization:

I think that people who are turned off from the church have this idea that religion is just about rules, and if you think that religion is just about rules, that would be really sad. It’s like thinking that your mom is just all about enforcing rules. Well, you have to have order, right? There’s some things that you have to tell your kids to do that they’re not going to naturally want to do, but you should ultimately realize that your mom loves you, and that’s why you have the rules, and that that’s what religion should do for you.

Connecting With a Higher Power

Finally, and perhaps most importantly to the participants, students who were interviewed described religion as the way to connect with God or a higher power. Michelle described religion as “belief in God and having faith.” When asked what words she associated with religion, Michelle responded with “God, faith, serving others, prayer or worship.”
Stephanie used similar words when she was asked to describe religion: “Christianity, Jesus, God, and Holy Spirit.”

In their answers, participants saw a connection between spirituality and religion. They saw spirituality as describing one’s individual, personal relationship with God and religion as an organized community following a common set of principles and beliefs. Maureen described the connection saying, “depending on what type religion you are, you definitely have a spirituality or prayer life depending on what that religion is. So they kind of go hand in hand together.” The concept that binds spirituality and religion together for the majority of the participants was faith.

**Defining Faith**

When asked to define the concept of faith, participants generally described it as believing in what you can’t see without being able to prove it: “Faith is putting your hope and trust in God” (Kathleen). Participants understood faith as being essential to practicing spirituality and religion because these are ideas or concepts, not substantive things that can be viewed or touched to confirm their existence. Several participants viewed faith as the concept that connects spirituality and religion. Stephanie defined faith as “in the middle. It’s the Catholic religion, and you believe in your spirituality, but you have to have faith to believe in the spirituality.” Anthony described faith as “the binder that holds everything together, to why there is spirituality and religiousness.”

The concept of meaning-making was evident again in the participants’ descriptions of faith. Mark stated, “faith is the hope behind it all because you can act something out, but if there’s no hope behind it, then you kind of know that it’s pointless.” Participants generally
viewed faith as the way to put belief into practice, to make meaning of one’s actions such as caring for the poor or the sick or participating in spring break service trips:

Part of what the Catholic teaching is [is] caring for the poor, caring for the sick, things like that, and that if you don’t have that faith you might still do that, but when you have the faith it takes on a different meaning of doing. That you care for those people, treat them as if they were brothers and sisters of yours. (John)

**Summary**

It is clear that participants viewed the concepts of spirituality, religion, and faith as inherently different, yet highly connected, as they reflected upon what these terms meant to them. There was strong agreement that spirituality was understood in a unique and individual way for each person and that participants understood religion as more frequently referring to a community of believers. For some participants, their spirituality was embedded within their religion. For other participants, they saw spirituality as being independent of a specific religion. In either instance, participants generally believed that an individual must have faith in order to understand these concepts; otherwise they are meaningless because they would be nonexistent.

Anthony provided an interesting final perspective on the connection between the three concepts using a core belief from his Catholic faith to provide a unique context for considering these terms:

“All three of them you need [in order] to be successful. It is kind of, to use another religious term, it is like the Trinity. You need to have all three of those. If you don’t have one of them, it doesn’t really work as well with only two of them, even though some people do try to. Well, I have faith, and I am spiritual so, but like the people that don’t go to church, but they say, “well, I have faith, and I am spiritual.” Well, they are still missing out on the more communal side of things, and the same thing if you go to church, but you’re really not faithful, and you’re really not spiritual.
Factors Influencing Decision to Reside in a Living-Learning Community

The second question that was asked in this study related to the factors that influence traditional-age Catholic students to reside in a Catholic-focused LLC at a large public university. An analysis of the coded data resulting from the participant interviews indicates features relating to general conditions that students described as important factors that they would consider in any housing decision and also the elements that caused students to specifically live within the Catholic-focused LLC: “If you’re looking for a community [in which] to grow in your faith and love of God and to make amazing friends, this would be the place” (Kathleen).

It is important to note that there were differing degrees of intentionality for the participants in deciding whether to live in the LLC. Some participants described a practical approach to living within the community. Their rationale stemmed from the logic that they liked the overall residential complex that housed the LLC. They made the decision to live in this facility, and from there they decided they might as well live in the special LLC that was an option within the facility. Perhaps this is a less threatening way for current residents to encourage membership from other students. For example, Maureen promoted the community this way: “I don’t say, like, you know, “Newman floor”, but I normally promote just University Plaza as a whole, but thinking that maybe somehow they will find it on their own, if they want to go on the Newman floor.”

Participants expressed a desire for increasing the ratio of program residents on the floor: It was just a place where most of the Newman people that lived at the Plaza lived, but it didn’t make up a whole floor, probably made less than a fourth of the people on the floor. So it wasn’t drastically different than having that many Newman people living on a floor at one of the residence halls. (John)
The impact of the lack of involvement during some of the program years is examined more closely in Chapter 5.

Not all participants utilized this pragmatic approach to select a living situation. Several of the participants intentionally selected the community and would have lived there regardless of where it was located. When Frances was transferring to the university, she spoke with the Catholic youth minister on campus who “suggested I look at University Plaza, so I went over, and I thought that it fit what would be a good transition right away.” She had also visited a friend at another large public university who lived in their Newman-affiliated LLC:

I realize that that’s directly attached to the Newman Center, but since I had been there, and I saw that, and I had been to other dorms, I just assumed that it would be, like, a Catholic dorm, you know, especially because the Newman Center’s name was on it.

Whether each participant selected the LLC because it was housed in the residence hall in which he or she wanted to live, or whether he or she selected it because of the nature of the program, an analysis of the coded responses resulting from the participant interviews yielded several themes including the facility and its amenities, the dining program, and the nature of the Catholic LLC. These factors that influenced the decision to reside in the LLC are discussed below.

Facility and Amenities

A number of participants described their decision to live within the LLC on a practical level. While they appreciated the opportunity to reside in the community, they described important pragmatic considerations such as cost, amenities, and general floor conditions as also influencing their decisions to live there:
There was a pool and an exercise room, and we learned through the tour that they had people come in and clean the rooms every week, and it was just a better deal overall. It was way less expensive than the dorms and closer and more central to campus. (Kathleen)

For these students, living within the LLC was an added benefit to living in the off-campus residence hall that they had selected.

Cost

Nearly all of the participants viewed the building that housed the LLC as a more affordable housing option than on-campus residence halls or off-campus apartments. Comments like James’s were commonly heard when participants were describing the facility: “It was a nicer place, it also cost a lot less than the place I was at initially, which was oncampus and actually had less stuff then the UP [University Plaza] does.” Participants were clear in their responses that affordability was an essential factor when making a choice for off-campus housing.

Amenities

Participants also described a number of amenities as being essential factors in their decision to live in the community. The living accommodations were routinely described as being convenient. For example, location was mentioned by several of the participants:

The only reason I was able to live in University Plaza is, like I said, it was cheaper than the dorms, and it was closer to the side of campus I needed, so that was my way of convincing my parents. (Mary)
Geographically, the facility that housed the LLC was more proximate to the center part of campus than the largest segment of the university-owned housing stock. A few of the participants described the location of the facility as a physical safety feature because they could easily walk to areas on campus that were well traveled and offered adequate lighting at night. This feature added to their overall interest in living in the facility.

Other amenities frequently mentioned by the participants when describing their reasons for living in the community included larger room size, elevator, air conditioning, and large walk-in closets. Recreation facilities including the swimming pool were also described as important amenities influencing the decision to live in the LLC.

**Floor Conditions**

Participants repeatedly reported a perception that the floors of the off-campus facility were cleaner and quieter than on-campus residence hall living options. University-owned residence halls at the institution generally offered traditional residence halls with double rooms and community bathrooms at the ends of the hallways as the primary living option. The facility that housed the LLC was constructed quite differently, offering suite style-rooms with semiprivate baths. Many of the participants discussed the enhanced bathroom privacy as an important factor in choosing the facility. The suite-style living accommodations were often described by participants as more similar to an apartment or at least a good way to transition to off-campus apartment living. One additional benefit mentioned that did not exist in either on-campus residence halls or off-campus apartments was a weekly room cleaning service within the facility.
Dining Program

A second significant factor beyond the facility and its amenities emerged from the data. Many of the participants described the importance of food quality and an in-hall dining program as being very significant to living in the facility: “One of the popular places to go is UP [University Plaza] because it has much better food than any other place” (John). The dining center in the residential facility was routinely described as having higher quality food at a more affordable price than the university-owned residence halls. Participants appreciated the all-you-care-to-eat nature of the facility, which was described as more economical for them.

Several of the participants also described the location of the dining facility and its all-you-care-to-eat style as enhancing their ability to find someone who they knew to eat with, which was described as very important by several of the participants:

A lot of people on the floor go and eat together once or twice a week, if not more. They invite all the people that are Catholic on the floor and other people too, but all the people that are Catholic go to dinner together. If they want to go, they don’t have to, but there’s always that invitation there. It’s the snowball effect. They could go and eat dinner or go to an event with everybody, and they don’t even have to say anything the whole night. It gives them a chance to be around people, which most people want, but they don’t have to come out of their comfort zone of talking to anybody, and hopefully little by little, they start to kind of open up and have some friends. (Mark)

Additionally, several of the participants described a campus program sponsored by the Newman Center called Dinner in the Dorms as a successful marketing tool whereby they became aware of the Catholic LLC program. One participant stated that he thought it was “Cool to walk into the Dinner in the Dorms event with a Catholic priest” (Mark). This traveling program allowed students who were connected with the Newman Center to gain exposure to on-campus residence hall dining operations and the dining center at the private, off-campus
facility that housed the LLC on a monthly, rotating basis. When it was their turn to host, current residents of the off-campus facility that housed the LLC used the opportunity to promote the facility and provided a tour to those who were unfamiliar with the program. While intended to provide a mechanism for students to interact with the Newman student group as a whole, one unintended benefit of the Dinner in the Dorms program was to introduce potential community members to life in the off-campus facility and by extension, the LLC.

While all of these amenity factors were important considerations for participants entering the LLC program, they are insufficient explanation in and of themselves to understand the choices that students made to live within the Catholic-focused community. One factor is that comparable room options were available within the facility on other, non-LLC floors. In order to completely understand the factors, a closer look at the reasons that participants selected to live at the residence hall and within the LLC is necessary.

Catholic Living-Learning Community

In addition to the amenities, the cost, and the dining options that participants cited as important factors in choosing to live in the LLC, participants also reported specific factors related to the Catholic nature of the LLC as being influential to their decision to live there:

It’s a great place to meet new friends with the chance to grow in your faith, get involved with the church, and just be able to live with people your age and possibly the same interests, and to be able to grow together. (Luke)

Their responses centered around four themes including looking to live with other students who share the same lifestyle and values; a place where one could explore questions he or she was
wrestling with; looking for a common sense of purpose; and a desire to live closely with other Catholics, specifically those who were involved with the Newman Center.

In general, the Catholic LLC was described as a more mature environment. Some attributed this environment to a SMT pledge that Newman Center leaders were required to commit to. The leaders were required to abstain from premarital sexual activity and illegal activities including underage consumption of alcohol. Others attributed it to the lack of freshmen on the floor. Whichever is more accurate, it is clear that participants perceived the living environment to be one of shared values and common purpose where they could comfortably address the meaning-of-life questions that they were encountering. Kathleen summed up the members’ commitment to the community by describing students who should not live there:

Anyone who isn’t interested in living a Christian lifestyle, whether that is, like, they aren’t interested in following the drinking age laws to checking their behavior and how they treat others. Just one who is not willing to learn about the Catholic faith.

Live With Catholic Friends

The primary reasons cited by participants for living in the community were to live with their friends from the Newman Center and to participate in a Catholic lifestyle. As Anthony explained, “It’s a place that is more Catholic than anywhere else on campus. You would get to meet people from around this church, and then it would help you grow in your faith if you started doing stuff here.” The floor environment was described as being similar to living at home with your family. Students implemented an open-door policy so that others would feel welcome in the community. The floor community was also described as a place where it was easy for students to make new friends. John indicated, “they could have Catholic conversations
with floormates because he knows them from Newman. They at least talk about Newman events and plan to go together.”

Several of the participants found living in the LLC to be a convenient way to locate other students to attend campus-wide and Newman Center-sponsored events with. Mary said that “if you’re really involved at Newman, it’s convenient and comfortable to live by the others who are involved.” Several participants commented that the proximity of other involved students living together increased their sense of safety because it provided companions to travel back and forth to the Newman Center with during late-night events. Maureen described how this happened:

If you are late at night at Newman for example, if you are over here already and you know someone else that lives at UP [University Plaza], like, “oh, can I get a ride?” and you can just get a ride back to UP.

Theresa also observed that “going to church as a group felt normal and accepted because we were on the Catholic floor… I just don’t know if those things would have happened so… fluidly… on an average, random floor.” In fact, several of the participants reported an increase in comfort about attending Mass on Sunday evenings because they didn’t have to explain to others on their floor where they were going at 8:30 in the evening in order to be at Mass by 9 p.m.

**Shared Values**

Most of the participants attributed some of their interest in the LLC to a desire to live with other students who shared their values and were looking to lead a similar lifestyle. Their
values tended to align with the values that the Catholic Church holds and many residents strictly followed church teachings:

It was nice to be on a floor with people with similar values. If somebody wanted to have a drink or hang out with people, it wasn’t ridiculous. It was quiet. You really could study on the floor if you wanted to. You could go to the lounge, and even if there was other people in there, they were generally pretty quiet because they were studying too. (Mark)

The lifestyle was repeatedly identified as different from the typical college-student lifestyle that participants perceived as revolving around alcohol consumption, drug use, and frequent sexual activity that they had encountered in the university-owned residence halls. As Maureen stated, “Behavior is important—you have to understand where you are living and that it’s different.”

While several participants acknowledged that fellow residents did not abstain from alcohol, there were repeated responses describing their desire to live in an environment that was free from large parties and that fellow residents were not all intoxicated every weekend. In fact, participants repeatedly described their floormates as those who either didn’t drink or who drank responsibly and legally when they did consume alcohol. Participants saw these behaviors as creating a cleaner, quieter living environment where the social life did not revolve around alcohol and behavior that they described as crazy and out-of-control behaviors such as blaring loud music late at night was virtually nonexistent. Rachel reported that the floor “attracts a certain kind of person, but even for those who didn’t choose to live on [the] floor, there’s a kind of unspoken atmosphere or agreement that things aren’t going to be crazy.”

Participants described living within the community as being like living with your family. They viewed the community as a safe, peaceful environment where neighbors were
generally respectful. Several participants described this quieter, more in-control environment as leading to more studying on the floor and even to fewer drug busts.

Some participants also described a climate in which abstaining from sexual activity was more comfortable in this living environment. David described it as a community that allowed participants to practice what he described as Catholic virtue without peer pressure or the possibility of offending others:

I think that’s just kind of really the major thing it taught me was I can actually take what I learned in seminary, and I can actually apply it to this situation where it becomes more necessary to, you know, practice good self-restraint.

**Common Purpose**

In addition to the floor where behavior was consistently appropriate, several participants described their enjoyment of living on a floor with great people and in a community with fellow residents who share the same beliefs and a common sense of purpose: “Great people on the floor; it’s nice to have fellow residents who share the same beliefs” (Michelle). For example, David said that living on the floor encouraged an active prayer life: “We promote and encourage a prayer life with each other and, aside from that, are promoting our activities and encouraging people as often as you want you are always more than welcome to come to our activities.”

Several participants described the importance of focusing on academics and connecting that to their faith life. Maureen said,

It’s like they’re their own private quiet floor and everything anyway, but the more people that we can get that are [quiet, the] quieter the floor can be. Because, I guess, most people who are Catholic, and the more important thing is their studies and doing something that will make them feel good about themselves.
Place for Exploration

Participants also reported being drawn to the LLC as a place where they could safely explore the questions with which they were wrestling:

Primarily, they would be surrounded by like people who share the same faith background who would be able to help them with their faith journey and help them to explore some of the same things that the Catholic faith has that they may not necessarily be aware of or they have always been kind of interested in. (David)

Some of these questions explicitly pertained to the Catholic faith, while others were simply focused on the common struggles of college-aged students. Luke described the community as a place where residents were “centered in faith with God, and our common beliefs, I think, have molded us to live that lifestyle. I truly think that.”

Interestingly, a number of the participants were either discerning a vocation to a religious life or had already attended seminary and were returning to the secular university. Both groups described the floor as a safe place where “there are other students here too, that are in the same place as I am, and they are struggling through school and work, but they also come to church” (Stephanie).

Summary

The decision to live within the LLC is obviously a complex one for the participants. There are practical reasons such as the cost and the amenities offered. Participants generally viewed the facility as offering many more benefits at a more affordable price than either apartment-style living or residing in a university-owned residence hall. Yet there were many
similar floors within the residential facility that offered these exact amenities at the same price, and any student living within the facility could access the all-you-care-to-eat dining center.

The opportunity to live with others who shared their Catholic faith was also significant for participants. They described this shared faith as leading to a community of shared values and common purpose:

You have this common background, and you maybe make certain assumptions that people are kind of wrestling with some of the same issues that you are or at least are willing to let you talk about the issues that you’re wrestling with and maybe give you a perspective. At least they have some shared experiences that you’re going through, either through the Newman Center or through historical kinds of experiences that you’ve had. (Rachel)

For some participants, that meant an opportunity to explore vocational choices. For others, it simply meant a more reserved environment that was quieter and had less alcohol and drug use than the communities they had lived in previously. In either case, it was clear that participants chose this living community in the belief that it would be qualitatively different from their other living alternatives. Most of them found that the community met their expectations.

Characteristics That Contribute to Faith Development

The third question considered in this study focused on the characteristics of a Catholic-focused LLC at a large public university that contribute to the participants’ faith development:

A community of Catholics energized and hungry for their faith and to share that faith with each other and anyone who is interested, and it is also a place where one can be themselves and no one’s going to judge them. (David)
Themes that evolved from coding the data included enhanced opportunities for invitation to faith-based events and programs, the existence of faith-based programming, peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities, support for students who were discerning a call to religious life, and the manner in which living in the community prepared students for ongoing faith development following their departure from the community and the university.

It should be noted that participants lived within the community during a 6-year span from the floor’s inception to the time of the interviews. It is clear from analyzing the data that intentional faith-development initiatives within the community varied widely from year to year and that this disparity was reflected in the participant reflections on their floor experiences and the level of faith development that they believe occurred. Several participants offered suggestions for elements that they believed should be present within the community in order to maximize the opportunities for faith development of community members.

**Opportunity for Invitation**

Residing within the Catholic-focused LLC provided an opportunity for students to easily identify other like-minded individuals with whom to attend faith-based activities and events at and sponsored by the Newman Center: “There’s actually quite a few people at Newman that have ended up holding important positions for students because they were invited when they were non-Catholics and ended up going through RCIA [Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults]” (Mark). These opportunities for invitation occurred for both the Catholic members of the community and the non-Catholic students who also lived on the floor. Mark described some of these invitations:
Conversations about what trips people wanted to take. If you wanted to go to March for Life in Washington D.C. for prolife or even just other little conversations between my roommate and myself. Whether or not we were going to go to certain events at the Newman Center.

While opportunities for invitation don’t lead to faith development in and of themselves, they certainly increase the likelihood that students will participate in faith-enriching programs because it was easy to locate fellow students who were also attending. This is true in Luke’s case. He attributed the entirety of his renewed faith to having resided in the community and an invitation to a retreat that occurred early in his residency there.

A couple of the people that lived across the hall from me, because there was the retreat coming up, and they were inviting people. At the time, I don’t think they knew what my religious affiliation was, so there did come a point where it was kind of just like an invite. Like hey, there’s this retreat. It was kind of a general; it’s a great way to meet new friends, that’s how it kind of started. Then getting more, talking about it, learning that it was through the Newman Center, and it was a Catholic-based retreat, and that sort of thing, and when I heard that, I opened up and told them, “that’s great, I’m Catholic. I’ve actually spent a few years kind of falling away from the church, and I’m looking to come back, that would be great. I’d love this opportunity,” and so I think that would kind of be the first conversation of real spirituality.

Many participants discussed the role of the resident assistant (RA) in creating these opportunities for invitation and the need for that student staff member to be Catholic and connected to the Newman Center. In fact, nearly all of the participants discussed the essential role the RA could and should play in the development of the community, paying particular attention to the additional faith-development needs of the students who had selected the Catholic LLC:

I remember people talking about that one of the RAs on the Newman floor [in] 1 of the years was an atheist and didn’t care about religion at all. So I think the one thing that they could do to positively improve was to make sure that someone involved with Newman is the RA of that floor to try and see if they can get events for specifically those people. (John)
Faith-Development Programming

Participants described a variety of programs and events that they believed enhanced their faith development: “Provide the opportunity for reflection, especially for the people who have been on the retreats or the spring break trips. They would be familiar with it, so it wouldn’t be a novel idea” (Mary). While many of these activities were hosted by the Newman Center, participants were able to identify several in-house programs that were offered to residents of the LLC. For example, Mark described watching a faith-based movie and having a discussion afterward with fellow residents:

A discussion like the one about the Boondock Saints. I’m sure we could have just had a priest watch it, but it’s kind of more fun to watch it and see what little bits we could pick out. It’s definitely positive because people weren’t being negative or degrading or anything. It was just a chance to talk about the faith.

While some of the programming was intentional and elaborate, some of the more memorable programs for the participants were much more informal and led by peers:

There would also be times where we would gather in someone’s room and pray Rosary, or we would even do Night Prayer sometimes, if a few of us were hanging out and we were all about to go to bed. Pull out a Breviary and do Night Prayer together, and that would be it, and go to bed. (Luke)

The amount and level of faith-development programming varied significantly during the years that the participants lived on the floor. While it is evident that some years there were regular, intentional efforts at offering this type of programming, several other participants discussed their desire for additional, more extensive programming that was designed to deepen the residents’ faith development:
I think that you should have Bible studies or rosaries. One of these extra things every single week, or day of the week, there’s some kind of program here. Some kind of faith-enrichment thing, and I think that they should have held those on that floor. (Frances)

**Peer Mentoring**

Several of the participants discussed peer-to-peer spiritual development as perhaps the most important reason for living within the Catholic LLC: “I wouldn’t have felt so open about talking about spirituality in a small group setting in the study lounge, but that probably would have been accepted and seen as somewhat normal on the Catholic floor” (Theresa). Participants acknowledged that many college students are questioning their spirituality and their faith, and they found the community a welcoming place to ask questions and to explore what they truly believe:

I would also tell them it’s a place where if they have questions about Christianity or Catholicism, people are going to be willing to answer them or get answers for them, and it’s not going to be, you know, it’s not judgmental. We’ll try to accommodate them the best we can. (Mark)

Participants described an environment that was comfortable for individuals who were exploring their faith. Kathleen explained,

You’ve got to meet them where they’re at. I have learned how important it is to make connections with people one-on-one. You can have all the events and marketing in the world, but if you aren’t doing the work to going [sic] out and ministering to these people individually like getting to know them, who they are, and where they are coming from and what their goals are like, you’re only going to have a basic knowledge of who they are as a person. So I guess definitely forming one-on-one relationships and making an effort to remember people and make them feel welcome. I think that is key. (Kathleen)
Participants valued the opportunity to explore their spirituality together and described the value of teaching one another rather than simply relying on the priest or other spiritual leader to provide guidance and education:

Some of the best ways to learn something is to teach someone, that’s a great way to put it. It’s right. When you see someone going through questionings, something like that, it really makes yourself, you have to be able to back yourself up and really question yourself on what you know and how strong you are in the faith. (Luke)

Discernment Support

A number of the participants utilized the Catholic LLC as a place for reflection and support as they proceeded through the process of discerning whether they were being called to religious life:

I think it’s a topic of conversation when there’s somebody who is openly, seriously discerning. Kind of like myself or the gentleman who is at the seminary now. So when those kind of people are around, it comes up more often than not. (Mark)

David arrived at the community having just returned from the seminary where he had determined that the priesthood was not in his future. His reaction to living in the community was evident in the contrasting freedoms that he enjoyed at a public university that were not available to him in the seminary: “It was overall a great learning experience for me just, you know, just as a human being to be able to experience a different form of Catholic community than I had been previously used to.”

The researcher had the opportunity to interview John as he was finishing his undergraduate education and was preparing to enter the seminary. He was able to reflect upon his time living in the community and described how that prepared him for the transition to his new educational home.
It’s kind of interesting when you have someone who was doing something really unique in terms of what their plan for life is, that some people, you know, meteorology, or teaching, or doing art, or stuff like that, you know. It’s kind of normal, but when you have someone thinking about becoming a priest and going into the seminary, that’s something different, so the discernment topic would come up a bit. (John)

Maureen described her devotion to the Society of the Sacred Heart that she ascribed to things she learned while living within the community. Maureen also discussed fellow residents who were preparing to leave for or just returning from the seminary:

One of the guys that lived on the floor last year is up at the seminary now. One of the other guys that lived there spent a semester in seminary before he came to NIU and he, usually guys spend more than a semester, but he, I give him a lot of credit. He went and he tried it out, and he realized after a semester, he’s like, “whew, man that’s not for me,” but so he understands and he’s super supportive.

Preparation for Life After College

For those who weren’t considering religious life, the Catholic LLC served as a launching point for their future immersion into a nonuniversity Catholic parish following graduation:

When I went to college, Mom and Dad aren’t making you go to Mass. For whatever reason, I decided, “well, I had a good time in high school; I guess if nothing else, I’ll just keep going to Mass, and we’ll see what happens from there.” So it made me make it my own. Kind of each day something would happen, whether it’s good or bad, and would keep leading me to keep going back to Mass or to do this or do that. So it just made, it made it my own. (Mark)

Several of the participants described the value that they placed on their experiences and the reinforcement that their experiences provided in developing an adult faith life following their graduation from the university:

I would continue to not even know that the Newman Center existed. I’ve thought about this on many occasions, and the more I think about it, I don’t even know if I would have
continued to go to church. Maybe on the rare occasions that I typically did every few months or so, whatever it may have been, but certainly no sort of deep growth or have any sort of meaning to me or backbone of my faith. I’m sure I would have been drawn into more of the drinking and partying aspect too, because I knew it would have surrounded me as well. (Luke)

**Summary**

An analysis of the coded participant data identified five characteristics of the LLC that participants described as contributing to their faith development: opportunity for invitation; faith-development programming; peer mentoring, discernment support; and preparation for life after college. While this study did not attempt to measure the faith development of the participants, there was consensus that these characteristics were significant to the participants as they considered their faith development:

It’s a place where you can kind of be with people who are around your same set of beliefs, and so you can feel comfortable talking about what you believe and questioning what you’re learning and what you’ve been taught. It’s kind of a safe fertile ground for those kinds of discussions, and it’s also a place where you can get a feeling of belongingness. (Theresa)

Many of the community characteristics that participants identified as having contributed to their faith development were described as being weak or inconsistent in this particular community during some of the years in which they were in residence. Additional consideration of these factors is analyzed in Chapter 5.
Summary of Significant Findings

This chapter includes the findings from an analysis of 39 faith-development interviews conducted with 13 students and alumni from a large public university during the 2012-14 academic years. These findings include a demographic profile of the participants.

There was a general consensus among participants of the definitions of spirituality, religion, and faith. There were three components that impacted participants’ decision to live in the LLC: facility and amenities, the dining program, and the Catholic nature of the LLC. Within the Catholic nature of the LLC, there were four subthemes: living with Catholic friends, shared values, common purpose, and a place for exploration.

Participants reported that five environmental factors influenced their faith development: opportunity for invitation, peer mentoring, faith-development programming, discernment support, and preparation for life after college. A summary of the themes that were found in this study is included in Appendix C. The final chapter of this dissertation provides a discussion of the findings and the implications for further research in student faith development and practice in student affairs.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the impact of a faith-based LLC housed in a private residence hall at a large public university. This qualitative study used a series of individual interviews with 13 participants to address the research questions:

1. How do traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic define and differentiate the concepts of spirituality, religion, and faith?
2. What factors influence traditional-age college students who identify as Catholic to reside in a Catholic-focused living-learning community at a large public university?
3. What are traditional-age college students’ who identify as Catholic perceptions of the characteristics of a Catholic-focused living-learning community at a large public university that contribute to faith development?

This chapter begins with a brief summary of study findings that are divided into broad categories following the outline of the research questions. This chapter then discusses the findings in relation to literature in the areas of college-student spiritual development and residential learning communities. This discussion leads to recommendations for improved student affairs practice and scholarship in the area of college-student faith development. Finally, limitations of the study are noted, and suggestions for future research are explored.
Findings Summary

Chapter 4 provides a detailed review of the results of this qualitative study including direct quotes from participant interviews that revealed their understanding of the topics covered by the research questions. This section provides a summary of the key findings from this study that provide the basis for an ensuing discussion about implications for improved student affairs practice and scholarship in faith development.

Defining Terms

The interview series began by asking participants to define and discuss their understanding of the terms spirituality, religion, and faith. In nearly all cases, responding to these questions was the most difficult portion of the interview protocol. In fact, when asked to identify when they realized their understanding of these concepts, several of the participants reported that the interview was the first time they had been asked to reflect upon how they made meaning of these concepts.

Two thirds of the participants (nine of 13) asserted that there was a difference between being religious and being spiritual, and four saw those terms as being the same or strongly interconnected. Of those who saw the terms as being different, five described a dichotomy between the organized, communal nature of religion and the individual nature of spirituality, three viewed spirituality as the way one acts out or expresses his or her religion, and one viewed them as a hierarchy with spirituality on top as an umbrella concept with various religions underneath. It is important to note that despite identifying a distinction between the two concepts, participants often used the words interchangeably during the interviews, and their
distinctions between the two concepts did not seem to impact how they practiced or experienced spirituality and religion.

When responding to questions regarding the connection between spirituality, religion, and faith, seven of the participants believed that all three of the concepts are commonly understood in relationship to each other. One of these participants described their relationship as being similar to a Venn diagram, and one participant compared them to the Trinity, a foundational concept within the Catholic faith. Four of the 13 participants described faith as a separate belief system, usually indicating that faith was belief in something that couldn’t be proven. The remaining two participants described all three concepts as being the same and indicated that they were an essential component of their Catholic faith.

**Residency Factors**

Participants reported that the primary factors that influenced their decision to live in the community were to live closer to other Newman students (13) and to live with others who shared similar values and lived a similar lifestyle (11). Comments about a shared lifestyle were generally reflected by an expressed desire for less drinking, a lower noise level, and fewer illegal drug incidents than participants had experienced in on-campus residence halls. A number of practical factors were also identified as influencers including convenience/amenities (eight) and cost (six).

Having people with whom to eat (seven) was also identified as important to participants when selecting a living location. Many of the participants (five) learned about the available food options and gained a better understanding of the residential facility’s amenities during the Dinner in the Dorms program described earlier. Although several participants reported they
were looking for someone with whom to eat, a similar number did not report the same interest in finding other students with whom to attend Mass or other religiously oriented activities. Only two participants reported an interest in locating students with whom they could pray, and only one student chose to live in the community so that he could participate in peer mentoring, or what he called Catholic conversations. This last finding surprised the researcher who had anticipated that participants would seek to live with peers who were interested in faith exploration. This was not the case for the participants in this study.

**Influencing Characteristics**

Participants had a difficult time identifying characteristics of the community that enhanced their faith development because they generally did not feel that the community enhanced their development. That said, five participants indicated that opportunities to discuss faith with peers positively influenced their faith development, especially for participants who had not requested to live within the Catholic LLC. Three participants reported that attending Mass as a group reinforced their efforts toward regular attendance. Two students identified prayer within the community as being important to their faith development, especially during times of crisis. Several participants also identified discernment support and observing Lenten practices together as being helpful to their spiritual development.

It should be noted that nearly every participant described a weak partnership between the off-campus housing facility and the Newman Center. Nearly all of the participants expressed belief that a stronger relationship would lead to greater spiritual-development results. Strengthening this relationship is one of several recommendations for improving practice that is addressed later in this chapter.
Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study offer insight into how a small group of college students conceptualize spirituality, religion, and faith. This study’s findings also illustrate how the participants’ understanding of these concepts relates to their selection of a residential faith community and any spiritual-development benefits they may derive from living in this type of community. This study enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of participants’ definitions of spirituality, religion, and faith as derived from the students’ perspective and provided insights into the factors and influences surrounding their participation in a faith-based LLC through listening to the stories and experiences of current and previous residents of the facility. The following discussion compares the themes that emerged from this study’s data analysis to the literature on spiritual and religious development of college students and the literature on LLCs. Conclusions regarding the impact of a faith-based LLC on traditional-age college students are discussed in light of this study’s findings.

Spiritual and Faith Development Literature

Several researchers (J.W. Fowler, 1981; S.D. Parks 2000) have used cognitive-structural stage development theory to better understand the notions of spirituality, religion, and faith and to explain how one’s understanding of and experience with faith typically evolves as he or she matures. Although this study refrained from attempting to measure participants’ levels of spiritual or faith development, utilizing faith-development literature as a theoretical framework provided important context for this study’s findings.
As noted earlier, participants were either current undergraduates or recently graduated alumni at a large public university. Using J.W. Fowler’s (1981) faith development theory as a theoretical framework, traditional-age college students generally fall into either the Synthetic Conventional Stage or are in transition to the Individuating Reflective Stage as described in Chapter 2. Fowler’s extensive studies demonstrate that early adolescents defined faith based upon the definition that was held by their identified authority figures until they began to take responsibility for their beliefs. Some of this study’s participants seemed to be struggling with Fowler’s Stage 3 while other participants had begun the transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4 as evidenced by their willingness to own their beliefs or to at least acknowledge that they were struggling with the definitions.

Another example of the concordance between this study’s results and the developmental literature is the reluctance of some of the participants to engage in peer-led discussions or learning opportunities within the residential community while others described peer mentoring as the most important reason for living within the community. While participants routinely described the potential benefits of living with others from the Newman Center and the possibility of having what they described as Catholic conversations with their peers, some participants reported that these types of spiritual conversations didn’t take place on the residential floor. When reflecting on their actual experiences in the living environment, some participants instead reported having discussed important spiritual matters with the Newman Center priest who was clearly viewed by participants as an expert on these matters. This makes sense given what we know about psychosocial and identity development of students at this stage. Erikson (1980) has indicated that as adolescents are moving toward adulthood, they are exploring their identity. Often, being a part of a community such as a floor of one’s peers
provides a safety net that allows the adolescent to explore new ways of thinking and making meaning of their experience. As such, it is natural for the students in the LLC to struggle with the balance between allegiance to the floor community, deference to an authority figure such as a priest, and determining a spiritual path of their own.

The findings of this study also support the work of S.D. Parks (2000) who described faith as a “multifaceted phenomenon” (p. 21) and believed that it should be considered from several perspectives. Similar to this study, participants in S.D. Parks’s (2000) studies were asked to differentiate the concepts of spirituality, religion, and faith. S. D. Parks wrote, “A careful exploration of the word faith is more than an exercise in etymology” (p. 24). S.D. Parks viewed a comprehensive understanding of faith as a meaning-making dimension of one’s experience. Several of the participants described a similar understanding of how they made meaning of their experiences while others described the value of simply reflecting on the definitions of these concepts, often for the first time during this study’s interviews. S. Parks (1986) also considered the forms of community that young adults experienced. She found that mentoring communities and social groups, such as an LLC, could play an integral role in any spiritual development that occurred.

In analyzing the findings of this study, one may conclude that this study affirms the work of Hill et al. (2000) who concluded that the concepts of spirituality, religion, and faith are individually defined based upon one’s experiences. This may be particularly true for college students who are at various stages of understanding their spiritual development.
Residential Community-Living Literature

As described in Chapter 2, student-development literature documents a variety of positive effects that result from living in an on-campus residence hall including involvement, satisfaction, retention, academic performance, growth and development, and student beliefs and values. While the purpose of this study was not to directly measure the benefits of living on campus, it is valuable to note the results of this study and to understand how they may correlate with results of previous studies that examined the effects of residential living on students’ beliefs and values. Participants frequently cited effects from the community environment—in particular, noise levels and the responsible use of alcohol—and the lack of diversity within the community as characteristics that differentiated the LLC from other residential communities in which they had lived.

The first characteristic that participants routinely cited was their interest in living with others who shared similar lifestyles and values. This was described in a variety of ways, but responses generally revolved around a lack of inappropriate behavior from community members. Mark described the floor as a place where there was “less shenanigans going on.” Luke reported that because the floor was “centered in faith with God and common beliefs,” students were molded to live a certain lifestyle. This strong culture that reduced the noise level and kept the floor relatively free from alcohol-related incidents reportedly made room for participants to, as Theresa described it, meet “different kinds of people that she wouldn’t otherwise have interacted with.” These results are consistent with Berger’s (1997) findings that a cohesive floor environment may provide a safe foundation from which students can reach out and explore new relationships and environments.
Interestingly, the reported lack of drinking behavior in the LLC seems to contradict the work of Martin and Hoffman (1993), who found that residential students were more likely to consume alcohol than those who commuted from home. The results of this study suggest that the nature of this particular LLC mitigates any impact that living in an on-campus residential setting might have. In fact, the results from this study are better considered in conjunction with the work of Brower et al. (2003) who found that students living in socially supportive communities, such as the Catholic LLC being studied, were actually less likely to binge drink than their peers. Participants who reported a general lack of inappropriate behaviors as a significant factor in selecting the LLC repeatedly described the associated peer accountability effect and their positive perceptions of the living environment.

Gaining an understanding of the importance of the residential dining experience was an unexpected outcome of this study. This finding seems to support the work of Davis et al. (2015). While participants in this study were focused on the community-bonding aspect of the shared dining experience rather than the physical cafeteria space as in the Davis et al. study, it is evident that the traditions and rituals of the Dinner in the Dorms program were significant to the participants.

A third characteristic that participants described in detail was the lack of diversity in thought and action that resulted from the community. These results seem to contradict the work of G.R. Pike (2002) who found that living on campus was positively related to openness to diversity. LLC participants indicated that the community might not prepare students for faith life beyond the university because of the insulated nature of the community. The community was designed as a place where students can develop an identity and learn who they are as part of being in college and moving into adulthood, but the homogeneity of the participants may
limit the intentional opportunities to live with students from diverse backgrounds that Hu and Kuh (2003) identified as being important to the development of students. While this study did not attempt to consider the long-term effects of residency on the ability to interact with others outside of the community, the suggestion to do so is included within the recommendations for future research that follow.

Recommendations

This study intended to provide a better understanding of the student experience within a specific type of LLC, and the results may be used to improve student affairs practice in areas of spiritual development and the intentional design of living environments for college students. To achieve this intended outcome, the following four recommendations are offered for public higher education institution leaders who would like to foster the religious and spiritual development of their students, especially those who would like to do so through intentionally designed residential communities. Implementation of these recommendations would better position public institutions of higher education to develop the whole student, including his or her spiritual aspect.

The strongest recommendation that is suggested by the data is to carefully consider the relationship between a faith-based housing facility and the sponsoring faith community. Nearly all of the participants reported a lack of an established, visible partnership between the local LLC and the Newman Center. Creating a sense of connection and structure may make participants more comfortable when encountering peer-led discussions about spiritual issues and generate a more seamless experience for residents. However, research indicates that our understanding of adolescent development and the types of crises that enable or hamper
psychosocial growth is evolving rapidly (Arnett, 2011; Robbins & Wilner, 2001). As noted earlier in this chapter, many of the participants still viewed the local priests as experts when issues of spirituality arose.

A second recommendation that is nearly as important is to understand the role of the RA or other peer leader within the living community. Participants routinely reported the need for peer leaders within a faith-based living community to at least be a member of the faith community and preferably be an involved, active member who is seen as a leader of both the spiritual and the living communities. This study’s results suggest that the faith community should also be actively involved in the selection and training of the student staff member. Together, the residential facility and the faith community professional leadership may be able to work with any peer leaders to develop an appropriate programming model that may include encouraging the LLC members to attend religious services regularly as a group, for those who may be interested.

A third recommendation that is suggested by the data is to select an amenity-rich location in which to house the LLC. Results from this study indicate that the facility’s amenities were an important consideration for potential residents along with the mission of the living-learning program. A selected facility may need to be carefully designed in order to support the intended learning outcomes of the program. Many of the students interviewed for this study expressed surprise that their LLC was coed with rules that permitted overnight guests of the opposite gender. Condoms were also freely distributed as they would be in any student residential community. Several of the participants described their discomfort with this set-up and an awkwardness of balancing these policies with their interest in living within the community.
The fourth recommendation suggested by this study’s data is to identify a residential facility or space within a facility, that is sized appropriately so that a majority of the residents are part of the LLC. Participants in the study described several academic years in which nonresidents of the LLC outnumbered those who resided there, sometimes by as much as two or three to one. This created very awkward dynamics on the floor and diluted the significance of the LLC for the residents.

Study results indicate that following these recommendations would enhance the success of an LLC. Participants also described the need to develop a community mission with goals and objectives, to provide opportunities for group and individual reflection, and to offer faith-based floor events such as Bible study and small prayer groups. Implementing the recommendations above may enable these faith-based activities to be effectively offered within the community.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this study involves the purposive sampling of the participants, all of whom were referred by staff at the Newman Center. The researcher had intended to use a snowballing technique to identify participants, but none of the students who were initially interviewed were willing or able to refer other potential student participants. As such, the participants may not be representative of students in general and may not even be representative of the students who lived within the community during this study’s time frame. Nearly all of the referred participants were members of the SMT. This may be significant because SMT members sign an agreement pledging to serve as moral leaders among their peers. As a result, they are not permitted to smoke or consume alcohol underage, and they
agree to have a chaste relationship with their dating partners. It is unknown how SMT membership and its associated commitments may affect the participants’ perceptions of the living community, but their lack of similarity to most other college students is a limitation of this study.

A second limitation of this study is that it specifically addressed the spiritual development of students who lived on one floor in a private residence hall at a large public university. While the results provide a better understanding of the experiences of students in this setting, caution should be used when generalizing to other populations and communities. At no point did the participants constitute the majority of the LLC floor. As has been noted, there was also limited involvement on the part of the church organization sponsor. In addition, this study’s being conducted within a small, newly established LLC is a limitation of this study.

Suggestions for Further Research

These study limitations suggest several pathways for additional research about the spiritual development of college students and how this development occurs. The LLC in this study housed upper-division students who were respectful of their peers and who were seeking a quieter living environment. The context of this study makes it difficult to determine whether the characteristics of this living community were the result of the spiritually focused nature of the LLC, or whether the characteristics evolve due to maturity of the students living there. This question was raised by Mary, a study participant:

But then again, part of it might be an age-level thing. Maybe when you’re that age, you just resort to this is what you’re taught, and so maybe if you would have lived anywhere, you would have those same answers. I don’t know, because I think with some aspects of spirituality, like your age, does kind of change things.
One way to explore the LLC effect further would be to identify a public university without a first-year residency requirement, at which the spiritually focused LLC also housed first-year students. This type of environment would allow the researcher to explore whether similar effects were identified with first-year students who were part of a similar program and for the community as a whole when less mature students were in residence.

The developmental nature of the effects of this type of LLC suggests another area for further research. A variety of studies examining the immediate impacts of residing in an LLC can be found in the student-development literature. However, there is a dearth of research on the long-term effects of residing in LLCs in general and faith-based communities in particular. This lack of longitudinal research provides a number of interesting future research possibilities. While still relatively new in comparison with the history of higher education institutions in the United States, LLCs have been in existence long enough for researchers to begin to explore the permanency of any immediate effects and also longer-term effects that may not be immediately evident.

A third area for further research is to consider the impact of the peer group on adolescents who are engaged in the transition to adulthood. Historically, researchers (Astin, 1993; Erikson, 1980) have documented the challenge and support that are provided by the peer group. However, recent research on the extended length of the adolescence period (Arnett, 2011) has introduced the concept of a quarterlife crisis (Robbins & Wilmer, 2001) that may significantly alter our understanding of the impact of the peer group, particularly for those students living in residential LLCs that are intended to be homogeneous in nature.
Summary and Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the factors that lead to the spiritual development of college students, a growing area of investigation in the higher education field. This study considered the effects on student spiritual development of residing in a faith-based LLC. These types of living communities are one way that colleges can create intentional opportunities for conversations with peers that may enhance student spiritual growth and development. Effectively utilizing these types or resources will require practitioners to have a clear understanding of how best to design faith-based residential LLCs in order to promote holistic growth of college students, particularly in the area of spiritual development.

Chapter 5 concludes this research study’s report. The findings generally support the current understanding in the higher education literature and produced recommendations that invite all community stakeholders to participate in the faith development of college students. These findings also suggest further additional research to be conducted on college-student faith development in a public higher education setting. It is only in doing so that higher education can fulfill its obligation to best meet the needs of all college students.
REFERENCES


Inkelas, K. K., & Weisman, J. L. (2003). Different by design: An examination of student outcomes among participants in three types of living-learning programs. Journal of College Student Development. 44(3), 335-368.


Consent to Participate in Research

I agree to participate in a research project titled *The Role of a Residential Learning Community in the Faith Development of Catholic College Students* being conducted by Michael Stang, a doctoral student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to examine how residing in a living-learning community for Catholic students impacts the faith and spiritual development of participants.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study I will need to meet face-to-face with Mr. Stang for a series of three interviews and agree to have my interviews audiotaped. The interviews are anticipated to last from 45 to 60 minutes each. I also understand that I might be contacted following the interviews by Mr. Stang for follow-up questions. The interviews will take place at a time and location convenient to me.

Following my interviews, the audiotapes will be transcribed by Mr. Stang. All data collected including audiotapes, transcripts of interviews, analyses of data, and consent forms will be kept in a locked cabinet at Mr. Stang’s home. They will be securely maintained for three years and then destroyed at the completion of this retention period.

I understand that my identity will be kept confidential. My identity will be known only to Mr. Stang and his dissertation chair, Dr. Lisa Baumgartner. My name will be replaced by a first-name pseudonym in the final written paper and in any subsequent publications or presentations.

I understand that the intended benefits of this study are to add further depth to existing knowledge in the college student affairs and adult education literature by enhancing understanding of the spiritual and faith development process of emerging, college-aged adults. It is hoped that this study will add to the impetus to redesign and refocus efforts by individual institutions and the student affairs profession as a whole to focus more intentionally on this aspect of college student development.

I have been informed that there are no foreseen risks that I might experience during this study. The interviews will be discontinued if any unforeseen discomfort arises. I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice. If I have any questions concerning this study, I may contact Mike Stang at 815-753-9651 or Mr. Stang’s dissertation chair, Dr. Lisa Baumgartner, at 815-753-8168 or Lbaumgartner@niu.edu.

I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at 815-753-8588.

I understand that Northern Illinois University policy does not provide for compensation for, nor does the University carry insurance to cover injury or illness incurred as a result of, participation in University-sponsored research projects. I also understand that my consent to participate in this study does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I might have as a result of my participation.

I acknowledge that Mr. Stang has my permission to use data obtained from me in his research, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent.

I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.
I have read the above information and have had all my questions answered. By signing this form, I consent to participate in this study.

Signature _____________________________________ Date __________________

By signing below, I consent to be audiotaped during the interview.

Signature _____________________________________ Date __________________
APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE
Demographic Questions

What is your hometown?
What is your age?
How would you define your cultural/racial background?
From what religious background do you come?

Describe your childhood family.
Did your family practice a faith or religion, and if so, could you describe it?
What influence has your childhood religion, if any, had on your view of spirituality?
How have other aspects of your identity (culture, gender, class, educational background, religious upbringing) influenced your spirituality?

What is your major?
Why did you select this major?
Has your faith tradition or history influenced the selection of this major, and if so, how?

Definition Questions

What does spirituality mean to you?
What words do you use to describe spirituality?

What does religion mean to you?
What words do you use to describe religion?

Can you explain how spirituality and religion are similar or different?

What does faith mean to you?
What words do you use to describe faith?

Can you explain how faith is similar or different from spirituality and religion?

Experience Questions

What type of faith community, if any, did you belong to before attending NIU?
Describe your involvement in that community.
How has attending college impacted the practice of your faith?
Have you participated in events, services, classes, or programs during college that were advertised as spiritual or religious or sponsored by campus ministry/religious life/religious department? If not, why not?
What is the role of spirituality in your life?
When do you most think about spirituality in your life?

Describe an event during college that you feel had an impact on your spirituality.
Has there been a person during your college experience who has had an impact on your spirituality? If so, who, and how?

If you were to tell a story about your spiritual life during college, what would it be?
What are the chapter titles?
Who are the characters?
What was the climax?
How does it end?
Is there a sequel?

Newman Center Questions

Why did you choose to become involved with the Newman Center?
Could you describe some of your first experiences at the Newman Center?

LLC Questions

Why did you choose to live on the Catholic floor at the University Plaza?
Could you describe some of your first experiences on the floor?

How do you and your peers engage in conversations on the meaning-of-life?
Do you have conversations in your community about spirituality?
How are they started?
Who starts them?
With whom do you have these conversations?
When?
Where?
What is said and talked about?
How do you usually feel during the conversation?
What are the results of the conversation?
What do you think these conversations do for you?
What sparks conversations about spirituality?
What events, ideas, traumas, religious services, etc. spark these conversations?

What do you expect to gain from this living experience?
What is the best part about living in this community?
What has been the most challenging part of living in this community?
How has living in the community influenced your experience at NIU?
APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF THEMES
Spirituality

   Personal Reflection
   Belief in God
   Organized Religion
   Finding Meaning

Religion

   It’s Communal
   Rules and Obligations
   Connecting With a Higher Power

Faith

Decision to Live in LLC

   Facility and Amenities
      Cost
      Amenities
      Floor Conditions

Dining Program

Catholic Nature of LLC

   Living With Catholic Friends
   Shared Values
   Common Purpose
   Place for Exploration

Environmental Factors Influencing Faith Development

   Opportunities for Invitation
Peer Mentoring

Faith-Development Programming

Discernment Support

Preparation for Life After College