A CASE STUDY OF THE INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND LEARNING
AT A CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

A Dissertation by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God and my family. To my husband, a single dedication page cannot do justice to the role you played during this arduous process. Thank you for the countless hours you spent managing all aspects of our home and family so I could continue my education. I’m so grateful for the opportunity you provided. Thank you for your unwavering support and encouragement, for being a sounding board for ideas, for celebrating the milestones, and for acting as a cattle prod when needed. You are a true servant leader who has helped me to become better through this process.

To my two sons, thank you for your encouragement and support as well. It has been interesting to have three of us taking college classes at the same time. I’m proud of your efforts to continue your own education, and hope you will both remain life-long learners.

To my parents, thank you for modeling the importance of learning as I was growing up. You demonstrated it was possible to return to school and continue your education as a non-traditional student. You always encouraged your children to grow in faith and in academic knowledge. For that, I am grateful.

To my Lord, I pray my work reflects excellence, not for my glory, but for Yours. The Bible says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (NIV, Colossians 3:23-24). This work is dedicated to that cause; may it be pleasing to You.
“Leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin” (Schein, 2004, p. 1).

The word “coin” brings to mind two images, a silver coin and a candy coin. An authentic coin is solid, has value, and is worth the same amount regardless which side is visible. A chocolate coin consists of a soft center with a shiny, foil coating. An organization should exemplify the solid coin, where the culture is solid, the underlying assumptions are clearly understood, and the leadership style is aligned with the needs and values of the organization. When leadership tries to manipulate the culture or mandate the values and beliefs of an organization without getting buy-in from the people involved, the organization will end up with a shiny cover (i.e. vision or mission statement) but will melt from the inside when the heat is on.
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ABSTRACT

Many faith-based institutions articulate a mission of bringing faith and scholarship together. The integration of faith and learning is widely discussed, yet limited empirical research of the concept exists. This qualitative case study provides insight into the daily, lived experiences of the campus community at a small, private, liberal arts college as they worked together to achieve the mission of Christ-centered education. The study was designed to facilitate understanding of how the organizational culture of an institution influenced daily life; to see if participants perceived the organization as living the mission of integrating faith and learning. The college had a full-time enrollment of 281 students in traditional, resident-based programs, and about 400 non-traditional, on-ground and online students. Document reviews, interviews, and focus group sessions with faculty, staff, and students were utilized. Upper-level administrators (4) participated in individual interviews. Two focus group sessions each were held for faculty (11), staff (14), and students (11), for a total of 40 participants. Data were analyzed through the lenses of organizational culture and transformational leadership. Findings revealed both culture and leadership played a role in helping the community walk the talk, and four conclusions related specifically to the integration of faith and learning. First, language is important. The phrase, integration of faith and learning, articulates a concept that is both too broad and too narrow to provide a model for empirical research. Second, institutional culture influences the ability of the college to achieve its mission. Third, faculty face challenges similar to those described by other researchers. And, fourth support is needed to facilitate the process of integrating faith and learning in the academic areas. These conclusions imply schools should discuss what the integration of faith and learning means for their unique campus culture, and align leadership with organizational culture to support the achievement of their missions.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Mission. Purpose. Identity. These words are often used to describe the goals or intentions of various institutions. Educational organizations articulate their mission and vision through formal statements in an effort to communicate their principles and function to the broader public. Mission statements may contain strategic plans (Mission, 2005) or answer important questions related to purpose, uniqueness, products, values, and vision (Mission statement, 2003). In a general sense, mission statements provide insight into the stated activities and goals of an organization.

Researchers have described various contextual uses of mission statements. For example, mission statements may serve to legitimize the institution for stakeholders and accrediting bodies, provide operational direction and unification to the internal community, encourage a common focus for the organization, and promote the institution through its articulation in recruiting materials (Atkinson, 2008; Berg, Csikszentmihalyi, & Nakamura, 2003; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). A well-articulated mission statement can also unite external and internal stakeholders.

Mission statements can provide challenges for institutions as well. Research has shown school mission statements do not always accurately reflect actual experiences (Delucchi, 1997; Scouller, 2012). Sometimes they are described as surface-level and deliberately vague (Firmin & Gilson, 2010; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Such findings lead a person to question. How are these mission statements carried out? Do the statements really embody the lived experiences of those involved in the organization? Is there alignment between the articulated mission statement and the actual work environment of the institution? How is the mission statement understood
and applied by those living and working in the organization? How does the institutional community make meaning of their particular mission?

These are challenging questions, particularly for institutions of higher education, which can have competing influences. Take for example small, private, liberal-arts colleges. Many are founded by private, faith-based organizations, yet must operate in the often public realm of education. This challenge is not uncommon; numerous faith-based institutions of higher learning exist in the United States. In 2009, about 20% of all accredited, non-profit, postsecondary institutions in the United States identified themselves as religiously affiliated (Rine, 2012). Many of these private, religiously affiliated colleges have articulated, through their mission statements, a specific commitment to integrating the tenets of their faith into the learning environment. To illustrate, Woodrow (2006) completed an analysis of the mission statements of private colleges associated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). The data, collected from 105 institutions in 2004, revealed the two most used words in the mission statements of CCCU schools were Christian and education. These results were verified by different researchers (Firmin & Gilson, 2010) who collected data in 2006. Firmin and Gilson also analyzed mission statements from private colleges associated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). Their study of 107 CCCU member institutions revealed the same two most used words: Christian and education.

**Research Problem**

A commitment to bringing faith and scholarship together is articulated in the mission statements of many Christian institutions of higher education. The concept has been described using such phrases as “integration of faith and learning” (Holmes, 1987), “faith-learning integration” (Hasker, 1992), “Christ-centered scholarship,” “incorporation of faith and
“integration of knowledge,” “value-based education,” “integration of life, faith, and values,” “faith-informed vocation,” “dialogue between faith and reason,” “the creation and redemption of scholarship” (Glanzer, 2008), and other variations. For the purposes of this research, the phrase integration of faith and learning will be used to describe the concept. This ideal is articulated in promotional materials and seen on web pages. Similar statements are evident in job descriptions and core value statements of these institutions. A number of various, denominational-affiliated universities across the United States have even developed foundations, centers, and institutes to facilitate the integration of faith and learning, another sign of commitment to the cause.

While a number of colleges and universities have articulated missions committed to a faith-based, educational experience, it is unclear how this concept is actually accomplished. The phrase “integration of faith and learning” was made popular in Arthur Holmes’ (1987) book, The Idea of a Christian College. Since that time, the phrase has maintained its popularity and is often discussed in circles of Christian higher education. However, the concept is both broad and abstract, providing challenges to institutions which articulate the concept in their vision and mission statements.

Challenges are found in a variety of areas. First, a common definition and understanding of integration of faith and learning has not been agreed upon by scholars (Nwosu, 1999). This has made the concept more difficult to study; resulting in limited empirical evidence to inform the process or give insight into how the integration of faith and learning is experienced on Christian college campuses. Second, it is unclear how institutions communicate this mission to faculty, staff and students. Third, there is a lack of understanding of how those in administrative and leadership roles facilitate progress toward the mission and the articulated goal of integrating
faith in the learning environment. Fourth, there is the challenge of understanding how faculty, staff, and students make meaning of and experience this mission; a much deeper and complex issue than a short phrase seen on a college website or published in a brochure.

A few studies related to college mission statements have been conducted. Most of the studies analyzed the statements themselves, looking for trends and key words and phrases (Atkinson, 2008; Delucchi, 1997; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). One study of mission statements related specifically to Christian colleges and universities (Firmin & Gilson, 2010), but it also studied key words and phrases. These studies did not examine the relationship between the mission statement and the actual daily practice at the institutions. In fact, further study of the phenomenon has been recommended (Boerema, 2011; Firmin & Gilson, 2010; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). In a study designed to establish a research agenda for Christian schools, Boerema (2011) found the link between stated mission and practice to be the most requested topic for research. There has also been a call for selected site visits to study how institutions operationalize mission statements (Morphew & Hartley, 2006) and a suggestion of further research in the form of interviews to understand what happens on a daily basis (Firmin & Gilson, 2010). In short, there is a need for qualitative research to understand how mission statements are understood, applied, and lived out on a daily basis. This is particularly needed at Christian colleges where there is a stated commitment to unite faith and scholarship.

A study of administrator, faculty, staff and student perceptions of a Christian institutional mission statement can benefit the research community in a variety of ways. First, it can help fill a gap in knowledge of how mission statements influence the day-to-day operations of a college campus. Second, it may reveal aspects of organizational culture that support or impede the
institution in achieving its mission. Third, a study conducted at a Christian college can inform practice at other such colleges that articulate a unique mission of integrating faith and learning.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine how the mission statement at a Christian institution was lived out; how the goal of bringing together scholarship and faith occurred on a Christian campus. Three particular areas studied included institutional support for the integration of faith and learning, campus community perspectives of faith and learning, and current practices related to the integration of faith and learning.

This study sought to answer three questions related to the mission of integrating faith and learning on a Christian college campus:

1) How do upper-level administrators interpret, communicate, and support the mission of a Christian college?

2) What does the integration of faith and learning mean to the campus faculty, staff, and students?

3) How do faculty, staff, and students describe their experiences related to the integration of faith and learning on campus?

These questions were likely to be highly influenced by the culture of the institution and the espoused and enacted beliefs of the campus community.

**Theoretical Framework – Organizational Culture and Transformational Leadership**

Organizational culture and leadership was the initial theoretical framework chosen for this study. The plan was to utilize organizational culture as the lens through which to view the findings. Leadership was originally important to the framework only in that it applied to the view of culture as either a variable or a root metaphor. However, following analysis of the data,
it became apparent leadership was much more important than originally perceived. Bass (1998) discussed the interaction of organizational culture and leadership:

Leaders create and reinforce norms and behaviors within the culture. The norms develop because of what leaders stress as important, how they deal with crises, and the way they provide role models, and whom they attract to join them in their organizations. (p. 63)

One theory of this relationship between culture and leadership is called transformational leadership (Bass, 1985). This transformational leadership theory was added to the theoretical framework for this study, and will be described following the discussion of organizational culture.

**Organizational Culture**

Understanding institutional culture can provide insight into how members of an organization make meaning of, experience, and enact the concept of integrating faith and learning at a particular institution. However, understanding culture can be challenging, as the nature of culture is very complex. Various descriptions of organizational culture exist. Owens (2001) described culture as “the behavioral norms, assumptions, and beliefs of an organization” (p. 145). Other descriptions included “the interpretive system of a particular organization” (Ritti & Levy, 2010, p. 10), and “a system of commonly accepted meanings and commonly held views about what constitutes proper beliefs, attitudes, and motives” (Ritti & Levy, 2010, p. 11). These descriptions illustrate the difficulty of accessing culture, as assumptions, beliefs and motives cannot be directly observed.

Various theories relating to culture have been utilized in research. Generally, these theories can be categorized into two groups: culture as a variable, and culture as a root metaphor (Smircich, 1983). Those who see culture as a variable seek to measure, manage, and create
cultures in an effort to control organizations and make them more effective (Meek, 1988). The problem with this approach is it assumes there is one best culture for the organization, and that this culture can be manipulated by management. However, Meek (1988) argued “culture as a whole cannot be consciously manipulated” (p. 462) and should be broken down into sub-concepts when studied. The culture-as-variable approach regards culture as an independent variable which can be controlled, failing to take into account the complexity of culture.

In this study, culture is viewed as a root metaphor, not a variable to be manipulated. Those who see culture as a root metaphor view it as a way of interpreting and describing an organization. This approach views culture as something an organization is not something an organization has (Smircich, 1983). Culture is used as a metaphor in an effort to conceptualize and understand how shared meaning emerges through social interaction (Meek, 1988). Culture is one of several metaphors used to describe organizations (Morgan, 1980), but metaphors are subjective and must be used with caution, as any one metaphor presents a limited view of a complex situation (Morgan, 2006). Researchers with this perspective study shared knowledge and beliefs, shared meanings and symbols, and social interactions which occur within an institution (Smircich, 1983). Since culture is not directly observable, researchers must work in an interpretive mode, searching for meaning.

Schein (2004) described three levels of culture: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts are the most easily observed, and examples include physical artifacts, technology, products, published values, etc. Formal, published mission statements are also an example of cultural artifacts. While artifacts are easily observed, it is dangerous to make assumptions based on artifacts, because the same artifact may have different meanings in different cultures. Espoused beliefs and values are things people say are important.
Schein (2004) provides examples which include strategies, philosophies, and goals. The problem with this level of culture is that it does not provide a complete picture. In addition, the espoused beliefs may be desired goals for the future. It is important to remember these values do not tell the whole story of the organization. The third level of culture, and the most difficult to observe, is basic underlying assumptions. These underlying assumptions, unspoken and hidden from view, are foundational to what actually occurs in organizations. Schein (2004) explained basic underlying assumptions are typically non-debatable and are the essence of culture. Members often explain these “unwritten rules for getting along in the organization [as] … ‘the way we do things around here’” (Schein, 2010, p. 15). This level of culture is developed as members participate in shared experiences and assimilate into the culture of the institution.

When analyzing institutional perspectives on integrating faith and learning, it is important to consider the culture of the institution and how that culture relates to personal, espoused beliefs and underlying assumptions about faith and learning. Schein (2010) provided a detailed look at the impact of culture on organizational decisions. Schein defined culture as:

- a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 18)

Personal beliefs about integrating faith and learning are likely influenced by the culture of the institution where people work. Yet what appears to be agreed upon at the artifacts level and the espoused beliefs level may, indeed be different when underlying assumptions are revealed.

Morgan (2006) also articulated the culture metaphor as one way of understanding organizations. He stressed culture could not be imposed on a group. Rather, culture was
developed over time, in the context of social interaction. Morgan explained how the history of the group impacted decisions made, and described one case where “corporate culture may have been the single most important factor standing between success and failure” (Morgan, 2006, p. 128). In short, culture influences the success of an organization.

Culture is learned through socialization—mostly by watching and listening. It is more about what is done than what is said. Since culture is created through shared meaning, it is important to understand how shared meaning emerges from shared commitments. Weick (2001) places commitment in the context of interdependent action and illustrates how commitment is connected to sensemaking in organizations:

Commitment focuses the sensemaking process on three things: an elapsed action, socially acceptable justification for that action, and the potential for subsequent activities to validate or threaten the justification. Thus, commitment drives interaction patterns by tying behaviors, explanations, social support and expectations together in a causal sequence. (p. 14)

Therefore, when people are given a choice, and the decision is public and irrevocable, they are more committed because their actions are harder to disown or undo (Weick, 2001). This context may prove insightful in understanding the level of commitment to the institutional mission among varying members of the organization.

The culture of an organization can sometimes be threatened. For example, when an organization experiences change, it can cause the organization to reflect on its real purpose. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) studied the role of organizational culture in an organization over a 25 year period. In responding to threats to its identity, the members of the organization turned to organizational symbols, practices, and collective history in an effort to make sense of their
organization. The study led to development of a theoretical framework of organizational response to identity threats. This framework addressed both “making sense” (questioning what the organization is about) and “giving sense” (stating what the organization is about) of organizational identity (p. 441). The first part of the model incorporated external images, cultural practices and artifacts in making sense of the organization. The second part of the model included projecting desired images and embedding claims in the process of giving sense to the organization.

While the above framework was developed in response to identity threats within an organization, the concepts of making sense and giving sense can be helpful in studying organizational culture as well. Making sense (questioning) can be viewed as internal integration and giving sense (stating) can be viewed as external adaptations, two words Schein (2004) used to describe organizational culture. Stating can be viewed as the first two levels of culture described by Schein—artifacts, and espoused beliefs and values. When seeking to understand the deeper level of culture, the underlying assumptions, questioning individuals and groups can be used in an effort to understand the internal integration of the organization’s mission statement. Organizational culture provides a powerful lens through which to view the problem of how Christian colleges make sense of and give sense to their unique mission statements on a daily basis.

**Transformational Leadership**

Leadership theories abound. Transformational leadership was specifically selected as a theoretical lens for this study for two reasons. First, transformational leadership has been recognized as an effective style of leadership within the current context of a rapidly changing society (Basham, 2012; Humphreys, 2005; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; B. N.
Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004) or in times of uncertainty and turbulence (Basham, 2012; Bass, 1985, 1998). Transformational leadership exemplifies an adaptability and willingness to change, where the leader is “motivated by a sense of mission to recreate the organization to survive in a challenging external environment” (B. N. Smith, et al., 2004, p. 86).

Transformational leadership also has been described as “a bridge between old and new views of leadership” (Rost, 1991). Rather than focus on traditional leadership characteristics, transformational leadership is an approach that focuses on the process of leadership, and how the leader interacts with the followers (Kezar, et al., 2006). This contemporary style of leadership emphasizes concern for others while meeting the needs of an increasingly changing world.

Second, the theoretical lens of transformational leadership aligns well with the organizational culture framework being used for the study. Covey (1985) described the objective of transformational leadership was to transform an organization. He said the goal was “to change them in mind and heart; enlarge vision, insight, and understanding; clarify purposes; make behavior congruent with beliefs, principles, or values; and bring about changes that are permanent, self-perpetuating, and momentum building” (p. 3). Transformational leadership theory also posits that leaders’ behaviors stem from personal values and beliefs (Humphreys & Einstein, 2003), which aligns well with the topic of integration of faith and learning.

The seminal work related to transformational leadership was articulated by Burns (1978) in Leadership. Burns’ work was largely connected to Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs and he described it as a process where “one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Burns described the leader’s task as:
consciousness-raising on a wide plane. …The leader’s fundamental act is to induce people to be aware or conscious of what they feel—to feel their true needs so strongly, to define their values so meaningfully, that they can be moved to purposeful action. (p. 43-44)

Although Burns used the term transforming to reflect the progress from one hierarchy to another, the theory has since become known as transformational leadership through the work of others (Bass, 1985; Rost, 1991).

Burns’ work was further developed by one of his protégés. Bass (1985) articulated three interrelated ways organizational transformation was possible to achieve. The first way was to increase awareness of the importance of the task. The second was to encourage followers to focus on the greater good of the organization rather than their own interests. The third was to expand the hierarchical needs level of the followers. Through the development and use of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), Bass (1985) operationalized and tested the transformational leadership theory. He found three elements of transformational leadership: inspirational leadership, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Continued research and refinement led to four components, or leadership behaviors, identified for the transformational leadership theory. These components were idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 2000; Bass & Avolio, 1994). Bass and Avolio (1994) believed transformational leaders would achieve “superior results” by using one or more of these four components. Each of the four is described in more detail here.

**Idealized influence.** Transformational leaders are respected, have earned the trust of their followers, and serve as role models with high moral and ethical standards. These types of
leaders consider others’ needs over their own personal needs and desires. When he summarized two decades of work related to transformational leadership, Bass (1999) included charisma in the description of idealized influence. He added, “Idealized influence and inspirational leadership are displayed when the leader envisions a desirable future, articulates how it can be reached, sets an example to be followed, sets high standards of performance, and shows determination and confidence” (Bass, 1999, p. 11).

**Inspirational motivation.** Inspirational motivation is observed through leaders’ enthusiasm and optimistic views. Transformational leaders communicate expectations clearly, and demonstrate a personal commitment to the goals of the organization. Providing meaningful and challenging work, while sharing the vision and setting high expectations are ways transformational leaders inspire excellence.

**Intellectual stimulation.** Intellectual stimulation is described as fostering creativity, problem solving, innovation, and taking calculated risks (Bass, 2000). Followers are encouraged to “be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways” (Bass & Avolio, 1994, p. 3). A transformational leader encourages others to share problems, explore creative options, and share stories of successful approaches.

**Individualized consideration.** Transformational leaders treat people as individuals with different developmental needs. They provide mentoring and coaching, and encourage the use of feedback in order to learn. Employees are encouraged to attend trainings, and learning opportunities are provided. Tasks are often delegated, in an effort to further develop individuals; support is provided if necessary. This type of leadership focuses on the “self-concept of the employee and the employee’s sense of self-worth” (Bass, 2000, p. 24). In addition, a
transformational leader listens to his followers and engages in personal interactions with each follower.

Bass (2000) described transformational leadership as increasing the satisfaction, effectiveness and commitment of an organization. He stated:

Transformational leaders raise the awareness of their constituencies about what is important, increase concerns for achievement, self-actualization and ideals. They move followers to go beyond their own self-interests for the good of their group, organization or community, country or society as a whole. (p. 21)

The theory of transformational leadership aligns with a framework of organizational culture because it emphasizes the good of the group. It is also consistent with “Judaic-Christian philosophical traditions and discourses on the leadership of the moral sage that presuppose a trusting community as the central life context” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 2004, p. 177). Together, the lenses of organizational culture and transformational leadership provide the theoretical framework for this study.
Chapter 2

Review of Research and Related Literature

Research and related literature relevant to this study covered three, broad themes. This section of the dissertation provides background information on mission statements, organizational culture, and integration of faith and learning. The review of research related to mission statements begins with research from the broader category of business, moves to findings in educational settings, and finally articulates cautions related to mission statements. The review of organizational culture literature also begins with a broader category, moves to educational settings in general, and then discusses organizational culture of Christian institutions. In the final section, integrating faith and learning is discussed. This review includes faculty and student perspectives of integrating faith and learning, ways institutions can support this goal, and challenges related to the task.

Mission Statements

Every organization needs a reason to exist. This purpose is often articulated in a mission statement. The concept of mission statements began in corporate America, and became popular in that arena prior to moving to educational venues. Abrahams (1995) believed organizations without a mission statement would struggle. He described corporate mission statements as providing purpose, identity, unification, and a foundation for the company to build upon. He also mentioned a corporate mission statement should include the four basic components of a target audience, a concise length, a chosen format, and a title, key words, and phrases that set the tone. Abrahams (1995) provided a list of key words and the number of times they were used by 301 top companies in America. The most frequently used words included service (230), mission (221), customers (211), quality (194), value (183), employees (157), growth (118), environment
These words obviously related to business and industry, where the purpose of business organizations revolves around economic issues. In order to survive economically, the mission of a business needed to consider all constituents, including investors, suppliers, employees, community, and customers (Schein, 2010). However, it is important to remember that words—such as those provided in Abraham’s book—are only words. They do not guarantee a company will actually operate in the manner described in its mission statement.

**Educational mission statements.** Educational institutions have not always had mission statements, as it was presumed everyone knew the purpose of school. However, the popularity of the corporate mission statement influenced educational arenas, and many schools began developing mission statements in the 1990’s. Mission statements of postsecondary schools became an optional part of the reporting process to the government in 2003 and mandatory beginning in 2004 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). The information was reported to the federal government in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) report. This report is required of all post-secondary institutions participating in federal student financial aid programs, and the data are made available in a searchable, electronic database for anyone to access. This relatively new requirement illustrates the recent development of mission statements at the institutional level and their importance as a tool for communicating the purpose of schools to those outside of the organizations.

Mission statements of educational organizations will necessarily be different from corporate mission statements, as schools serve a unique purpose. However, the concept of a mission statement “balancing the needs of different stakeholders” remains the same (Schein, 2010, p. 75). In describing school mission statements, Stemler and Bebell (2012) explained education is viewed from academic, legislative, legal, and business perspectives. They pointed
out “no single educational philosophy or approach can be ‘best’ suited for a nation with such wide-ranging aspirations and a diverse population,” and advocated the need for distinct mission statements in order to most effectively serve the various constituents (Stemler & Bebell, 2012, p. 172). This is a different approach from a time when the purpose of schools was assumed to be uniform and agreed upon.

Although Stemler and Bebell (2012) advocated for each school to have a distinct mission statement, their analysis of school mission statements revealed common themes. In 1999, Stemler and Bebell (2012) developed a method of coding school mission statements which revealed eleven categories. These categories were grouped into three broad themes—developmental, preparatory, and environmental. The developmental themes focused on the importance of developing the cognitive, social, emotional, civic, physical, and spiritual elements in students. The preparatory themes were focused on preparing students for integration into a vocation, community, or global society. The environmental themes emphasized providing a challenging or a safe and nurturing educational environment. When this coding scheme was applied to 421 high schools from varying geographic areas across the United States, the researchers found some commonalities. Over half of the high schools had mission statements emphasizing three of the developmental themes: civic, emotional, and cognitive. Conversely, the least cited codes were physical and spiritual development. In fact, only one percent of the schools articulated the spiritual theme in their mission statements, even though nine of the 421 schools (2.1%) were parochial. The mission statements of these high schools illustrated a limited emphasis on spiritual development—even at parochial schools where it could reasonably be expected.
Conversely, research has shown Christian colleges and universities to be set apart from secular institutions by their mission statements. Woodrow (2006) analyzed the frequency of words used in 104 Christian college and university mission statements. This study found Christian (N=70) and education (N=62) were the two words used the most often, with world (also society) and service in the top five high-frequency words. A few years later, Firmin and Gilson (2010) found similar results when they analyzed the frequency of words used in mission statements of 107 Christian colleges and universities. Four themes—education, Christian, service, and society—appeared in over half of the mission statements. The two themes most often observed were education (70%) and Christian (68%). Firmin and Gilson (2010) challenged CCCU member institutions to assess the degree to which their mission statements reflect their daily practice and values. This was an appropriate challenge, given mission statements are simply words on a page, not necessarily reflected in the day-to-day lived experiences of those on campus.

A study conducted across a variety of higher education institutional types also provided information relative to the mission statements of private colleges. Morphew and Hartley (2006) conducted an exploratory study of higher education by examining key elements of those mission statements in relation to the type of college or university making the statement. They used the 2000 Carnegie Classification System (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2001) to delineate types of institutions. The document analysis was conducted for 300 public and private, four-year institutions from the categories of Baccalaureate Colleges (general and liberal arts), Masters Colleges and Universities (categories I and II), and Doctoral/Research Universities (extensive and intensive). The study revealed key differences between public and private mission statements at all levels of higher education. Morphew and Hartley (2006)
suggested the values of benefactors drove the content of the mission statements more than Carnegie classification. For example, the mission statements of public institutions focused more on public service and diversity. The mission statements of private institutions tended to emphasize formative components of education such as developing students and preparing them for the real world. As a result of the study, Morphew and Hartley suggested mission statements were used more for communication with external audiences than for planning or cultural purposes, and served normative and political roles in legitimizing the institution. In other words, they are a means of communicating to benefactors and stakeholders outside of the organization that “we understand what you want and we’re going to deliver it to you” (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 469). It is also important to note a word of caution provided by the researchers of this study. They discussed the varied nuances of terms used in mission statements, providing an example using the word service. Public institution mission statements tended to equate service with civic duty, promoting the ideals of being productive citizens who are engaged in the community. However, the term service in private school mission statements held a different connotation. These statements focused more on service to humanity and impacting the global society. Given their findings, Morphew and Hartley (2006) suggested preliminary support existed for the idea that mission statements could be seen as symbolic artifacts. They cautioned against extrapolating behaviors from the espoused values in the mission statements, and suggested targeted site visits as a method of confirming the alignment of institutional behavior with mission statements. Site visits would allow a deeper level of culture to be observed, moving beyond the surface level of artifacts such as stated words.

**Cautions related to mission statements.** As illustrated above, caution should be taken when researching mission statements. Morphew and Hartley (2006) explained mission
statements with similar language may indeed have various connotations depending on the setting. They also cautioned against assuming behaviors based on a written artifact. This caution aligns with one of the main criticisms found in mission statement research—the lack of alignment of the mission statement with lived, daily experiences. At the secondary level, Scouller (2012) found a lack of connection between mission statements and teaching practices. At the post-secondary level, research also confirmed inconsistencies existed between mission statements and college experiences. Delucchi (1997) studied the mission statements of over 300 colleges who articulated claims about a liberal arts education. The 2000 Carnegie Classification for liberal arts baccalaureate colleges required a minimum of 50% of awarded degrees to be in liberal arts fields (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2001). Applying a standard where at least 40% of degrees awarded should be liberal arts degrees to be classified as a liberal arts college, Delucchi (1997) determined many inconsistencies existed between college mission statements and the types of degrees awarded. This research supports the viewpoint that a written mission statement may not reflect the actual, lived experiences of those at the institution.

A second criticism of mission statements is they are too general. Some studies have described mission statements as having little value because they tend to be comprised of vague, surface-level statements (Firmin & Gilson, 2010; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). In a postsecondary study, Taylor and Morphew (2010) analyzed mission statements for 100 private, baccalaureate level colleges. They analyzed the official mission statements found on college websites and compared them to mission statements published by U.S. News and World Report. The results revealed considerable differences between the official mission statement posted on the college website and the mission statement published in the U.S. News and World Report. This raised
some questions. Why were the official mission statements different from those appearing in a magazine? Did administrators completing the *U.S. News and World Report* survey not know the mission statement? Did they fill out the report based on their memory of the statement? Did they include what they believed to be the mission of the college? The researchers suggested institutions used the *U.S. News and World Report* publication as recruiting material, and intentionally used wording which would appeal to a broad audience. Words such as excellence, leadership, skills, and diversity were referred to as “strategically deployed shifters”—words which are interpreted differently by various readers, and therefore appeal to a broader audience (Taylor & Morphew, 2010, p. 499). The concept of various meanings for the same term was a caution also issued by Morphew and Hartley (2006). Taylor and Morphew (2010) noted one exception to the strategically deployed shifter theme. They found colleges which were intentionally religious used terms like “Christ centered”—terms the researchers did not consider as appealing to a broad audience. Rather, the words were considered limiting (Taylor & Morphew, 2010). Christian college mission statements were bold and direct in *U.S. News and World Report* data when the mission statements of other institutions were vague.

The study described by Taylor and Morphew (2010) has some clear limitations. One limitation lies in the difference between an official mission statement and the heart-felt interpretation of the mission statement by a college administrator. The researchers themselves acknowledged the *U.S. News and World Report* statements were “not official” (p. 485). Additionally, the *U.S. News and World Report* statements were retrieved from an archive maintained by *U.S. News and World Report*. There was no indication of when the archive was last updated. It is possible colleges had updated their mission statements since they were archived at *U.S. News and World Report*. 

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It is also possible researcher bias influenced the interpretation of data. For instance, the researchers made the assumption phrases such as “Christ-centered” would limit the number of prospective students (Taylor & Morphew, 2010, p. 501). Additionally, their use of phrases such as “strategically deployed shifters,” and “carefully crafted” to “signal multiple meanings” in order to reach a diverse number of students and take their “target populations…to the bank” (p. 499) implied an ulterior motive was intentionally driving the variations in mission statements. While their interpretation of the data is possible, there are also several alternative explanations.

One final caution regarding the Taylor and Morphew (2010) study is necessary. There is a danger in making assumptions about motivations and underlying beliefs and values based solely upon artifacts (Schein, 2010). In fact, the researchers themselves acknowledged the need for additional qualitative research (Taylor & Morphew, 2010). Qualitative research is needed to reveal a deeper understanding of processes by which decisions relating to mission statements were made and how those mission statements were lived out on a daily basis.

The caution against making assumptions about organizational culture based upon a stated mission applies to other research as well. Konz and Ryan (1999) analyzed the mission statements of 28 U.S. Jesuit universities to determine if they were able to maintain their organizational spirituality. They argued all Jesuit universities “should share the same spirituality, enunciated in the same basic manner” (p. 208), and concluded that since terms specific to the Jesuits were not evident in the mission statements of these universities, they were struggling to maintain organizational spirituality. Interestingly enough, Konz and Ryan (1999) referenced the work of Schein in relationship to organizational culture, but failed to heed his caution that understanding culture cannot occur at the surface level of artifacts (i.e. mission statements) (Schein, 1996). Additionally, they stated, “all members of the organization would
need to agree upon the terms or ideas used in the statement” (Konz & Ryan, 1999, p. 204). This statement is also counter to the idea of various sub-cultures existing within organizations (Schein, 2010).

Although there are perceived challenges with mission statements, almost all institutions are expected to have one. Meacham (2008) suggested senior faculty should communicate the values, traditions, and heritage of the mission to new faculty and new administrators. Meacham also suggested senior faculty explain how the mission guided the academic programs on campus, and join in collaborative conversation about what faculty does together for the students. This illustrates how a stated mission—an artifact—must be interpreted and applied in the day-to-day experiences of institution members. Additionally, the suggestion of communicating values, traditions, and heritage is linked to deeper levels of organizational culture, and implies the manner in which the mission statement is lived out will likely be based on the unique organizational culture of the institution.

**Organizational Culture**

A number of approaches exist for describing and analyzing organizations. Morgan (2006) articulated a variety of metaphors—everything from machines to psychic prisons—as a lens through which to view organizations. One of the images he discussed was culture. Morgan cautioned, “No single theory will ever give us a perfect or all-purpose point of view” but will provide a “way of thinking” about an organization (Morgan, 2006, p. 5). Others also have described culture as a beneficial way of viewing various organizations (Owens, 2001; Ritti & Levy, 2010; Schein, 2004). Understanding the culture of an organization can help an individual understand why things occur the way they do.
As previously mentioned, there are two broad categories relating to researchers’ perspectives of culture (Meek, 1988). One perspective views culture as something an organization has, or as a variable to be controlled and managed; the second approach treats culture as something an organization is; an outgrowth of social interactions which occur in the organization (Smircich, 1983). This research sought to understand how a Christian college interpreted, communicated, and supported its stated mission, as well as the perceptions and experiences of upper-level administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Culture, therefore, was not viewed as a variable to be manipulated by management. Rather, culture was viewed as a root metaphor for understanding how the mission statement was communicated, internalized, and lived out at a Christian college.

**Organizational culture in education.** Culture as a root metaphor has been used to describe organizational culture in schools. Understanding the culture of a school requires one to observe how values and practices are communicated to members of the organization. Owens (2001) identified six overlapping elements as determining the culture of a school: values and beliefs, traditions and rituals, history, behavior norms, heroes and heroines, and stories and myths. These elements are consistent with the levels of culture Schein (2010) described as artifact or espoused beliefs and values. The saga is another example of this level. Clark (1998) used the term *organizational saga* to describe a story which provided a strong sense of unity in educational institutions. The saga became an important, heroic story that was communicated to all members of the institution and bound the participants together. This concept is consistent with Owens (2001) description of symbolic elements. The saga was one way in which the culture of the institution was defined.
While discovering important, historical events through symbolic elements of rituals, traditions, heroic actors, myths, and stories enhances understanding of the organizational culture of the school, it is important to remember these elements represent the first two levels of culture. The third level of culture, basic underlying assumptions, is more difficult to observe (Schein, 2010). To comprehend this multifaceted level of culture, a researcher should probe for a deeper understanding of why the rituals, stories and myths, behavior norms, sagas, and other elements of school culture exist.

In the higher education arena, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) described six organizational cultures typically found in American and Canadian institutions of higher education. The purpose of their book was not to promote any particular culture type, but to encourage the reader to develop an understanding of and ability to work within any institutional culture. In fact, the authors stressed the idea of institutions being comprised of combinations, variations and/or hybrids of the cultures they discussed. These six higher education cultures were described as collegial, managerial, developmental, advocacy, virtual, and tangible. The collegial culture was described as a traditional, research oriented and faculty governed institution, which focused on generating, interpreting, and disseminating knowledge. Managerial cultures tended to be found in Catholic schools and community colleges, where the majority of faculty load related to teaching. Competence and efficiency were important, managing enrollments and finances was critical, and hierarchical structures were in place. The developmental structure was described as seeking personal growth for everyone in the organization. This culture was seen as more idealistic, less structured, and focused on leadership through service. Advocacy culture developed to address procedural injustices, and uses collective bargaining and mediation to
address issues. In an advocacy approach, faculty from varied academic areas had a common goal to work toward together.

In addition to the four cultures mentioned above, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) explained two new cultures have emerged in higher education. The fifth educational culture was described as virtual. This culture exists in a global, informational technology realm, which provides new ways of interacting and doing business. A tangible culture was the final culture described for higher education organizations. This culture valued historical tradition, community, and value-based education in a traditional, physical location. The six educational cultures Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) described illustrate not all institutions are the same, nor do they operate in the same manner. Therefore, even though a large number of Christian institutions espouse a commitment to integrating faith and learning, those mission statements will likely be communicated, interpreted, and lived out in different ways at various institutions.

Organizational culture of Christian colleges and universities. Research related specifically to organizational culture in Christian colleges and universities is extremely limited. Mills (2003) proposed it was “imperative for Christian school administrators, educators, and the community to consciously define the aspects of school culture that reflect the shared biblical values of the Christian school community” (p. 129). She theorized the culture of a Christian school should include a vision that is Christ-centered, an interdependent community, service to God and others, and an alignment of stated values, words, and actions. However, research providing insight into how the mission statements of Christian institutions are interpreted throughout the culture and enacted on a daily basis is lacking. The following section will review research from related topics in order to shed light on organizational culture at faith-based institutions.
Organizational research for Christian institutions has largely focused on job satisfaction and retention of employees. To that end, researchers studied organizational climate and commitment rather than organizational culture (Brown & Sargeant, 2007; Oberholster, Taylor V, & Cruise, 2000; Schroder, 2008; Thomas, 2008; Walker, 2013). While there is a perceived connection between organizational climate and organizational culture, a difference exists. Climate *interprets* the perceived organizational atmosphere, referring to individual perceptions. Culture *perpetuates* the norms and assumptions of the organization (Owens, 2001). Recognizing this difference, some findings from organizational climate research will still shed light on the understanding of organizational culture.

A study of organizational climate and commitment in four, Christian universities revealed over half of the 957 respondents had been at their institutions fewer than five years (Thomas, 2008). This could have an impact on the culture, as culture has been described as what is taught to new employees (Schein, 2010). Another study on organizational commitment recommended encouraging academic freedom, and hiring faculty with a strong denominational commitment and a strong faith commitment (Schroder, 2008). However, the concept of academic freedom contributed to polarized views regarding the integration of faith and learning among faculty at some institutions (Lyon, Beaty, Parker, & Carson, 2005). The organizational climate described in these studies relates to the interpretation of organizational culture.

One study of organizational culture in Christian higher education related to the ability of the institution to be innovative. While innovation is not the purpose of this current study, some of the findings are worth mentioning. Obenchain, Johnson, and Dion (2004) found that 51.8% of the 303 Christian institutions in the sample described the dominant culture of their institutions as a “clan.” Clan cultures espouse the attributes of teamwork, family, cohesiveness, and
involvement. The clan culture also values loyalty, commitment, and tradition. Furthermore, this type of culture seeks to develop human resources, morale, and cohesion among organizational members. It makes sense to develop the faculty and administration (human resources) of a Christian college as they are largely responsible for sustaining the faith-based mission. Also of interest in this study is the 19.1% of institutions who classified themselves as “no dominant culture” (Obenchain, et al., 2004). These Christian institutions had two or more competing culture types, which opens the institutions up to possible conflicts. The study surveyed administrators, and recommended future research related to organizational culture at Christian institutions include a cross-representation of various groups in the organization. The recommendation is appropriate when viewing culture as a root metaphor for an organization, as culture is not determined solely by administrators.

The study of organizational culture is often discussed from a positive perspective, especially by those who view culture as a variable to be controlled. This approach suggests doing the right things will create a healthy environment. However, an alternative view—culture as a root metaphor for understanding an organization—is used in this study. When culture is viewed as something an organization is, it is easier to understand that cultures (and sub-cultures) become entrenched and difficult to change. Harris and Hartley (2011) provided an illustration which supports this view. Their qualitative case study of a small, private, faith-based institution provided a cautionary tale of possible polarizing results when the culture of an institution becomes an ideology. Their qualitative research revealed a series of events interpreted by two subgroups at the university. Both factions were committed to the high ethical standards articulated in their faith-based mission, yet each subgroup had different ideas on how this should be accomplished. As the story unfolded, it became clear each group made sense of the situation
in a manner which reinforced their own dogmatic views. The end result was a splintered campus, public dialog through media representation for both sides, and the removal of key administrators—one from each group represented. Interestingly enough, the researchers described a prevailing thought from both sides; if the key administrator would have provided a heartfelt apology, the situation could have been avoided (Harris & Hartley, 2011). The scenario provided an example of competing ideologies and a violation of institutional norms.

As the above research illustrates, colleges and universities have subcultures operating within the larger organizational culture of the institution (Harris & Hartley, 2011; Henck, 2011). This provides opportunities for conflict (Ennis, 2008), even when members of the community espouse the same ideology. In addition to the challenge of maintaining a campus culture of faith (internal adaptation), Christian institutions must also meet the requirements of a changing society (external adaptation). Henck (2011) described this dual accountability to higher education and faith communities as “walking the tightrope” and suggested success was possible if both cultures were understood (p. 213). Intentional research of organizational culture in Christian higher education was also recommended. To complete this type of research, a foundational understanding of the concept of integrating faith with learning is necessary, and an overview is provided in the next section.

**Integration of Faith and Learning**

The phrase “integration of faith and learning” was made popular in Arthur Holmes’ (1987) book, *The Idea of a Christian College*. Since that time, the phrase has maintained its popularity and is often discussed in circles of Christian higher education. However, not everyone likes the word *integration* as it implies bringing together two separate entities. Some
authors assert that faith and learning have always been unified, and the term integration implies
differently.

Theoretical discussions regarding the phrase “faith and learning” contain descriptions
which are typically variations of the abstract phrase. Examples of these variations include
phrases such as “interaction of faith and learning,” “unity of faith and learning,” “thinking
Christianly,” and “creation and redemption of scholarship” (Glanzer, 2008; Glanzer, Beaty, &
Lyon, 2005; Hall, Gorsuch, Malony, Narramore, & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Holmes, 1987;
Lawrence, Burton, & Nwosu, 2005). I did not intend to get caught up in semantics, but desired
to take a broader view of the concept in order to see how a Christian college defined,
communicated, and supported its stated mission of education in a Christian environment, and
how the campus community made meaning of their lived experiences on a daily basis.
Therefore, this section of the literature review focuses on the concept of integrating faith and
learning, faculty and student perspectives, institutional support, and challenges to integrating
faith and learning.

**The concept of integrating faith and learning.** The integration of faith and learning
has been described in different ways. Holmes (1987), who popularized the idea, explained:

Integration should not be seen as an achievement or a position but as an intellectual
activity that goes on as long as we keep learning anything at all. Not only [emphasis
added] as an intellectual activity, however, for integrated learning will contribute to the
integration of faith into every dimension of a person’s life and character. (p. 46)

Following this clarification, Holmes (1987) proposed four approaches to the integration of faith
and learning; attitudinal, ethical, foundational, and worldview. These approaches (which will be
described below) were not suggested as a smorgasbord of individual choices for how to
accomplish a task, but rather interacting components, each contributing to a holistic perspective of how the Christian faith affects learning.

More recently, Ostrander (2009) provided a basic introduction to the concept of integrating faith and learning, beginning with examples of what it was not. These examples included hugging a student at graduation, beginning a class with prayer, and even quoting scripture. All of these actions could occur without ever making a connection to the Christian faith. Following these non-examples, Ostrander described the integration of faith and learning as “relating one’s Christian worldview to an academic discipline. It is the ongoing quest to understand a subject in all of its complexity from a Christian perspective, and then to live out its moral and spiritual implications” (Ostrander, 2009, p. 96). With this understanding, he outlined three levels of faith/learning integration, which will be described below. These levels were the motivational level, the intellectual/foundational level, and the applied/ethical level. Like Holmes (1987), Ostrander (2009) did not intend to imply these levels occurred in isolation. Rather, the integration of faith and learning requires all levels. Christians should not only desire an in-depth content knowledge, but also think deeply about how their worldview is applied to the entirety of their lives.

In addition to the authors’ perspectives cited above, a few empirical studies have attempted to capture both student and faculty descriptions of integrating faith with learning (Burton & Nwosu, 2003; Lawrence, et al., 2005; Nwosu, 1999; Sherr, Huff, & Curran, 2007). Nwosu (1999) used faculty definitions from survey responses to identify three categories of integration; intellectual, lifestyle, and discipleship. Burton and Nwosu (2003) used Holmes’ four approaches and proposed a fifth, pedagogical approach. Sherr, et al. (2007) categorized student perceptions in two ways, relationships and competence. Although various terms were used to
describe the integration of faith and learning, similarities appeared in the literature. This review summarizes this information into five aspects, all of which are part of the whole concept of integrating faith and learning. Each aspect—relational, motivational, intellectual/foundational, applied/ethical, and pedagogical—is described here in more detail.

The relational aspect of integration can be manifest in an assortment of ways. Various descriptions included the importance of a positive, Christ-like attitude for both teachers and students (Holmes, 1987), discipleship (Nwosu, 1999), sincere caring (Sherr, et al., 2007), and creating a safe, classroom environment (Lawrence, et al., 2005). Each of these examples viewed relationships as a way to integrate faith and learning. However, while relationship is seen as an important aspect of a Christian college community, “integration is not simply a matter of encouraging personal relationships between professors and students” (Ostrander, 2009, p. 93). In other words, a relational approach, by itself, does not constitute integration of faith and learning.

The motivational aspect of integration relates to the motivation to learn. Ostrander (2009) described this as the simplest form of integration, where a Christian should be motivated to learn and approach the endeavor with a positive attitude—not because it is a requirement, but out of a deeper desire to know more about the world and God. The attitudinal approach (Holmes, 1987) also fits this category.

The integration of faith and learning may also be seen as intellectual. This aspect includes two broad categories: foundational knowledge, and content specific curriculum. Holmes (1987) described foundational knowledge as understanding philosophical, historical, and biblical principles as well as their underlying assumptions. These concepts are foundational to numerous content specific fields, and are often viewed as easier topics for integration to occur. The second category of the intellectual aspect of faith and learning is focused on specific content
Several resources have recently been published which provide examples of ways to integrate the Christian faith into particular disciplines (Beck, 1991; D.S. Dockery, 2007; David S. Dockery, 2012; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Poe, 2004). Ostrander (2009) described this intellectual/foundational level as occurring along a continuum from implicit to explicit integration. Mathematics was placed on the far left of the continuum with implicit integration, followed by natural sciences, social sciences, history, arts and literature, and finally philosophy/theology on the far right of the continuum with explicit integration. This illustrates the likelihood of faith/learning integration occurring differently in various disciplines.

The applied/ethical aspect of integration refers to more than application of knowledge. It also includes the ethical considerations necessary to apply knowledge in a manner which aligns with a Christian worldview (Ostrander, 2009). A Christian worldview is one where life is viewed holistically; where life, intellectual pursuits, and culture are all seen in relationship to God (Holmes, 1987). Also described as lifestyle (Nwosu, 1999), the applied/ethical aspect of faith and learning integration seeks consistency and alignment between all areas of life, with no compartmentalization.

The pedagogical aspect of faith/learning integration was proposed by Burton and Nwosu (2003). Based on previous work (Nwosu, 1999), they suggested pedagogical approaches would enhance the integration of faith and learning. They suggested active, engaging learning strategies would allow students to apply concepts learned at a deeper level, and discuss faith implications related to the concepts. This idea relates to the application aspect of integration described above. Application requires different pedagogical approaches from traditional, teacher centered models of instruction; which in turn requires more intentional, thoughtful planning by
Faculty members. A discussion of faculty perspectives of the integration of faith and learning, along with challenges they face in the process is provided below.

**Faculty perceptions.** One frequently documented study of higher education religious institutions was conducted over several years, with surveys mailed to faculty at six different colleges and universities from 1994 through 1998. Several published studies drew upon the data generated from these surveys (Lyon, Beaty, & Mixon, 2002; Lyon, et al., 2005; Parker, Beaty, Mencken, & Lyon, 2007; Ream, Beaty, & Lion, 2004). Most, but not all, of the studies were quantitative, and focused on faculty opinions.

One of these studies focused on faculty attitudes related to the integration of faith and learning (Lyon, et al., 2005). Faculty members were asked to select areas of the curriculum where Christian perspectives should be discussed. Possible responses included a list of courses sequenced from broad, abstract application (philosophy) to specific, concrete examples (physics). The researchers expected a variety of responses all along a continuum, from separatist to integrationist, with the majority of faculty avoiding the integrationist perspective. An integrationist was described as someone who favored integrating Christian perspectives throughout the entire curriculum. A separatist was described as believing it was inappropriate to include Christian interpretations anywhere in the curriculum. Rather than receiving a continuum of responses as the researchers had expected, the results of the study revealed faculty were on one of two ends of the spectrum; an integrationist or a separatist. Almost half of faculty members surveyed were classified as integrationists, and 36% were separatists. Of interest is the fact that separatists were more likely to be found at larger research universities while integrationists were more likely to work at liberal arts colleges. Additionally, over one-third of
the faculty at all religious institutions surveyed did not think Christian perspectives should be integrated in the curriculum in a systematic manner.

Another study drawn from the same data analyzed how faculty adapted to working at a religious institution. A conflict between underlying assumptions of the faculty and espoused beliefs of the university was found by Lyon, et al. (2002). Faculty from four schools in the study articulated a commitment to both academic and religious goals. However, if a conflict arose, faculty at three of the four institutions said academic goals should trump religious goals. These studies reveal possible challenges for a Christian college which articulates a commitment to integrating faith and learning.

A different study conducted by Nwosu (1999) focused on professional development of faculty and faith and learning integration in the classroom. One component of the study included a survey of faculty members asking them to define the integration of faith and learning. This survey was administered to 35 faculty members from various Christian colleges who attended one of three different professional development seminars. Results revealed faculty definitions tended to fit into categories of intellectual, discipleship, or lifestyle; with over half of the definitions falling in the intellectual category. Intellectual referred to the connection of subject matter to one’s faith. Discipleship referred to passing on the Christian faith to others through relationships. And, lifestyle referred to living out one’s faith on a day-to-day basis. The faculty perspectives revealed in this particular study were in agreement with the five aspects of integrating faith and learning described above.

**Student perceptions.** Student perceptions of integrating faith and learning were also important to understand. Burton and Nwosu (2003) conducted a follow-up study to the faculty study (Nwosu, 1999) designed specifically for the purpose of understanding student perspectives
of integrating faith and learning. A survey was distributed to elementary methods students in a course taught by one of the researchers over three different terms. The data from 44 students was aggregated for analysis, with responses falling into six categories: learning processes, making connections, parallel processing, atmosphere, faith application, and foundational. These six categories align with the aspects of faith and learning integration described earlier in this review. The learning processes category had the highest number of responses (n=20). This student-defined category related to the pedagogical approach suggested by the authors of this same study. Nine student responses related to making connections, and three student definitions were in the foundational category. Both of these categories align with the intellectual/foundational aspect of faith/learning integration described above. The atmosphere category aligns with the relational aspect of integration. The final two student-identified categories of parallel processing (where growth of faith and intellect occur at the same time) and faith application (where ideas are integrated in daily lives) both relate to the applied/ethical aspect of integration of faith and learning previously described. Therefore, all six categories of faith/learning integration described by students seem to align with the five aspects of faith/learning integration summarized from the literature. The one aspect missing from the students’ perspectives was the motivational approach. Perhaps that is because students tended to describe integration of faith and learning as a teacher activity rather than a student activity (Lawrence, et al., 2005).

In a slightly larger qualitative study, Sherr, et al. (2007) conducted individual interviews and focus group sessions with 120 undergraduate students attending seven different CCCU colleges. The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of student perceptions of faith
and learning in the classroom. The researchers found student perceptions about faith and learning could be categorized in two ways: relationships and competence.

Students described two key themes in the faculty relationship category. First, faculty needed a strong relationship with God. This strong relationship was characterized by students as a “passion for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a sense of being accountable to the Lord, and a commitment to the relationship that develops over time” (Sherr, et al., 2007, p. 21). The second aspect of relationships was faculty relationships with students. A sincere care for students’ physical, spiritual, and emotional well being was an indicator students perceived in faculty who demonstrated integration of faith and learning.

The faculty competence category also contained two main themes. First, students expected scripture or spiritual themes to be incorporated into the curriculum. Second, they perceived competence with the classroom environment to be important. These findings led to the researchers developing what they called a “Christian Vocation Model” (Sherr, et al., 2007, p. 30). This model focused on two main areas where faculty could demonstrate uniting their faith with their work—relationships and competence. The authors advocated the model be used to provide direction for professional development for faculty at Christian institutions.

**Institutional support.** Educational organizations typically provide support for faculty and staff through the use of mentoring programs and professional development. These are two possible options through which religious institutions could assist faculty with the integration of faith and learning. In their book, Simon et al. (2003) described mentoring as “a vital component in nurturing the connection between institutional mission and the everyday life of colleges and universities” (p. 17). This was seen as crucial to helping those who were less experienced or uncomfortable connecting teaching and scholarship to faith.
Although numerous studies related to mentoring are available, studies specific to religious colleges and universities are largely missing from the literature. However, one quantitative study was found which gathered descriptive information related to faculty mentoring relationships at CCCU schools (Cunningham, 1999). The study surveyed 611 faculty members from nine CCCU schools. The survey consisted of 35 functions associated with mentoring, six of which related to biblical discipleship. The study revealed a discrepancy between the espoused belief that mentoring was important and actual participation in the mentoring process. This disconnect was described as possibly due to things the institution could control, such as heavy teaching loads, large class sizes, committee work, and no real value placed on mentoring.

Professional development is another way to support faculty as they strive to integrate faith and learning. Again, empirical research in this area is limited for religious, higher education institutions. One researcher (Nwosu, 1999) attended three seminars dedicated to integrating faith and learning in an effort to understand professional development of faculty in this area. Unfortunately, the seminars focused more on preparing theoretical publications related to the topic than on integrating faith and learning in the classroom.

One study of teachers at Christian elementary schools did find a connection between training and integration of faith and learning. Jang (2012) found both theology classes and training on the integration of faith and learning to be significant factors in teacher implementation level at these schools. However, additional research at the higher education level is warranted.

Recognizing the need for research, the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) articulated a research agenda dedicated, in part, to assisting faculty as they integrate faith and learning (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2013). They also announced
newly developed online training modules in November 2012 on the Faith and Learning Integration Channel (FLIC). These modules provide training for faculty as they seek to integrate faith and learning. Members of CCCU institutions may access these trainings for no charge, allowing for institutional support and professional development.

Mentoring and professional development were two methods Christian colleges could use to support faculty efforts to integrate faith and learning. Yet, Beck (1991) believed “Christian institutions must do more to help their faculties provide a thoroughly theistic education” (p. 11). What this support looks like is largely missing from empirical literature.

**Challenges to integrating faith and learning.** Several challenges exist for Christian, higher education institutions who articulate a commitment to integrating faith and learning. These challenges include organizational members who have limited experience with religious issues, experience uncertainties or tensions related to the topic, fear being labeled as anti-intellectual, and struggle with a lack of time.

Many faculty, particularly those new to the Christian university professorate, may have limited exposure to issues of religion (Nord, 1995). This lack of experience has been attributed to the absence of religion in the curriculum of public elementary and secondary schools (Nord, 2010; Nord & Haynes, 1998), an absence of religious dialogue at both secular and religious post-secondary schools (Beck, 1991; B. C. Fisher, 1989; Miller, 1977; Nord, 2010), and the fact that many faculty receive their post-baccalaureate training at secular institutions (Beck, 1991; Matthias & Wideman, 2009). It is likely that many faculty members at Christian institutions have not come from an institution where the culture values the integration of faith and learning.

Lack of experience creates uncertainty and tension for those charged with the task of integrating faith and learning. Uncertainties arise from a lack of knowledge about religious
issues (Jang, 2012; Matthias & Wideman, 2009; Nord, 1995; Nord & Haynes, 1998) or tension with the topic (Knowlton, 2002; Matthias & Wideman, 2009). Personal angst was one type of tension discussed. In a personal narrative study, Knowlton (2002) articulated feelings of being overwhelmed in the first year as a faculty member at a Christian college, and described tensions related to integrating faith and learning. The first was an epistemological tension; positivist versus constructivist. Knowlton described struggling with reconciling a positivist faith—his belief in an absolute truth and one true God—with a constructivist framework where he believed students’ understanding was socially constructed. The second category of tensions was described as a tension between indoctrinating (teaching) students the Christian viewpoint and encouraging them to think critically about his worldview. The final challenge he faced was students who were used to a positivist classroom where teachers were expected to have all the answers. Students did not necessarily like having to construct meaning on their own. In an effort to reconcile these tensions, Knowlton examined literature related to Christian education. He was surprised to find literature “blatantly rejects indoctrination and further rejects acceptance of God’s truth without critical analysis of that truth” (Knowlton, 2002, p. 46). Based on his own, past experience, he had expected the literature to stress the importance of converting people to Christianity and accepting God by faith. In the end, Knowlton reconciled some of his tensions by separating pedagogy from epistemology, and concluding, “integration is an activity of pedagogical facilitation” (p. 52).

In addition to uncertainty and tension, fear is a challenge to integrating faith and learning. Overcoming fear—the fear of being labeled as anti-intellectual—is another hurdle for faculty (Matthias & Wideman, 2009). Faculty members are highly knowledgeable in their specialized
fields, and take pride in their work. Therefore, being labeled as relying on faith instead of reason is unappealing.

Finally, lack of time is also a challenge for faculty. Teachers are often pressed for time. Time to prepare. Time to reflect. Time to think about an issue (Hall, et al., 2006). Jang (2012) found having adequate preparation time was a significant factor in increased implementation of faith and learning at a Christian elementary school. This may also be true at the college level if secular curriculum is used. In one study, curriculum at 69 Presbyterian colleges was consistent with secular schools (A. Fisher, 1995). The use of secular curriculum materials would require faculty to find supporting Christian resources on their own, and be intentional in their efforts to incorporate faith in the classroom. This would require additional planning time.

Several challenges exist for a college wishing to integrate faith and learning. How these challenges are addressed will likely be influenced by the organizational culture of the institution. Research described in this section related to mission statements, organizational culture, and faith and learning. This literature provided background for the study. Clearly, a need existed to explore these concepts in connection with the Christian institution.
Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

This study sought to understand how the mission statement at a Christian institution was lived out. Empirical studies related to both higher education mission statements and the concept of integrating faith and learning were limited; therefore, this study merited the use of qualitative methods (Creswell, 2007). Researchers have agreed qualitative studies provide rich detail and facilitate a depth of understanding not possible by other means (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Schein (1996) stated “culture needs to be observed, more than measured” (p. 229). Qualitative studies are particularly needed to understand educational culture (Owens, 2001; Thomas, 2008). The theoretical framework of organizational culture and leadership used for this study suggested a qualitative case study method of inquiry. A case study is “conducted within a localized boundary of space and time” (Bassey, 1999, p. 58). The case reported in this study was a small, private Christian college, which was an affiliate member of the CCCU.

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the data collection tool. Stake (2010) described the researcher as the “most valuable instrument for qualitative research” (p. 101). Document reviews, focus groups, and individual interviews with open-ended questions and probing follow-up questions were used. The research process was inductive. No preliminary hypotheses or surveys with pre-conceived categories were created, allowing the evidence to unfold throughout the process (Lofland, 1971; Patton, 2002). The use of interviews allowed for rich description and deeper understanding of participant perceptions.

Qualitative approaches provided important insights into the assumptions, beliefs, and values of members in the college community as they interpreted and enacted the institutional mission statement. Qualitative approaches also supported the “importance of rendering the
complexity of a situation” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4) as was the case with interpreting and applying a mission statement to the varied, day-to-day experiences of campus life. Because of the multi-faceted nature of mission statements and the complexity of understanding culture, the methodological plan was used as a roadmap (Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 2010). The design, although detailed, was intentionally flexible to accommodate needs as they arose.

Setting

The setting for this study was Midwestern Christian College. This site was purposefully selected (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002) because the college was described as “committed to providing a quality education from a Christian worldview.” Since its establishment in the late 19th century, Midwestern Christian College has worked to provide a Christian education for students, and maintains that commitment today. The current, stated mission of the college is “Christ-centered education for character.” This college, located in a Midwestern state, seeks to develop students intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially. The emphasis on educating the whole person in a faith-based environment was one reason it was purposefully selected (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Midwestern Christian represented the type of institution this study sought to research. A more complete description of the college is provided in Chapter 4.

Selection of participant categories was also purposeful, in order to achieve the broadest range of perspectives possible within the specific case. Capturing the heterogeneity of a population was another reason for purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2013). In order to gain a deeper understanding of the culture of the institution, a variety of individuals were included in the study. Because Midwestern Christian includes administration, faculty, and staff in the goals, participants of the study were selected from these groups. Categories of interviewees included
upper-level administrators, staff (mid-management, hourly employees), faculty (new, long-term), and students (student government representatives, freshmen, upperclassmen, athletes). More details on purposeful sampling of these participants are provided in the interview section below.

**Data Collection Strategies**

For this case study, document reviews, focus groups, and individual interviews were used to understand the culture of the institution. Two key points informed the data collection strategies in this study. First, the researcher is the primary tool for collecting data in qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). To maximize the effectiveness of the research tool, the researcher needs to have some background and understanding of the culture prior to the interview process (Schein, 1996). Second, case studies do not have a standardized method of data collection (Bassey, 1999). The process is unique and designed for each particular case. This knowledge informed the data collection process outlined for this study.

The first step in data collection was to gain access to the site. This study used the cooperative style described by Bogdan and Bilken (1992). This philosophy applied both to the process of gaining initial access and throughout the study as I sought permission for group and individual interviews. As part of the initial requests, information was provided regarding what I would do, how it would fit their schedule, what would happen with the findings, why their school was chosen, and what they would gain from participating in the study (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). The goal was to solicit cooperation through honest communication and a genuine desire to work together to better understand the cultural implications of the mission statement at this Christian college.

The main point of contact for this study was the Provost/Vice President for Academics. This was a logical starting point as he was largely responsible for the day-to-day activities on
campus. The Provost/Vice President for Academics also had access to pertinent documents, such as the faculty handbook and new faculty training materials. Having this key contact facilitated access to the site and provided insight into selecting initial informants (Merriam, 2009). Working with the Provost/Vice President for Academics provided the greatest number of initial documents and possible participants for the study.

After gaining approval for the study, I completed a review of documents and resources provided by the provost. The document review was followed by interviews with focus groups and individuals. There was no pre-determined end to the data collection cycle. Moore, Lapan, and Quartaroli (2012) described a period of six weeks to three months as the typical amount of time needed for most case studies. For this study, data collection continued until a point of data saturation occurred. Interviews with heterogeneous groups from across the campus community were an important part of achieving this goal. An initial timeline was developed within the framework of a two month study. While the document reviews, interviews, and focus group sessions were completed within two months, the initial timeline was flexible to meet the needs of the campus community and the researcher. Follow-up emails were also used to obtain additional information and clarify perceptions.

**Review of Documents and Resources**

A review of documents provided insight into level one of institutional culture—the artifact level. The provost provided access to numerous institutional documents utilized for a recent accreditation visit. This allowed me to gain background knowledge and insight into the community. Schein (2010) described written documents as artifacts, the surface level of culture. He stressed that unless the underlying assumptions were understood, one would not be able to correctly interpret the artifacts. Document reviews can “stimulate paths of inquiry” for actual
interviews (Patton, 2002, p. 294). Therefore, the purpose of reviewing the documents was to gain initial information, look for possible connections to the mission statement of the college, and generate and refine questions for the interview process.

Artifacts selected to review included items likely to contain the college’s mission and vision statements, evidence of a connection to the commitment to faith and learning, and documentation of the requirement for integrating faith and scholarship as part of employment expectations. Artifacts included both internal and external communication tools. Examples of internal, insider-only artifacts included the faculty handbook, syllabi templates and copies of revised syllabi, strategic plans, annual reports, student evaluation forms, faculty observation forms, and staff performance review processes. Examples of external, publicly available artifacts included the Midwestern Christian College web site, job position announcements, marketing materials, academic catalogs, and student handbooks. The actual selection of documents began with obvious resources, but was expanded as the study progressed.

Schein (2004) stated “studying what new members of groups are taught is, in fact, a good way to discover some of the elements of a culture” (p. 18). Eisenberg and Riley (1988) agreed, “Perhaps the most important context in which definitions of organizational reality are created and shaped is in the socialization of new members” (p. 136). Because of this, I reviewed documents and resources shared with new faculty, staff, and students. I also made note of particular resources mentioned during individual interview and focus group sessions, and reviewed those appropriate for the goals of the study.

The review of documents and resources was carefully documented and categorized. A spreadsheet was used to track the review of documents and analyze the information gained through the review process.
Interviews

Following the initial document review, individual interviews and focus group interviews were conducted. Again, a purposeful sample was used to begin the process. A purposive sample looks for key informants and heterogeneous representation of the wide variety of individuals participating in a campus community (Moore, et al., 2012). It was important to obtain representation from a variety of different groups, since this study sought to understand the culture of the campus.

Individual interviews. An informational meeting with the Provost/Vice President for Academics was the first step to identifying the administrators for the initial interviews. The provost identified an upper-level administrator responsible for faculty, staff, and students. In addition, the provost also suggested another upper-level administrator be interviewed for the study—one who was responsible for non-traditional programs, both online and on ground. In all, four individuals participated in the individual interviews: the president, the dean of students, the dean of professional studies, and the provost. This approach identified four upper-level administrators from various groups across campus who were important to interview.

The individual interviews proceeded following a protocol outlined by Creswell (2009). This protocol included a heading, standard procedures, questions and sub-questions, probes, space to record responses, and a thank-you statement (Creswell, 2009). This protocol was incorporated in an interview guide (Merriam, 2009), which is found in Appendix A. Specific questions as well as open-ended questions with follow-up probes were used. Sessions were audio recorded and concurrent notes were taken (Creswell, 2009). Recordings were transcribed as soon as possible following each interview.
Interview questions deserved special consideration. Developing good questions takes time and effort (Maxwell, 2013). Six different types of questions were suggested by Patton (2002). These types included opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory, background/demographics, and distinguishing questions. Questions were sequenced in a way which elicited the most detailed responses. Patton (2002) also described good questions as “open-ended, neutral, singular, and clear” (p. 353). Merriam (2009) stressed the importance of avoiding “multiple questions, leading questions, and yes-or-no questions” (p. 100). The interviews were conducted using an interview guide which was refined following the document review process. Additional points of inquiry were also revealed after the individual interviews with the upper-level administrators. These insights were incorporated into the focus group sessions.

**Focus groups.** Focus group sessions followed the interviews with the individual administrators. I selected participants for the faculty and staff focus groups using a purposeful sample process to identify six to ten participants for each focus group (Merriam, 2009). Faculty were selected from the entire list of 30 faculty members. Care was taken to identify faculty who would be heterogeneous in terms of years of experience, content areas, gender, educational background, and leadership responsibilities. Individual, email invitations were sent to 19 identified faculty members and 11 participated in a focus group. The two focus groups for faculty were held on separate days, one week apart. If a faculty member was unable to attend one day, they were asked to attend the alternate day.

A similar process was used to select staff member focus groups. The participants were purposefully selected from a list of 52 staff members, with the goal of heterogeneous representation in mind. After confirming the accuracy of the identified position of the staff members selected with the administrative assistant for academic affairs, individual emails
invitations were sent to 19 staff members. Similar to the faculty focus groups, two sessions were held for staff. If staff could not attend the first session, they were asked to attend the second session the following week. Separating the sessions by a week allowed for flexibility to meet the needs of the participants, and also offered an opportunity for the participants in the first sessions to suggest additional participants for the study. Three additional participants for the staff focus groups were suggested by students, and were invited to participate; two were able to do so. Thus, a total of 14 staff members participate in the study.

Student focus group members were identified in a slightly different manner. I still purposefully selected participants, but with assistance from an administrative assistant from the college. The administrative assistant worked with the institutional assessment director to generate a random list of students from the 281 full-time students who were attending the college. I specifically requested the list include students who were heterogeneous in gender, years at the college, leadership roles, athletic participation, and major areas of study. Because of confidentiality requirements, student emails were not published. Therefore, the administrative assistant contacted the 20 students initially identified to request their attendance at one of the two focus group sessions. Student participants in the first group were mostly upper-classmen. When asked to identify other students to participate in the study, they suggested a “popcorn” selection of freshmen. This suggestion led to three freshmen participating in the second focus group session. A total of 11 students participated in the study.

The purpose of the focus groups was to gain insight into the perspectives of a variety of groups across campus. Similar protocols and questions were utilized in the focus group sessions as were used in the individual interviews. The use of the guide was especially beneficial for focus groups, as it helped keep the interview session on track (Patton, 2002). An interview guide
for the focus group sessions is provided in Appendix B. As more knowledge was gained, the questions in the focus groups were slightly revised and became more targeted.

In addition to using a purposeful sample process to identify initial focus groups, a form of snowball, chain, or network sampling was used at the conclusion of each focus group session (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). This process was used to reach saturation, or a point of redundancy, in the data collected (Moore, et al., 2012). Participants were be asked to identify other groups or individuals to be represented in the study. This process resulted in additional staff and students being invited to focus group sessions. Participants were also asked to provide an email and/or phone number if they were willing to answer follow-up questions.

The data collection process for the focus group sessions was similar to the individual interviews. Each session was recorded and notes were taken. Transcribing took place as soon as possible following each session. Transcripts were then coded, analyzed, and interpreted as described in the next section.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Qualitative research requires ongoing data reflection. Data were analyzed throughout the research process, from document reviews to final interviews, in an interactive approach (Creswell, 2009; Moore, et al., 2012). Simultaneous data collection and data analysis is the preferred method for qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). During the collection, transcription and coding process, I kept a personal research journal, with observation reflections, memos, tentative themes, and ideas for the next data collection session (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010). Data from all collection efforts was kept in a spreadsheet, which was used to sort data and look for trends.
I personally transcribed all interviews and focus group sessions. The transcription process allowed for another layer of interaction with the data, enabling me to obtain a collective impression of the case and gain a general feel for the overall meaning. Transcription also allowed for an initial form of analysis, generating hunches, or insights (Merriam, 2009). Data were coded, using an iterative process to find emergent themes. Coding was adjusted and data recoded as new information emerged and the study became progressively focused (Creswell, 2009). A process of open coding, described by Merriam (2009), was used to develop categories for the data. Open coding, though often associated with grounded theory, was appropriate in this case study. Lofland (1971) stated, “In order to capture the participants 'in their own terms' one must learn their analytic ordering of the world … the first principle of qualitative analysis” (p. 7). Allowing the codes to emerge from the data facilitated this process.

As the coding process continued, categories were developed. The categories were connected to the research questions, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitive to the phenomenon, and conceptually congruent (Merriam, 2009). In keeping with the progressively focused approach articulated earlier, several initial categories were gradually reduced to fewer themes. Creswell (2009) suggested considering codes that were: expected for the topic, surprising, unusual, or addressed theoretical perspectives in the research. Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggested twelve approaches to identifying themes. Of the various approaches they recommended, the scrutiny techniques of repetition as well as similarities and differences were used, as they returned a greater number of themes. This allowed progressive focusing to occur (Stake, 2010) as the categories were developed. The processing technique of cutting and sorting was also used, as it was the most versatile (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). These approaches to
analysis and interpretation were best aligned with the purposes and resources available for this study.

The data for the study were kept electronically. Therefore, the process of cutting and sorting was completed electronically. A separate file was used for manipulation of data to avoid possible problems or data corruption. Additionally, a back-up file for the entire case was kept in a different location. The confidentiality of all participants was protected. Collected data was protected and secured. Recordings and transcriptions were kept on a computer, secured with password protection. Consent forms were also stored in a secure place. Names of the college and individual participants were removed or replaced with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. No names or identifying information are included in the final report. Neither will they be included in any presentations or publication of the study’s findings unless the express, written consent of the college and the participants is provided.

**Researcher Position**

In qualitative research, it is particularly important to understand the unique characteristics of the data collection instrument – the researcher. Personal background, experiences, training, biases or values which may affect data collection, analysis or interpretation should be reported (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). My own personal background has several links to the research.

I grew up in the world of education. Many relatives, including my grandmother, mother, aunt, and sister were teachers. My own experiences included playing school as a child, teaching Sunday school during high school, and tutoring mathematics as a work study student during college in Nebraska. After graduating college with a Bachelor of Arts in mathematics education, I spent six years teaching and coaching at a Kansas school with about 300 students in grades nine
through twelve. During this time, I became involved in education at the state level, and
continued this involvement while working as an at-home mother when my children were small.

After five years at home, I returned to teaching high school math for a larger Kansas
district, compiling a total of 11 years in public education, and completing a Master of Arts in
Teaching. In 2002, I made the transition to the college level to teach professional education
classes for teacher education students. I was passionate about pedagogy as much as content, and
wanted to help others learn how to teach. This is currently my 12th year working in the education
department at a private, Christian college.

My elementary, secondary, and undergraduate training were all completed in public
schools. My Master of Arts in Teaching was completed at a private, faith-based university.
These educational experiences did little to prepare me to integrate faith and learning at a
Christian college. While I was asked about my faith as part of the interview process and
reflected on Christian scholarship as part of an annual report, little formal discussion or training
was actually provided. Therefore, I was interested in seeing how others at a private, Christian
college understand and experience a mission statement dedicated to bringing faith and
scholarship together.

My husband and I have two boys. The oldest attended an out-of-state, Christian college;
the youngest will begin attending college this year. The decision for our oldest to attend a
Christian college was based, in part, on the mission of the college to integrate faith and learning.
I wondered how this was happening. What approaches were used? How did the campus
community at his college make sense of its unique mission statement? Was their culture
different from the two religious colleges I had experienced?
Personal experiences provided an opportunity for bias on both sides of the study. First, as a Christian, I do believe it is important to integrate faith and learning. However, my own experiences as a student and a teacher at two different Christian colleges led me to wonder how intentional colleges were about fulfilling their missions. Maxwell (2013) reminded qualitative researchers the goal of acknowledging bias is “not to eliminate this influence, but to understand it and use it productively” (p. 125). My background experiences, both in education and working at a Christian college, provided some context for the study. Some prior knowledge was essential for understanding artifacts (Schein, 2010), and contributed to the quality of the research (Yin, 2003). However, I was conscious of the fact that culture varies from institution to institution, and was intentional about not making assumptions and focused on letting the data emerge from the study without allowing any preconceived notions to influence my analysis and interpretations. To aid in this process, I kept a personal research journal, with observation reflections, memos, tentative themes, and ideas. The journal was self-reflexive, detailing my perceptions of the interview climate, reactions of the participants, and my own feelings about the experience (Tracy, 2010), and a self-awareness of “what I know and how I know it” (Patton, 2002, p. 64). These approaches helped address possible bias and ensure a quality study was conducted.

**Research Quality**

With any qualitative approach, the researcher needs to represent the data as carefully and truthfully as possible. In keeping with this goal, I applied the use of best practices associated with qualitative research. Tracy (2010) described “eight universal hallmarks for high quality qualitative methods” (p. 837). Those criteria were a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity,
credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence. This study was conducted in keeping with those “big-tent” ideas (Tracy, 2010, p. 837).

The study of the lived experiences related to the mission statement of a Christian college was a worthy topic to be addressed with sincerity and meaningful coherence. As previously discussed, researchers have called for a deeper understanding of how mission statements are understood and applied on Christian college campuses (Boerema, 2011; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). Sincerity was demonstrated through self-reflexivity, honesty and transparency regarding biases, and attention to the needs of those being studied. Patton (2002) stressed researchers have “an obligation to monitor and report their own analytical procedures and processes as fully and truthfully as possible” (p. 434). One approach is to use an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The process of systematic data collection to ensure clear, detailed records of the study are available was outlined in the methodology section of this proposal. Records for all data collected included the date, time, and place, and were backed up each time new data were added (Bassey, 1999). Additionally, Merriam (1995) advocated stating the researcher’s position at the beginning of the study so readers could understand possible biases in the interpretations presented. The previous section on researcher position was included to provide transparency and illustrate sincerity. Meaningful coherence was demonstrated through the connection of the design of the study, data collection strategies, and analysis procedures to the conceptual framework of culture as a root metaphor for understanding organizations.

Credibility was another criterion which applied to this study. Credibility includes the use of thick description, triangulation, and representation of multiple viewpoints (Tracy, 2010). These concepts are supported by other qualitative researchers. For example, Patton (2002) and
(Merriam, 1995) described the importance of thick description in both field notes and written publications. Triangulation, an approach where different types of data and various data sources lead to similar conclusions, was also encouraged (Bassey, 1999; Merriam, 2009; Moore, et al., 2012; Patton, 2002). This study used document reviews, interviews, and focus groups. These three types of data sources included both written and verbal data and allowed multiple viewpoints to be revealed. Written data came from internal and external sources of information, and verbal data came from upper-level administrators and heterogeneous groups of faculty, staff, and students. These numerous and varied data sources were specifically identified to provide a variety of perspectives, increasing the credibility of the study.

To enhance the rigor of this study, the methodology was thoughtfully designed. Rigor includes concepts of due diligence, time in the field, careful data collection, thoroughness, and thoughtful analytical processes (Tracy, 2010). An initial period of two months was proposed to ensure adequate time to understand the case (Moore, et al., 2012). Time between interviews and transcription was minimized (Patton, 2002). Careful consideration of the number, length, and design of the interviews was undertaken to ensure rich detail and thoroughness.

The study also addressed procedural and relational ethics considerations. Wichita State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) insured procedural ethics were followed. This included doing no harm to the participants, allowing for voluntary participation, and protecting participants confidentiality (Tracy, 2010). The study utilized signed consent forms (Appendix C) which stated the participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Care was taken to establish rapport with the participants and explain the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002). Additionally, I worked to schedule interviews and focus groups at times convenient for the participants, respected all opinions voiced in the interviews, and strove to include everyone in the
focus group conversations. Finally, I sought verification of themes by member checking. Each focus group participant was contacted individually, by email, with a summary of the emergent themes. The email requested feedback and clarification if the participants did not feel the themes accurately represented their views. A few emails were returned with encouraging notes, but none articulated a concern with the emergent themes.

Quality, qualitative research requires careful consideration of numerous research design and methodology decisions. This chapter presented detailed evidence these issues were considered with due diligence to ensure a quality, productive case study of the integration of faith and learning at Midwestern Christian College.
Chapter 4

Findings

This research examined how the mission of integrating faith and learning was lived out at a small, Christian college located in the Midwest. The pseudonym, Midwestern College, will be used to maintain confidentiality. The data collection process revealed a colorful portrait of the institution and her efforts to achieve the mission of Christ-centered education for character. This section will paint a picture of the college drawn from document reviews, individual interviews, and focus group sessions.

Context

Midwestern Christian College is a small, private, Christian college in the Midwestern region of the United States. This site was purposefully selected (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002) because the college articulated a commitment to the integration of faith and learning. According to the current college catalog, “Midwestern is committed to providing a quality education from a Christian worldview.” Administration, faculty, and staff are included in the goal of achieving the mission; therefore participants of the study were selected from these groups. Categories of interviewees included upper-level administrators, staff (mid-management and hourly employees), faculty (new and long-term), and students (student government representatives, freshmen, upperclassmen, and athletes). In addition to interviews and focus group sessions, many documents were also reviewed.

The document review process was approached with the intent to look for connections to the mission statement, reveal paths of inquiry, and generate and refine questions. Numerous items were reviewed, including the current academic catalog; handbooks for students, faculty,
and employees; exit surveys; an organizational profile; policies and procedures; and various
documents compiled for the school’s recent Higher Learning Commission accreditation visit.

Four individual interviews and six different focus group sessions were also conducted to
collect data for this study. The interviews were with upper-level administrators, and the focus
groups consisted of two groups each of faculty, staff and students. A total of 40 individuals
participated, including four administrators, 11 faculty members, 14 staff, and 11 students.

The college president, provost/vice-president for academics, dean of students, and dean
of professional education participated in the individual interviews. These four leaders were male
and all attended a private, Christian college at some point in their post-secondary, educational
training. Two had attended Midwestern Christian College. One attended when the college was a
two-year school and received an associate’s degree before continuing to another 4-year school
and earning his bachelor’s degree. The second received a bachelor’s of science in ministry from
Midwestern. In addition, two of the four leaders had degrees in ministry, and a third had actually
been a missionary for many years prior to earning his doctorate at a private, Christian university
and working in higher education.

Two focus group sessions were held with faculty. The first group included six faculty
members, and the second group included five faculty members; a total of 11 out of 30 faculty
were involved. Nine of the eleven faculty who participated in the focus groups had attended a
private, Christian college. There were seven males and four females, with a length of
employment at Midwestern Christian College ranging from three to 32 years. One faculty
member was Hispanic, and the remaining faculty members were Caucasian. One library director
and three department chairs were represented, along with content areas of business,
communication/theatre, education, fine arts, mathematics/physics, natural science, psychology, social science, and sport science.

Two staff member focus groups—with six and eight members each—comprised the largest number of participants. A total of 14 out of 52 staff members, six women and eight men, participated. All staff members who participated where Caucasian. A high percentage of staff, 93%, had attended a private, Christian college. Length of employment at the college varied from one to 14 years. A wide variety of positions and offices were represented including academic support, administrative assistants, admissions, development, financial aid, information technology, maintenance, residence life, spiritual formation, and student success.

A large number of the focus group participants had experienced private higher education. Of all the employees who participated in the interviews and focus group sessions, 90% had attended a private, Christian college at some point in their post-secondary, educational career. Additionally, over 50% had actually attended Midwestern Christian College at either the associate or bachelor level. Even those who had not attended Midwestern often talked about knowing someone at Midwestern as influencing their decision to apply for a job at the college. Figure 4.1 illustrates the high percentage of employees, disaggregated by focus group, who had experienced private, Christian education at the post-secondary level.
The percentages of employees who attained advanced degrees from private, Christian colleges was much lower. Of the 11 faculty who participated in focus group sessions, only two (18%) earned post-graduate degrees from private, Christian institutions. Half of the upper-level administrators earned advanced degrees from a private, Christian college. Only one out of 14 staff members (14%) had a post-graduate degree from a Christian college. At the time of the interviews, two additional staff members were working on advanced degrees from Christian colleges, but had not yet completed their programs. Figure 4.2 illustrates the percentages of employees who held advanced degrees along with the percentages who held advanced degrees earned from a private, Christian college.
In addition to collecting data from college employees, two focus group sessions were held with students. The first group included seven students, and the second group included four students. Three freshmen, three sophomores, two juniors, and three seniors participated, for a total of 11 students. Eight males and three females participated in the focus groups. One student was African American and 10 were Caucasian. Two of the students were transfers. Students majoring in aviation, business management, elementary education, history, psychology, sport science, and student ministries were represented. Five students chose to attend the college in order to play sports, and six described the community as a reason for attending. About one-third (36%) of the students had attended a private elementary or secondary school prior to coming to Midwestern Christian College, and 27% described knowing someone connected to the college prior to attending.
Data collected from document reviews, interviews and focus group sessions were compiled and analyzed to produce a holistic view of the integration of faith and learning at this particular institution. Initial findings revealed the campus community had recently completed some soul searching related to its mission. This element of the study will be described first, in the sections titled Prologue and Mission Possible? Following that, the four, overarching themes that emerged from the data will be described. These themes related to leadership responsibilities, a holistic approach to the integration of faith and learning, the importance of living life in community, and faculty experiences.

**Prologue**

When a new president arrived on the scene in 2010, he spent time watching and learning about the campus culture. These observations revealed a lack of direction and achievement. He described what he saw:

People would come in a 9:00, come over [to the cafeteria] at 9:30, at 10:30 they would finish talking and go back over to the office; lunch would start at 11:30, lunch always went for an hour, go back to the office, maybe get started about 1:00, and 2:30 came back for the afternoon thing, and at 3:30 it is almost time to go home at 4:00.

His perception was, “We were happy doing nothing. It was tough.” When he asked questions about what he observed, he was told, “That’s our community.” And, he agreed, it was. He said, “Everybody knew you didn’t have to work.” The president explained that no classes were scheduled during the times people were meeting in the cafeteria, and not one faculty member had published anything in three years. Additionally, the prior provost had gotten angry with the new president for coming to work at 7:30 every morning, telling the president he should be out fundraising. The new president also observed this same provost leaving at noon every day to go
golfing. He said, “Their culture was ‘good enough is good enough… it’s OK.’” He felt there needed to be a higher standard.

In addition to a lack of work ethic, the president was also faced with financial challenges. The college had a large amount of debt, no way to borrow any money, and a projected deficit for the year. He also observed poor management of money they did have, comparing it to a section of scripture commonly referred to as the parable of the talents. He explained, “What we’ve done is taken [the money] and buried it in fear. And every June, we dig it out, take a chunk, and put it back into the ground and say we are doing good.” He viewed this as very poor stewardship, and explained the Lord would not honor wasting money:

We want to be good stewards of the things God gave us. If you want me to raise a million dollars, I get that. But if we are wasting money and borrowing every year, why would the Lord honor that? He would not. It’s not excellent.

Rather than being concerned about stewardship, he described the college staff as having an attitude of “We don’t have to worry because, in faith, God will deliver.” If the college was to survive, he had to help them see a need for change. He shared about a time he stood before the community and said, “Folks, we are going to close if we continue… I just need you to know, good enough isn’t good enough. We are not going to make it. Heads up!” The new president perceived a lack of direction and focus, and he shared his perceptions with the campus community.

**Mission Possible?**

The story of Midwestern Christian College was one where the mission had not been clear for several years. When the president arrived in 2010, he found no one could articulate the mission. He described the first employee meeting he held after arriving at Midwestern:
The first meeting was in this room, and every single person was here. I said, “What’s our mission?” Not a single person in that room knew our mission. I was shocked. I think [one employee] said, “well, isn’t there something there…” and she got a sentence out of a three paragraph mission statement. She got one sentence out of it.

The new president was concerned that no one on campus could articulate the mission of the school. This added to his perception of the college losing its focus.

Faculty members also described a lack of clarity regarding the mission statement. One faculty member described the prior mission statement as “really long and convoluted,” and another agreed, “We’re talking like paragraphs.” A faculty member who had been around for many years described a “formalized process during the [prior president] years,” but no one could articulate it. This time period was from 1996-2005 and coincided with when the word Christian was added to the name of the College, which one staff member described as “very intentional,” yet no one was able to articulate the mission. Other staff members had similar perceptions, and agreed when one confessed she could not remember the prior mission statement.

The upper-level administrators told a similar story. All three were at the college prior to the arrival of the new president. One described an experience he had when he began working at the college:

One of the things I first asked our then president was, “what is our mission statement?” because I want to craft a mission statement for residence life that mirrors the mission statement. I said, “Nobody can tell me what the mission statement is.” He said, “Well, I can tell you what the mission statement is. It’s hanging up around here somewhere.” That was the response. And, I thought, oh my goodness!
He continued, “When you don’t know what the mission is, you run the risk of becoming a
directionless institution.”

Upon observing the lack of clarity with the mission, the new president decided the first
important task would be to create a mission. He described asking the employees, “OK, you
guys, have we lost our way? Why are we here?” When they responded in “dead silence” he
began to lead them in strategic planning discussions. He encouraged them to think, “What are
we going to be when we grow up?” He wanted everyone to be clear about the mission.

**Historical Development**

The questions posed by the new president led to a review of the historical development of
the college. Researching the historical roots of the college helped employees understand who
they were and where they came from. They also researched the historical mission of the college
as they worked to answer the question of purpose. These two elements of the history of the
college are described here.

**Historical roots.** Midwestern Christian College began as a Christian school for
elementary through post-secondary students. From its inception in 1884, the school articulated a
commitment to the Christian faith. The school was originally established by the Free Methodist
Church as a seminary. The founders wanted to serve homesteaders in the Midwest who felt
“deeply the need of a Christian school.” The current college catalog describes the commitment
of the founders:

The [Midwest] Conference, according to the 1886 conference minutes, hoped the school
would be “a breakwater against infidelity…” and a leader in Christian education “…from
Chicago to California and send out its vital pulsations of behalf of the cause of Christ to
remote parts of the earth.”
With the exception of a four-year period when the school was owned by the Methodist Episcopal denomination (1893-1897), the support of the Free Methodist Church has remained constant.

Through changes in location, leadership, and programs, the school has continued to articulate a commitment to faith-based education. In 1914, the school moved from its initial location in another state to the current site. At this time, the name changed to Midwestern Academy and College. In 1923, the school became the first accredited junior college in the state. Over time, the school continued to grow, adding athletics and expanding programs. The current name, Midwestern Christian College, was adopted in 1999, and the school was recognized by the Carnegie Foundation as an accredited four year college the following year. The college currently houses a School of Liberal Arts and Sciences (SAS) for traditional programs, and a School of Professional Education (SPE) for non-traditional and online programs. Midwestern Christian is also an affiliate of the CCCU.

The school faced several seasons of financial hardship. The sale of the school to the Methodist Episcopal denomination in 1893 was due to debt; yet the school was returned to the Free Methodists in 1897. In 1911, the school almost closed because of few students and an inability to pay expenses, including faculty. The poor economy of the initial location predicated the move of the school to another state. There were many lean times through the era of the Great Depression and World War II. Challenges continued through the late 1950’s with low enrollment, discontent, a turnover rate of 80% among staff, and the loss of the auditorium to a fire over Thanksgiving break. However, these challenges did not deter the college from her commitment to Christian education. On the college’s website, the final section of narrative related to the history of Midwestern Christian College states:
Throughout the college’s history, the driving force has been the same. At each major crisis and with each major step, there has been a reaffirmation of faith that Midwestern exists to provide a quality education from a Christian worldview. Our purpose is to produce Christian servant leaders who will be salt and light in our society and in the world.

The documents articulated a commitment to the integration of faith and learning, even though an official mission statement did not exist until 1999—a similar time frame to the development of mission statements at many other colleges and universities.

**Historical mission.** A formal statement of “philosophy and purposes” was created in 1972 under the leadership of the president at the time. The statement read, “The principles and precepts which govern Midwestern College are predicated on the belief that man is an entity and that the need for religious experience, wisdom, and expression permeates need for his being.” The statement also made reference to the importance of community, describing “harmonious group-living is a vital adjunct to the attainment of maturity and represents an important aspect of school life at Midwestern.” These statements articulated both religious and community connections as being important.

While still under the same president’s leadership, the purpose statement changed in 1976. The new statement was titled “Purposes and Objectives.” In this version, the Free Methodist Church of North America was explicitly mentioned as the founder. Even though the wording was different, the themes of community and religion were still evident:

Midwestern College brings together groups of people: students, faculty, administrators, staff, to engage in the struggles and rewards of learning and experiencing. Credits are granted and evaluations recorded; however, its purposes are fulfilled more through the
interaction of the persons involved, most of whom acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The school is committed to creating an ongoing atmosphere conducive to the spiritual, intellectual, social, and physical health and maturation of the individuals involved. It purposes to assist and encourage the formulation of a personal faith and value system integrative and dynamic in nature.

These first, formal statements were developed during one president’s time in leadership at Midwestern College. Although the college community faced many challenges during his tenure, the president did not view the struggles as deterring the college from her mission. In fact, when he reflected on his time as president (1964-1980) he described the opposite, writing, “In many senses, these years have been years of victory, for it is out of the crucible of hard work and struggle that the college’s mission and purpose is being achieved.”

Following the departure of this long-serving president, Midwestern was led by six different presidents over the next three decades. From 1981 through 2009, the longest tenure held by any president was from 1996-2005. During this time, the purposes of the college were articulated as a formal mission statement in 1999. The new mission statement included phrases such as, “an evangelical Christian college in the Wesleyan tradition,” and “committed to: academic excellence, integration of faith and learning, talent development, formation of a growing personal faith in Jesus Christ, and preparation for a life of servant leadership.” The creation of the formal statement coincided with the transition from a 2-year institution to a 4-year college and another change in name. Midwestern College became Midwestern Christian College in 1999 and was officially recognized by the Carnegie Foundation in 2000.
The mission was revised in 2003 under the direction of the same president who was leading at the time the first formal mission statement was developed in 1999. This mission statement, while slightly shorter in length, continued to emphasize the Christian faith:

Midwestern Christian College of [State] (established in 1884), an evangelical Christian College embracing the Wesleyan Tradition, provides a personalized, educational experience through liberal arts and professional studies. Midwestern Christian College seeks to prepare students to be academically competent, socially responsible, professionally astute, service oriented, and spiritually mature in their faith in Jesus Christ.

This mission statement from 2003 was the last documented mission statement found in the review of the documents, excluding the new mission statement that was created under the leadership of the new president who arrived in 2010.

A review of the history of the college revealed several transitions at the school. These transitions are articulated in Figure 4.3. Throughout these changes in location, leadership and mission, the documents reviewed articulated a continued commitment to the integration of faith and learning.

A review of its history also revealed that Midwestern Christian College has worked to provide a Christian education for students over the course of its existence. One administrator described the recent focused reflection and planning time as “a turning point for the school. Kind of a recommitment to… Why are we here? What is our purpose for being here?” As a result, the process of clarifying the purpose of the school led the current campus community to re-affirm the historical purpose of the college.
### Timeline - Key Events by Decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Name (Location)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1880</strong> Founded as a seminary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1890</strong> Midwestern Academy and College - move, new location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1900</strong> 1940’s Midwestern College</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1910</strong> 1960’s Midwestern College of the Free</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1920</strong> 1999 Midwestern Christian College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1930</strong> President #3 (1939-1944)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1940</strong> President #4 (1945-1953)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1950</strong> President #5 (1953-1959)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1960</strong> President #6 (1959-1964)</td>
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<td><strong>1970</strong> President #7 (1964-1981)</td>
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<td><strong>1980</strong> President #8 (1981-1987)</td>
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<td><strong>1990</strong> President #9 (1987-1996)</td>
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<td><strong>2000</strong> President #10 (1996-2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2010</strong> President #11 (2005-2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2020</strong> President #12 (2010-)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Leadership

| **1884 Principal Reverend #1**  |
| **Acting Principal Reverend #2** (1st President)  |
| **President #2 (1919-1939)**  |
| **President #3 (1939-1944)**  |
| **President #4 (1945-1953)**  |
| **President #5 (1953-1959)**  |
| **President #6 (1959-1964)**  |
| **President #7 (1964-1981)**  |
| **President #8 (1981-1987)**  |
| **President #9 (1987-1996)**  |
| **President #10 (1996-2005)**  |
| **President #11 (2005-2008)**  |
| **President #12 (2010-)**  |

### Mission Statement

| **1880** Philosophy & Purposes;  |
| **1976** Purposes & Objectives  |
| **1972** 1961 Mission Statement  |
| **1999** 1999 - First Formal Mission Statement  |
| **2003** New Mission Statement  |
| **2010** New Mission Statement  |

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**Figure 4.3** Timeline of Key Events by Decade

**Clarifying the mission.** The strategic planning process was initiated by the new president in 2010. A staff member who worked on the strategic planning committee for the mission of the college remembered the process this way:

> We did some meetings in the evenings and started that process of: What are we going to do? Are we going to change the mission? You know, this is too wordy to remember, and such. So, from those meetings, a smaller group started to work. Okay, what are we really here for? And, as we went back into scripture, we started digging in and saying, OK, Christ came to educate us as whole people.

The result of the strategic planning was a new, revised mission statement: Christ-centered education for character.
Participants in the study were clear, they did not see the revised statement as a change in mission, but rather an effort to make the purpose of the college very clear, easy to remember, and easy to communicate to others. One faculty member described the new mission statement as a “rebranding or a repackaging” of what was already in existence. The staff member who had confessed she could not remember the prior mission statement described the revised mission statement as “much more articulate” and more easily remembered. She also described a recent survey of faculty and staff where 98% could state the mission. Another employee agreed, “I agree that definitely all of us know it. It is important to the school, and it is made known to us that Christ-centered education is what we are all about.”

The upper-level administrators had similar perceptions. The new mission statement was not seen as different from the previous goals of the college, just more succinct and easier to remember. When asked if the entire campus community was in agreement with the revised mission statement, one administrator shared:

I can’t read everyone’s mind—but the last two years have been very significant here on campus. And I feel like with the leadership change, and some of the new efforts we have implemented, there is pretty much a uniform buy-in from not only faculty, but staff and administrators as well. We are committed to this mission… I hear it reflected. Third party, second party, people really are speaking a different language than when I first arrived here.

This administrator viewed people as clearly committed to the new mission statement because he heard specific discussions related to the mission on campus.

Another administrator felt the institution had always been intent on the purpose of the school, but, because the mission statement was so lengthy, “people just didn’t know it.” Another
administrator, the one who asked the previous president about the lack of mission stated, “I think it speaks well to the kinds of people we hire that Midwestern functioned for so long and maintained so much of its core values without a stated mission that people were able to recite.” However, he saw immense value in having a clearly articulated mission:

I value the work we did to try to put together a mission statement and to communicate that mission statement; to make it a mission statement that everyone understands and can recite. With that said, the mission statement as it stands right now—Christ-centered education for character—it gives us a direction and it gives us a focus.

He also saw the process as revealing similar commitments in the history of the college, and stated, “It really kind of affirmed our foundation in a lot of ways.” All of the upper-level administrators were pleased with the new mission statement and perceived it clearly articulated the purpose of the college.

Current documents described the new mission statement as “a reaffirmation of our essential mission” and “an uncomplicated and clear-cut reminder of the ethos that has inspired this institution since its inception.” The new mission statement maintains the commitment to Christian education that was consistent throughout the history of the college. Yet, because it is much shorter than previous mission statements, it is easier for people to remember and articulate.

All of the administrators, faculty, and staff who participated in the study clearly articulated the new mission statement. Students in the focus groups were also clear about the mission of the college. One student participant, who was also an ambassador for the college, described sharing the mission with prospective students. She said, “They come here and that’s when we start saying, like, ‘Christ-centered education.’ We have a purpose in mind, and that’s
what we want. So, like, when people preview, we automatically tell them that’s what we are.” It appeared the mission had been clarified.

**Communicating the Mission**

Once the mission statement was clearly articulated, outcomes related to the mission statement needed to be established. One administrator described this as the need to “flesh out the mission.” The provost and the dean of students worked together to determine what that should look like. The provost described the struggle to articulate the essence of the mission:

> It’s so easy to say our mission is Christ-centered education for character. But, there’s two things that center in there. One, what in the world is Christ-centered? And, what is character? We’ve had to wrestle with both of those questions.

At one point, the idea of using the Methodist Church’s Wesleyan Quadrilateral to establish key result areas for the mission was discussed. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral consists of four elements: a) scripture, b) tradition, c) reason, and d) experience. Scripture is central, and of primary importance, with the other three providing secondary insight. These sources are used to understand the Christian lifestyle.

The provost decided against using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral because he thought it would be difficult for the campus community to understand and articulate. He shared:

> Our past mission statement—which was very good, very articulate, very educratic—it was fantastic. But nobody knew it. They knew components of it, because again we were based on Wesley’s quadrilateral, so they knew reason, experience… but they couldn’t say it.
He was searching for something that would stick. He described it as something “you could hang your hat on,” and he didn’t think the Wesleyan Quadrilateral was it. So, the provost and dean of students continued looking for a way to articulate the outcomes of the mission.

The two talked about how to define character. They looked at definitions. They reflected on scripture related to the mission. Finally, the provost said, it came down to “how would Christ define character?” After thinking and praying, they determined two scriptural ideas embodied the type of character they were trying to articulate. First, Christ grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man. Second, we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. These four areas were then used by the provost as he worked to develop a way to communicate those outcomes to the campus community. The dean of students said, “[The provost] did a great job of being able to explain it and add verbiage and wording that filled it out and rounded it out.” What emerged was the development of the Fit Four model.

The Fit Four model. Once the character outcomes of heart, mind, body, and soul had been identified, the provost worked to develop a way to communicate those outcomes. A fit mind referred to the rational and psychological component of character. A fit body included the ability to perform competently in one’s vocation as well as physical health. The ability to relate socially and connect with various cultures was embodied in the fit heart component of character. Finally, the fit soul outcome related to the spiritually responsive element of character. The four fits were used to describe how Midwestern Christian College viewed the character component of the mission, Christ-centered education for character.

The provost also chose to communicate the four fits visually. He articulated the concept and worked with others to develop a graphic representation of the four outcomes. He described
this effort as a campaign to help people understand and remember the mission and outcomes. He shared:

Please understand that when we came up with the fit four… we were trying to understand who we were and who we were going to be. But, I can’t say I had some Mohammad experience on a rock somewhere where God spoke. We just kind of came up with this, it made sense to us, and we kind of brought it along. I never thought that it was going to, in essence, really take a life of its own.

The graphic has a heading of FIT FOUR, which sits atop four squares arranged in a windowpane format. Each of the four boxes has one of the four fits written in the box along with a picture representation of the particular fit. A copy is provided in Figure 4.4.

![FIT FOUR](image)

**Figure 4.4** A Graphic Representation of the Fit Four Model

**Spreading the word.** Once the mission was articulated and the outcomes were clearly defined, they needed to be shared and incorporated into the ethos of the campus. These Fit Four outcomes were described in several documents, including the 2013-2014 Academic Catalog, Faculty Handbooks for both traditional campus and online faculty, Student Handbooks for both traditional and online students, the 2013-2014 Strategic Plan, and the Mission at a Glance
document presented to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The visual representation illustrated in Figure 4.4 appeared in all of the aforementioned documents.

The student handbook stated, “Administration, faculty, and staff work together to provide opportunities which will challenge students to strive towards ‘Fit Minds, Fit Souls, Fit Bodies, and Fit Hearts.’” In describing the Fit Four outcomes, the faculty and student handbooks and the strategic plan made reference to Bible verses found in the books of Mark and Luke. A sample paragraph from the student handbook read:

In Luke 2:52, we find a description of the development outcomes associated with Jesus. The gospel writer asserts Jesus “grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.” This description captures the holistic reality of humanity, recognizing both our horizontal relationship within creation and our vertical relationship with the Creator. Jesus further provides a glimpse of development when questioned about the greatest commandment. He responded, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:28-30). This exact paragraph was also found in the faculty handbooks and the strategic plan.

In the 2013-2014 Academic Catalog, the message from the president also emphasized the core elements of the Fit Four:

The bedrock of our education is this: Jesus is spoken here. In addition to developing the skills required to achieve in this world, we take the time to explore what it means to engage our culture from God’s perspective—a Christian worldview. Here at Midwestern Christian College, we focus on the student as a whole person. We create opportunities for you to develop not only academically, but also spiritually, socially, emotionally, and physically.
He described the mission as including more than academics, and reinforced the emphasis on a holistic education.

In addition to appearing in numerous documents, the Fit Four model was described in the interviews and focus groups as well. One participant in a staff focus group stated, “Christ-centered education was really a huge theme, but the character piece was as valuable as well. That fit four was how we measure the character part. That’s how that came into play.” One staff member shared that 80% of faculty and staff could articulate all four elements of the Fit Four when asked. The institutional research officer pointed out the usefulness of the Fit Four from a data perspective, “That’s delineating how we are organizing things and it reflects that deeper commitment to that Christ-centered education for character.” When the group was asked if they gravitated toward the Fit Four when enacting the mission, everyone nodded their heads, and several provided examples of how the Fit Four impacted the approach they took in their own, specific jobs on campus. These examples are shared later in this report in the section titled maintaining focus.

Students in the focus groups also articulated the mission and the Fit Four clearly. They agreed the mission statement was emphasized more in recent years. An upper classman shared the mission was stated more now than when he was a freshman. He explained:

They have plaques in every building, which is a nice reminder. It also helps people who are passing by really know what our mission is. They can ask and then to further involve people in our community, we can tell them what that means to us, and how it’s applied with the Fit Four.
Another student agreed, “There has been more publicity of it, I would say, around campus with our posters that we have on our light posts so people can really ask about it.” The posters on the light posts contained the visual illustration of the Fit Four Model provided earlier in Figure 4.4.

The Fit Four model rapidly became an integral component for communicating the mission of “Christ-centered education for character” to the college community. When asked if there were those who did not like the new mission or Fit Four model, the dean of students said, “I have found very little resistance to the fit four. People seem to really jive with it.” And, the provost described it as “A Pepsi logo type of thing.” He elaborated, “With the use of Christ-centered education for character and the fit four to give life to that, you can’t go anywhere without people knowing that is a part of who we are.” However, he shared a concern with the Fit Four. He cautioned:

It’s wonderful. But, you can totally talk about fit heart, fit mind, fit soul, fit body and have nothing Christian about it whatsoever… I can read a book, I can make friends with a person of a different culture, I can run three miles a day, I [can] have these great goals, and never be touched by the reality of Christ, because I separated it again. So, that’s a big issue for us. That’s the Christ-centered side. The character side is the fit four… We have character. But, we want Christian character… Without the Christ-centered side you are not going to get the kind of character you are looking for. You can have someone who is totally opposed to Christ still be a person of good repute.

The provost also stated, “The fit four, which is the articulation of the mission, has become integrated into the language, into the structure, into the documents, really into the ethos of the institution.” This caused him to express concern if it would ever need to change. He confided:
I tell you, one of my biggest fears is what happens if it all changes. How does that upset the process? ... [If] a new president comes in and they want to effect change, and many times the mission is one of the places they attack because it is easy to attack. Will people defend the mission because it is part of its culture, or is it so easily removed from the life of the college? That to me would interest me. If I could speed up time and see that. The data collected from the interviews, focus groups, and document reviews supported the provost’s perception that the mission of Christ-centered education for character and the Fit Four model had become embedded in the institution. The phrase, Christ-centered education for character, was short and easy to remember. The Fit Four model was referred to by the vast majority of participants and found in numerous documents. The succinct mission supported by a visual model was perceived as an effective way to communicate the mission to the campus community.

Living the Mission: Christ-Centered Education for Character

Three overarching themes emerged from the data related to living the mission at Midwestern Christian College: Leadership responsibilities, a holistic approach, and living life in community. All of these themes were described by members from the entire campus community. A fourth theme, teaching reflections, also emerged from the data; this theme relates more specifically to faculty. Each of these four themes, along with sub-themes, are discussed in this section.

Leadership Responsibilities

Upper-level administrators have a major role in ensuring the mission of the college is fulfilled. Administrators have an opportunity to emphasize—or de-emphasize—the mission of a college. The level of their support of the mission is often evident through observation of
activities and decisions made. In addition to clarifying and communicating the mission, leaders in key administrative positions demonstrate their commitment to the mission through hiring employees who will support and advance the mission, maintaining focus on the mission, and holding people accountable for helping the college achieve the mission. Data collected from this study aligned with these three categories of leadership responsibilities.

**Hiring decisions and guidelines.** The responsibility of the administrators to hire employees who supported the mission of the college was a strong theme which emerged from the study. Documents with policies and procedures related to the hiring of faculty were reviewed. These data, as well as data collected from interviews and focus group sessions, provided insight into the hiring guidelines, the statement of faith requirements, and the interview process used by top administrators to determine whether the potential employee was a good fit for the institution.

Two documents, in particular, articulated the importance of religion in hiring decisions. The SAS Faculty Handbook, designed for traditional, campus faculty, and the Policies and Procedures Manual both described Midwestern as a religious institution, which will “discriminate on the basis of religion in hiring and retention, but only to the extent permitted by applicable law.” Both documents also stated the college community adhered to guidelines “consistent with the history, theology, mission and character of the Free Methodist Church.” Both the SAS Faculty Handbook and the Policies and Procedures manual stated:

Employees of Midwestern Christian College are expected to adhere to these policies and to abide by the lifestyle expectations associated with the [Free Methodist] Book of Discipline as guidelines for Christian living. These guidelines are taken into consideration during the hiring process.
While both of these documents articulated the same statement regarding lifestyle expectations, a minor discrepancy between the two was noticed. The SAS Faculty Handbook referred to the 2007 Book of Discipline, and the Policies and Procedures Manual referred to the 2011 Book of Discipline. Of greater interest was the fact that the SPE Faculty Handbook, designed for online and degree completion program faculty, did not contain the same statements articulated above. There was no reference to discrimination based on religion. However, the SPE Faculty handbook did outline a set of hiring procedures for faculty. Faculty in the SPE programs, offered to non-traditional and online students, were called facilitators. Procedures for hiring facilitators included an interview with the Dean of Professional Education to determine, among other things, a “spiritual relationship with the Lord.” In addition, a “personal statement of faith” was also one of several items required in the formal application process.

A review of the college web site also provided insight into published hiring procedures. The page dedicated to employment opportunities listed nine job opportunities ranging from groundskeeper to instructor to chair of a department. The webpage had a link to each job description as well as two downloads: an application form and the Policy and Procedures Manual. The very first statement on the Application for Employment made reference to the religious preference articulated in the SAS Faculty Handbook and the Policies and Procedures Manual. The application for employment stated:

It is the policy of Midwestern Christian College to, within the parameters of our statements of faith and ethos, comply with all applicable state and federal laws prohibiting discrimination in employment based on race, color, sex, national origin, or other protected classification.
In addition to this statement, there was a sentence in the certification and signature section which indicated the employee would comply with the guidelines delineated in the Policy and Procedures Manual to maintain employment at the college.

The Policy and Procedures Manual available for download on the website in spring 2014 was different from the Policy and Procedures Manual reviewed as part of the HLC documents which the institution provided for this study. The HLC document was current for the 2013-2014 academic year, but the manual on the employment opportunities webpage was dated 2011-2013. Both manuals identified the same adoption date (2010) by the Board of Trustees, but the layout of the documents was very different. However, both manuals did contain the same non-discrimination wording. The 2011-2012 Policies and Procedures Manual also referred to the 2007 Free Methodist Book of Discipline, rather than the 2011 version referred to in the 2013-2014 Policies and Procedures Manual.

The job descriptions on the website contained varied wording related to the Christian emphasis of the college. Three of the nine job descriptions contained no language related to the Christian mission or expectations. These job descriptions were for grounds keeping, a graduate assistant position, and a development director. Three teaching positions were advertised. One of the listings was for a faculty department chair position, another was a non-tenure faculty position, and the third was a non-tenure instructor position. The two faculty descriptions contained the greatest number of references to integrating faith and learning of all nine, advertised jobs. These two job descriptions stated, “The applicant should consider the mission and perspective of Midwestern Christian College, which is dedicated to providing a Christ-centered education for character.” The faculty job descriptions also listed “integrate a Christian worldview into the learning experience,” and “abide by the ‘Core Values’ and Lifestyle
Expectations statements as set forth in the Policy and Procedures Manual” in the list of tasks expected for the positions. Finally, a sentence at the bottom of the job description encouraged anyone interested to “forward a cover letter, resume/vitae and a statement of faith” to the provost. These two faculty job descriptions provided the greatest alignment to the mission and expectations of the college. The third teaching position advertised only had one reference to expectations. It contained a single line in a bulleted list of tasks which stated, “Abide by the expectations as set forth in the Policy and Procedures and Faculty Manual.”

The remaining three job descriptions varied greatly. One job was for a position in the Office of Development and College Advancement. The advancement office focuses on fund-raising and working with alumni, volunteers, and philanthropic individuals to develop and advance the programs of the institution. The advancement position stated “The Core Values articulate the ideals that guide the operations of Midwestern Christian College in pursuit of providing a Christ-centered Education for Character.” The list of minimum qualifications for the advancement position included the statement, “An evangelical Christian commitment and lifestyle consistent with the institution’s goals, including signed agreement with Midwestern Christian College Statement of Faith and Community Lifestyle Statement and being in living agreement with same.” This job description was the only one of nine openings to specifically mention a signed statement of faith. A part-time position working in the student success center made no reference to the mission. However, one bulleted statement under the qualifications listed “A personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” The final job description was for a position in admissions. The first sentence under qualifications for this position read, “A qualified candidate must have a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and support the Christian character and
mission of Midwestern Christian College.” This statement was the only reference to mission or other hiring expectations in the job description.

The hiring expectations articulated in the job descriptions on the webpage were decidedly varied. Consistency occurred because all applicants were required to submit the same application form where they were to acknowledge adherence to the guidelines in the Policy and Procedures Manual as a “condition of employment.” However, the Policies and Procedures Manual available for download on the webpage was out of date. In spite of these variances in job descriptions, staff members in the focus groups recalled reading the manual. An employee from the development office said, “I do remember reading… a manual of some kind that made it very clear that a Christian faith was expected and vitally important to your success.” A recent hire from the business department concurred, “When we had the new employees go around, they do sign saying that they have received and acknowledge the policies and procedures manual and that they will follow them.” These reflections provided evidence that written documentation emphasizing the importance of a personal, Christian faith was communicated as part of the hiring process.

Statement of faith. Administrators used an application and interview process to determine the mission fit of a candidate prior to a formal interview. However, the application process appeared to be different for different positions. The job descriptions posted online required faculty interested in teaching for Midwestern Christian College to submit a statement of faith as part of the application process. The SPE Handbook also listed a personal statement of faith as a requirement of applicants interested in facilitating online courses. None of the other jobs required an applicant to write a statement of faith, but one did require a signed statement of
agreement with the college’s statement of faith. This inconsistency found in the documents was also evident in discussions with administrators, faculty, and staff.

The president described the application process for online facilitators, who were hired from all over the country. He said, “They all get interviewed, and they all submit a statement of faith. To the maximum extent that we can, we try to get a person that is a fit.” The president also shared that he personally signed the college’s statement of faith as part of the hiring requirements for the role of president. No other participants described being required to sign the college’s statement of faith, but the Dean of Professional Education did discuss submitting his own statement of faith as part of the hiring process six years ago.

The only focus group participants who described writing a statement of faith to submit along with their applications were faculty. However, only faculty hired recently seemed to recall that process. A recent hire described being required to submit a written statement of faith along with the application and resume. Another faculty member agreed, recalling:

I was actually one of the first—I may have been the first—that actually interviewed with the current president. Before I came in, I actually had to fill out a statement of faith and have that with me. They wanted me to actually email that in. I emailed that in a couple of days before, of course, with my application and things like that, and a resume and everything.

The provost reinforced this by sharing the statement of faith was used to “evaluate whether or not [the applicant] would be suitable.” He continued, “The statement of faith really is a doctrinal statement. And, in their statement of faith we are looking for belief in Christ.”

Data from interviews and focus groups revealed a statement of faith was not required of employees other than faculty. Additionally, faculty who were at the institution prior to the new
president did not recall that being part of the hiring process. One faculty member, who had been employed in various departments and as an adjunct prior to becoming a full-time faculty member, said she had not been asked about a statement of faith until applying for a full-time faculty position.

**Interview process.** The largest amount of data related to hiring were comments about the actual interview process. Some participants were hired under the current administration and some were hired prior to the arrival of the new president four years ago, yet the interviews and focus group data revealed several commonalities.

Faculty in the focus groups did not recall discussing the mission as part of the hiring process. The group chuckled when one member confessed, “I think because I knew it was a Christian college, I assumed their mission was the same as mine—and it seemed to be similar, educating people from that perspective.” A staff member who was hired 14 years ago did remember a focus on mission:

> They had just switched the name from Midwestern College to Midwestern Christian College, so there was a lot of this focus on mission and that kind of thing, too. It wasn’t as short as it is now, so I don’t remember it, but I know that that was something they went over with me.

The only other data related to mission were articulated by recently hired employees. One staff member from the ministry department recalled applying two different times and going through the interview process twice. He said, “Both times, mission was talked about as well, fairly intensely, theology, Free Methodist History, doctrine… theology, heritage, stuff like that.” Another recent hire also remembered the mission being discussed. He stated, “Well, I came in right as we were changing our mission statement to the fit four model, so that was interesting.”
Outside of these comments, the majority of the focus group data related to the interview process came from candidates being asked to articulate their faith and how they would apply it in their positions if they were hired.

Several faculty focus group members described being asked to articulate their faith. Examples of interview questions included, “Talk to me about your faith journey,” “What does your belief mean to you?” “How has it impacted you?” “How I integrate my faith in my day to day life,” “How I stay close to the Lord,” and “Take me through a class period. Let’s say you are going to teach economics. What would a typical class look like? How are you going to integrate the faith?” One participant explained:

Definitely the fact that we were Free Methodists and believing, and that being important for teaching… You’re not going to bring in a non-believer who doesn’t believe in our concepts, our beliefs, our faith. Because, you are not going to see that then played out in the classroom.

These types of questions were seen as important because of the implications faith would have in the classroom.

Staff members also described being expected to articulate their own, personal faith beliefs. One staff member recalled being asked to provide his testimony, even though those interviewing him already knew him. Another employee also remembered being asked to provide her testimony. She shared, “When they first started off the interview, it was: ‘Tell us your testimony.’” A third woman, hired more recently described providing a written narrative, stating, “I definitely wrote out my testimony and my life journey as I was asked. I kind of created a statement of faith for them.” Being able to articulate one’s faith was an important element of the interview process.
Other staff members also discussed describing their faith journeys, spiritual heritage, and/or personal beliefs. A resident director shared, “I remember very much being asked about my spiritual heritage and why did I want to work with college students and how was I going to introduce Christ into those relationships. Very specifically.” A male employee who worked in admissions stated, “I don’t remember signing a statement of faith—I’ve only been here a year and a half—but I very distinctly remember discussing my faith story during the interview process before I was even brought to campus.” Another employee from the information technology department was also in agreement. He described this component of the interview:

My recollection was, that the faith statement was not, here is a piece of paper, read this, do you agree with it. But tell us about your faith. What it means to you. So, it was more my feedback to the individuals that were on the search committee about where I stood. All participants described interview questions related to their personal faith beliefs and how they saw those beliefs being applied and lived out in the job they were applying for.

Interviews for faculty and upper-level administrators appeared to be more intense than other employees. An upper-level administrator described meeting with “students, faculty, staff, religion department, former campus pastors, residence life team, all kinds of people. It was an all-day affair.” A recent hire for a faculty position agreed. He completed the application process with the new administration, and described a lengthy interview process:

My interview process started at 8:30 in the morning, and I met with the provost, then I met with the president, and then I met with the dean of admissions and then I met with the dean of finance… Then I met with dean of students, and then I met with the department chair of the science department and then I met with the department chair of the business department. Then they let me have lunch by myself. [He took a deep breath
and continued.] Then I met with the president and the provost again and I think I had a little group deal. Then they let me go at 3:30 and then I passed out!

The focus group participants laughed with sympathy and understanding. One commented, “I got off easy!” The extensive process revealed a commitment to community, which is discussed later in this chapter, and was perceived as an effort by upper-level administrators to hire employees who were the right “fit” for the college.

FINDING EMPLOYEES WITH THE RIGHT “FIT.” Finding employees who were the right fit was described as always being a priority at Midwestern Christian College. A long-time faculty member described a previous dean of the college who looked for several things when hiring someone; he looked for a spiritual fit, an economic fit and a geographic fit. The dean had served for 35 years in that position and had observed that people who did not have the right fit did not stay at the college for long.

The current administration focuses mainly on the spiritual fit and hiring people of strong, Christian character. The dean of students explained:

I want people who work down in financial aid to be strong people of character. To not fudge numbers, and to not try to glibly fly their way through things, because there are seasons in financial aid that are incredibly tedious and fast-paced and arduous.

He stressed wanting potential employees to understand that Midwestern hired “people of character,” who “love the Lord, and want to see that in their own life.” A staff member in one of the focus groups validated these comments by the dean of students. The staff member remembered the dean articulating the importance of a strong spiritual fit when hiring someone:

I’m recalling [the dean of students] mentioning a candidate they had interviewed for a position (I don’t even remember what position it was now), and he was having a hard
time getting over the fact when they asked a question about faith it was kind of a…

(pause) lukewarm response, and it was one of those – a deal breaker. If you can’t speak to your faith system and your beliefs, then you are probably not the right person to be here.

The staff member viewed this administrator as making hiring decisions that were supportive of the mission of the institution and screening out those who were not.

This same administrator believed he had made good hiring decisions, which have benefitted the college. He shared, “If there is one thing that I feel like I offer to the campus that God has gifted me with is I have been blessed to be able to hire good people.” He described this as a gift of discernment from the Holy Spirit, and shared a specific example related to hiring people to be in charge of the residence halls. He stated, “The average stay of a resident director is about two years. I’ve had staff—in my tenure here—three staff members that have stayed more than six.” He described feeling blessed to have been able to hire good people in student services who stayed for a long period of time.

The Dean of Professional Education, another upper-level administrator who hired several employees, also stressed the importance of a spiritual fit. When asked how he determined whether to hire someone or not, he referred to the applicant’s response in the statement of faith. He looked for the writing to be in first person, because to him, that illustrated the importance of the topic to the individual. He said:

When I get an application and everything is in third person, it doesn’t necessarily mean that it is a negative, but it raises some caution in my mind. And in those cases, I give them a call and I just have an interaction with them. But, one of the first questions I will ask is, “Today, what does the Lord mean to you? How important is He in your life?”
He described the statement of faith to be of utmost importance, stating, “I put a lot of value in that statement.” If their Christian faith was not important in their life, he perceived, they had a difficult time answering those types of questions.

The data presented here illustrate a history of administrators hiring employees who articulated a Christian faith and were supportive of the mission of the college. This cultural practice was encapsulated in a comment made by one participant when asked if other staff members would provide an alternative viewpoint. He said:

I’m trying to think through just about everybody I can on campus, and I’m having a hard time trying to come up with anybody that’s even… really… [secretly]… the opposite direction. I think that probably goes back to the hiring process and the fact that when we are hiring somebody, those questions get asked.

This staff member described the employees of the college as fairly unified in their commitment to the mission of the college. This unity was perceived as a result of administrators hiring personnel who were a good fit for the institution.

**Maintaining focus on the mission.** The data from this study revealed maintaining focus on the mission as an important part of the leadership responsibilities. Leaders must encourage the campus community to continually strive toward achieving the mission, or risk a loss of focus. The document reviews, interviews, and focus group sessions provided insight into the variety of ways leaders at Midwestern Christian College worked to keep the college focused on the mission of Christ-centered education for character and the Fit Four outcomes described earlier. The main ways leaders maintained focus on the mission and Fit Four outcomes were including them in college documents, incorporating them in meetings and decision making processes, and encouraging employees to apply them daily as part of their normal, lived experiences.
**College documents.** A focused attempt to incorporate the mission and Fit Four outcomes into college documents was obvious. The mission statement, Christ-centered education for character, was clearly articulated in key documents, including the academic catalog; SAS and SPE faculty handbooks; the student handbook; the academic catalog; the strategic plan; the Policies and Procedures Manual; and various other documents. The Fit Four theme was prominent in documents as well. In addition to the aforementioned documents, faculty described how they were focused on revising syllabi and evaluating the general education curriculum to ensure alignment with all elements of the Fit Four. A standard syllabus template included a rationale section where faculty were to answer the question, “In what way does [this course] reflect on the mission of the College or Fit-Four Strategy.” Sample before and after syllabi from a composition class illustrated the integration of the Fit Four into the course objectives as described by faculty.

An employee from the admissions department provided samples of publicity documents given to prospective students. The newer documents all made reference to either the mission, the Fit Four, or both. The college maintained a focus on the mission when it communicated with prospective students. Before students arrived, they received marketing and application materials articulating the mission of the college. Even a document my son, a high school senior, received unsolicited in the mail had the Fit Four theme pictured on one side.

The website, a form of virtual documentation, also appears focused on the mission and the Fit Four theme. The stated mission, Christ-centered education for character, and the Fit Four logo both appear on the main page of the college’s website. The Fit Four logo is linked to a full description of the Fit Four model. Other documents on the website also emphasize the Christian focus of the school.
Students wishing to apply to Midwestern Christian College are required to submit an application as part of the admissions process. The application contained a section titled “Why Midwestern Christian College?” In this section, applicants are asked to describe what a Christian faith means to them personally, and why they feel the college would be a good fit for them. The application makes it clear, “A profession of Christian faith is not required for admission to Midwestern Christian College,” but that the college does “seek to serve students who desire or appreciate our distinctively Christian educational environment.” This application process clearly communicates the mission of the college to the applicant.

When questioned about the application process, students remembered being asked about a statement of faith. After discussing among themselves, they agreed they were not asked to sign a particular statement of faith, but rather had to write a brief paragraph describing their own faith. This conversation validates the data collected from the document review where the application form required students to write about what a Christian faith meant to them. One student compared this approach to other colleges she applied to where the religious background was one of the first questions asked. She preferred the way Midwestern Christian College approached it, where they asked questions to get to know the applicant first. She said, “It felt a little bit more personal, before they hit you straight up with, ‘Well, what’s your religion background?’ So, that was nice.” The process also gave the student the opportunity to reflect more deeply about her spiritual beliefs and becoming more mature in her faith rather than providing a stock or perfunctory response. She went on to say, “And, it’s a good way for you to think about, well, I am coming into college. What do I believe? Is it mainly my parents’ faith? Okay, well that’s cool. But, I’m going to pick a school where I can develop my own independent faith.”
Some students in the focus groups also recalled taking a Presidential Test that asked questions related to their educational background and spiritual formation. The provost provided additional information about the test. He said every student who attended a preview weekend had an opportunity to take the test, which included academic questions as well as an essay related to a spiritual question. Every student who took the test during a preview weekend received a small scholarship. Additionally, one outstanding student was also awarded a Presidential scholarship. In addition to this test, the provost clarified, students were also asked questions as part of their application to Midwestern. The application questions related to books the student had read, favorite Bible verses, and personal belief system. These questions helped the college to know if the student would be a good fit.

Part of the admissions process also included signing the Community Expectations Covenant. Documents related to community expectations contained statements consistent with a commitment to the mission of Christ-centered education for character, and maintained a focus on this mission. The 2013-2014 Academic Catalog and the SAS Faculty Handbook both stated:

The mission of Midwestern Christian College is to provide a Christ-centered education for character. This outcome is echoed in the Community Expectations Covenant and Code of Character, which provide the behavioral basis for how elements of character are defined at Midwestern Christian College.

The Community Expectations Covenant did not appear in faculty or student documents related to the SPE. Therefore, it appeared the Community Expectations Covenant was used for the traditional, campus community, and the Code of Conduct was used for the online and degree completion programs.
The Community Expectations Covenant was discussed briefly in the 2013-2014 Academic Catalog, stating, “The Community Expectations Covenant is designed to be a support to each student and the community as a whole in this process of Christian lifestyle development,” and a copy of the document was included in the SAS Student Handbook. A copy was also included in the HLC self-study materials. However, the document provided in the self-study contained a date of May, 2011, and differed from the document in the Student Handbook for the 2013-2014 academic year. While the content of the two documents was fairly consistent, the format was changed. The SAS Student Handbook version was divided into two parts—a scriptural principles section and a best practices section. The scriptural principles section required students to have integrity, value diversity, and abstain from drugs, alcohol, and immoral sexual behavior. References to specific scripture verses were added to this section in the Student Handbook. The best practices section required students to attend chapel and act in accordance with additional guidelines related to safety, authority, and un-offensive behaviors. The title Community Expectations Covenant was used in SAS documents for faculty and students. The title Lifestyle Covenant was mentioned in the Policy and Procedures Manual. It was not clear how the Lifestyle Covenant differed from the Community Expectations Covenant.

A copy of the Code of Character was provided in the SPE Faculty Program Handbook and the SPE and Distance Education section of the 2013-2014 Academic Catalog. It was not mentioned in the SPE Student Handbook except in reference to the code as part of the administrative dismissal process for academic integrity violations. The Code of Character was not found in the Dual Credit Handbook, or the SAS Student Handbook. The Code of Character included three key elements:
I will honor the role of the scholar by refraining from any form of academic misconduct including plagiarism, impersonation, fabrication, sabotage, cheating, and deception.

I will respect the dignity and value of each individual, recognizing that each person is created in the image of God and deserves to be treated with respect.

I will refrain from the use of alcohol, tobacco, or other related substances on the property of Midwestern Christian College or as a part of any program or event sponsored by Midwestern Christian College.

The documents described here illustrate a commitment of the school to maintain its focus on the mission of Christ-centered education for character. In addition, the plaques in the buildings and banners across campus served as reminders of the mission as well. Written documentation is one way to continually remind the campus community of the focus of the institution.

**Meetings and decision-making processes.** Referencing the mission statement and the Fit Four model during meetings was another approach administrators used to maintain focus on the mission. One faculty member shared that at faculty meetings, “our vice president of academics is very apt to throw in suggestions for how to teach.” She was referring to ways to integrate faith in the classroom.

Staff members in the focus groups described meetings where the mission and Fit Four were prominent. One stated, “When we have all faculty and staff meetings, we have student development meetings, it is always focused around that, or asked how we can do that, or shown how we can do that.” Another staff member shared about the most recent faculty and staff meeting everyone had attended. He said, “[The president] shared our ultimate goal of Christ-centered education for character. He reminded us this is important. It was kind of one of those keep sharing, keep investing, because this is something that is worth giving your all for.”
director of spiritual formation echoed the idea of upper-level administrators stressing the importance of keeping Christ at the center of what they do. He stated:

> It’s been brought to my attention a few times—I know a couple of times from the president himself—that as society has changed, it’s really important that we all know and can state the Christ-centered education for character, because college education has shifted throughout the years. That is one of the things that separates us from a number of other colleges, that it is Christ-centered education for character. And, it’s important that we all know that and that we all keep that at the center.

The perception from staff members in the focus groups was the commitment to Christ-centered education for character was routinely evident and they were consistently reminded of this purpose, particularly when they attended group meetings.

The student government sponsor also spoke about the Fit Four model being used as a guide for student government meetings. During the focus group, he pointed to the whiteboard at the front of the room. He read the student government members’ goal for the year, which was written on the board, “Enhance and facilitate the MCC mission.” He explained when student government met, the members often asked, “What is the ultimate goal? Why are we doing this, and how does it fit our purpose? How are we enhancing the purpose of Midwestern College, which is Christ-centered education for character?” This goal influenced activities student government chose to sponsor for the campus community. He provided a specific example, explaining student leaders had decided to not sponsor monthly movie nights at the local movie theater because the movies being shown did not facilitate the college’s mission. He shared:

> This semester, we have had zero at the movie theatre because of particular movie choices. That has been an intentional discussion between me and students as well as us taking
myself and other student leaders and going and talking to other professors that they 
respect and saying what does this look like? Why would we show it? Why would we not 
show it?

In this case, the student government still sponsored movie nights for the campus community, but 
they were intentional in the movies they chose to show. The mission of Midwestern Christian 
College and the Fit Four model were referred to during student government meetings and was 
used in determining the activities student government decided to offer. The provost provided 
another example of how the Fit Four model was used by student government as they planned 
activities for the campus:

If they are going to host an event down in the mud hole or the coffee house, they will post 
an icon of whether it is a fit heart, mind, soul, or heart experience. If it is a social event, 
they put a little fit heart icon [on the flyer] and so students know.

Not only does this help student government to clarify the purpose of an event, it keeps the Fit 
Four model central to their planning and very evident to the student body on a daily basis. 
Having this type of focus at meetings clarified their purpose and also supported the mission of 
the college.

One additional meeting time was explicitly viewed by focus group participants as a way 
leaders maintained focus on the mission of the college. This was not a traditional, employee 
meeting. Rather, it was a weekly prayer meeting. Upper-level administrators led the way by 
modeling a personal commitment to begin each week with prayer. The opportunity to gather in 
prayer was open to the entire campus. One participant explained:

There is an established Monday morning prayer time for the school, for the students, 
faculty, the general campus. That is most well attended by cabinet members as well.
They are leading in that. Every Monday morning at 7 a.m. they meet together for prayer and that is open for anyone on campus. There are students that attend; faculty and staff as well.

Cabinet’s leadership in this weekly prayer time was perceived by the employees as upper-level administrators modeling a commitment to the mission to the rest of the campus community.

**Encouraging daily application.** In addition to using scheduled meetings as an opportunity to remind the campus community of the mission of the college, focus group participants provided several examples of steps the administration took to encourage them to live out the mission on a daily basis. These efforts were described as occurring in a variety of ways.

Faculty described efforts by the Provost to remind them of the mission through emails. “Sometimes he sends things to us individually that just happens to be with our departments,” stated one faculty member. Another agreed, “He’ll send emails; he sends devotionals out.” Emails from the Provost were seen as reminders to be thinking about the mission on a daily basis.

When asked about other resources which would help them carry out the mission, the participants usually referred to other people who they saw as resources willing to help them carry out the mission. Some mentioned legacies of those before them; others mentioned sharing ideas amongst themselves. Upper-level administrators were most typically mentioned as being a resource to people as they worked to integrate faith and learning on a daily basis. One participant did mention communicating with other faculty “one-on-one and through email,” but continued to specifically refer to key administrators:

I think [the provost] does a good job of putting himself out there as a resource for faculty and staff… anyone… I don’t know exactly what he says in the faculty meetings, but
president and [the provost] do a great job of putting themselves out there and just saying this is who we are. So, I don’t know exactly resource wise, but from my perspective they always seem to be available, and any of the cabinet level is available.

Another focus group participant also mentioned the provost along with another upper-level administrator as resources. He said, “[The provost] previously was the campus pastor. [The dean of students], who heads student development was previously the campus pastor. So they are natural resources over both of those wings of the college.” The sharing of ideas among people, specifically ideas from leaders, was described as the main resource to help employees as they worked to live out the mission on a daily basis. These ideas, along with the clear mission and the Fit Four model helped employees maintain their focus on what was important.

When asked to provide examples of how the mission played out on a daily basis, several staff members described how the Fit Four model was incorporated into their daily work in a variety of different jobs across campus. A selection of examples from employees who worked in resident life, administrative assistance, student government, advancement, and financial aid are provided here.

A resident director described how important it was to her to have the entire campus community working for a common goal:

Being removed from [the classroom] a little bit and being in the dorm, for me, it is huge to have everybody on the same page with that. Everybody that you work with on campus. That we are aiming for the same outcome in the end. I think that having that mission statement and all of us know it and we probably know it in our sleep almost. We all practice it a little bit differently because of the jobs that we have, but it is just a real comfort to know that your coworkers are right with you in those ways. That we want to
develop whole people in Christ, in the workplace, you know, to give them the tools to be active in their communities and serve in that way.

She continued describing how, in her work as a resident director, she developed programming around the Fit Four:

We have a treadmill in our building now, so that people can work out even in the building without having to go to the gym, because that gets busy. That is one element. We try to bring in guest speakers from the community or people who are a few years ahead of the college students to talk about their journey and how college effected and impacted their lives. Those are a couple of things. But, trying to integrate what is learned in the classroom and then bring it back and talk about it and make it even more relevant to how do you apply this on a daily basis in your life?

She saw the “heart, soul, mind, and body… [as] very holistic education” which applied to her role in working with students in the dorm as well as to the classroom.

Another employee described how having a clear mission and the Fit Four provided focus for her work as an administrative assistant. She described it as the guiding force for everything that happened in her office:

It’s crucial that that is always in front of anyone who comes into the president’s office and any work that comes out of the president’s office. It’s always focused on Christ-centered education for character. Is this what we are enhancing? Is that what we are doing? How is this going to impact fit minds, hearts, bodies, souls? Is this making an impact? Because if this doesn’t touch on those items, why are we doing it? Or, where do we put our resources. Those kind of questions.
The framework provided by the mission and Fit Four model brought clarity and purpose to her work.

Another example where the mission was articulated was advancement. An employee in development explained the importance of the mission and being able to communicate that mission clearly. He stressed to his department that after expressing gratitude, the next most important thing was:

To communicate the mission of the school in the language that that person understands. Sometimes it’s written; sometimes it’s verbal. Sometimes it’s simply probing questions to get that person to talk. But, it’s that involvement of expressing the mission, interpreting the mission—and our lives really interpret the mission. So, it’s a continual telling. An older alum that maybe graduated in the ‘40’s or something, that this is still the Midwestern that they went to. Society has changed, and Midwestern has changed, but the commitment is still the same, to the mission that they would understand.

Employees in advancement were encouraged to communicate the mission and remain focused on the mission of the college daily.

One final example of an employee maintaining a daily focus on the mission was provided by a staff member who had worked in admissions and was now working in the financial aid department. He described encouraging his staff to pray with people over the phone. He talked about incorporating faith, even when dealing with difficult financial situations which caused stress. He said:

We have those as an opportunity to say hey, let’s just stop and pray about what’s going on in your life. I’ve had students call me back later and [say], “Remember that time?” … Not really, (he laughs). “Well, it made a difference in my life.”
Having a Christ-centered approach when dealing with financial stresses of education was perceived as helpful, and maintained a focus on the college mission. In addition, he also described how the Fit Four model helped his department realize they were doing additional things they had not before realized also fit the mission:

We are also teaching students how to do a budget. And, [to think about] what are your needs or your wants? I have students in my office that want to take loan money so they can go get burgers down at McDonalds. So, to help them see… You know, how much does a hamburger cost? Versus 10% interest on every burger. Do you really want to spend $15 for a hamburger? So, it allows us to see some of these other things that we have been doing as a part of the mission. Whereas before it was just, this is our job. But now, it kind of all fits.

These examples provide insight into how various employees were attempting to remain focused on the mission on a daily basis. The Fit Four model was perceived as a tool for bringing focus and clarity to numerous departments in their efforts to remain focused on the mission of Christ-centered education for character.

**Holding People Accountable.** One responsibility of leadership is holding people accountable to the mission of the college. This was the third main leadership responsibility discussed by the participants of the study. Responses revolved around the topics of employee retention decisions and assessing the outcomes of the mission.

**Employee retention decisions.** Several documents regarding employee expectations were already discussed. In addition to the findings already described, the SAS Faculty Handbook articulated guidelines related to the ongoing expectations of faculty. It stated that a faculty member should:
1. Seek to be a person of deep faith and integrity.  
2. Strive to advance in one’s chosen discipline.  
3. Be faithful in teaching and mentoring students on the Midwestern Christian College campus.  
4. Make a meaningful contribution to the Midwestern Christian College community, the church of one’s choice, and the [town] community.

These expectations were for SAS Faculty; faculty who taught in traditional programs on-site at the Midwestern Christian College campus.

The SPE Faculty Handbook also listed expectations of the facilitators. These expectations were different from those listed above for SAS faculty. The online facilitator expectations included statements such as, “encourage adult learners,” “use process-oriented instructional methods,” “create a learning environment that is intellectually exciting,” “remain abreast of professional developments in their fields,” stress the “value of a liberal arts education,” and “be supportive of Midwestern Christian College and what it represents.” There was no reference to being a “person of deep faith and integrity” as was seen for SPE faculty, other than the required personal statement of faith submitted during the hiring process.

Regardless of the different expectations articulated in the two handbooks, both SAS and SPE employees were required to uphold the mission of the college. When asked if the mission was really driving decisions at the college, participants in one of the staff focus groups spoke to changes in the coaching staff they believed were mission driven. One woman explained the environment a decade earlier when she was a student was one where numerous staff and faculty were very committed to the mission, however some of the coaches were not. The resident director, whose spouse is a coach, provided additional background context. She explained, prior to their arrival, there had been a mindset that as long as the team was winning, the spiritual
emphasis did not matter. But, that changed when a new athletic director who had been a pastor was hired:

He was hiring men and women who definitely had a relationship with Christ…. Now, when you hire a coach, you want to make sure they have a fervent relationship with Christ. And, it’s not just about winning, although that still is a big part of it and that pressure is on… But, it is about how are you going to lead by example? How are you going to introduce Christ to the playing on the field and on the court? This isn’t a separate entity from your faith. This is a big part of it.

She described the change as occurring during the past five to 10 years, and felt the emphasis has become increasingly bold. She stated, “We are not going to take a coach who is kind of borderline,” and explained they would not be hired if “their faith and their lifestyle isn’t in line with what we believe and what we want our students to see as examples.”

In addition to this general change in philosophy, one staff member provided a specific example where the mission of Christ-centered education for character had not been followed; because of that, a change in staff occurred. She said, “There is definitely one specific instance I can think of with a coach. Some turnover there… more because of an incident, I would say, rather than philosophy.” When asked if the turnover was tied to mission she responded, “Yes, there was a bad example. It went beyond just an instance of that one thing. It was more of a… not necessarily lifestyle… but choices. Christ-centered education for character was a little bit lacking.” As she shared, others in the group nodded in agreement and added the words “choices” and “personal character.” It was evident the staff members in this group perceived the turnover in coaching staff as related to a lack of commitment to the mission of Christ-centered education for character.
Students also remembered one particular change in coaching staff. The focus group participants agreed the new coach was a better fit with the mission of the school. One student described participating on a sports team where, previously, the mission was not evident. But, he talked about a change in the past two years since a new coach took over. “I’m much more proud to call myself a [College team] player now, because of what he has done for our program,” he said. “He’s doing a great job.” The coaching change was perceived as good for the mission of the school by both employees and students.

The traditional campus was not the only part of Midwestern Christian College to see a change in personnel due to a lack of mission fit. The president talked about online facilitators who just wrote something down on the application in order to get a job. He said, “Now, you can fool me… but boy, it doesn’t take long to figure out who those people are.” The Dean of Professional Education confirmed the college had made changes with regard to some facilitators. Although he disliked having to terminate an online facilitator, the dean recognized that at times it needed to be done. He described his approach:

I will always try to make it a teaching moment. Because it is hard to terminate a faculty… that’s just… that still bothers me. If there is any way to help guide that person to be able to present something that is compatible with Midwestern’s mission, I try to do that. But, we have had to terminate a couple.

When asked if it was because they did not support the mission, the dean responded, “Right. And we missed it during the hiring process. Or, people change. It could be both.” These decisions illustrated the administrators decisions about retaining employees were made with the mission of the college in mind.
**Assessing mission outcomes.** The document review revealed the administration was interested in knowing if the college was perceived as accomplishing its mission. Student assessment surveys related to the mission of Christ-centered education for character were found. One survey was designed to be given to students graduating from the college. This survey sought feedback from the students about the institution as a whole. Another survey was conducted in every class each semester to provide student feedback on specific courses and faculty performance. Additionally, programs were comprehensively evaluated every three years. Each of these levels of assessment included evidence of a commitment to the mission and Fit Four outcomes.

**Institutional assessment.** The institution asked graduates to complete exit surveys where they rated their level of satisfaction on several topics. A new exit survey was created to align with the new mission statement. It was implemented in the spring of 2013. The survey consisted of 167 questions, the majority of which utilized a Likert-type response option. Several questions related specifically to the mission of Christ-Centered Education for Character. For example, students were asked to rate their satisfaction level on Bible and worldview courses, Christ-centered education, and HBC groups. They were also asked to compare their current level of confidence to when they started college related to expressing worldviews, interacting with the Bible, and their faith in Christ. Several questions also asked students to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with certain statements. Topics included statements about a quality education in each of the fit four areas; perspectives about faith, the Bible, and a relationship with Christ; and statements related to appreciation of diverse cultures and worldviews. Including questions related to the stated mission and outcomes on the exit survey illustrated administrators
were interested in student perceptions, took the mission of the college seriously, and would use assessment to hold the campus community responsible for achieving the mission.

**Faculty assessment.** Teachers are evaluated by students every semester using the Teacher Instruction and General Evaluation Rating (TIGER) survey. The faculty assessment process was also redesigned after the new mission statement was created. The new instrument asks students to rate the instructor on a Likert-type scale from one to five, with one being the lowest and five being the highest. The survey provides faculty feedback on students’ perceptions of their content knowledge and pedagogical approaches. In addition, the survey asks students to rate the instructor in the area of integrating Christian perspectives into the academic discipline. The TIGER Survey provides faculty feedback regarding the integration of faith and learning from the students’ perspectives. In addition to being assessed by students using the TIGER Survey, faculty also conduct self-assessment reflections. Using a Fit Four template, faculty complete a reflective assessment that contains personal and professional goals for each of the four outcomes. The goals are recorded on a form and submitted to the provost. A copy of this form was found in the HLC documents. The institutional assessment office also provided five examples, with names redacted, of forms completed by faculty as documentation evidence for this study. In the samples, faculty recorded both a personal goal and a professional goal for each area of the Fit Four using two different colors of ink. Although this process is an informal assessment, the provost does use it to encourage faculty and hold them accountable for developing in the same four areas the college expects students to develop.

**Program assessment.** Programs are formally evaluated by the administration under the Triennial Assessment Plan process. This is a process where, on a three-year rotation, program chairs file a comprehensive report regarding the state of the program(s). At the same time,
faculty in the selected programs also go through a comprehensive review. As part of the process, faculty complete an electronic portfolio which includes summary evaluation data, classroom observations from the provost and a peer, and self-reflections completed by the faculty member. One section of the self-reflection requires a narrative discussion on the faculty member’s growth in the four areas of Fit Four. When programs and faculty are not being comprehensively evaluated as part of the triennial assessment plan, a standard, annual report is still submitted to either the chair (for faculty) or the provost (for programs).

A Holistic Approach to Faith and Learning

One of the main themes to emerge from this study was the holistic approach the college took toward the integration of faith and learning. Upper-level administrators, faculty, staff, and students all appeared to view Christ-centered education as encompassing an entire way of life. Students described a holistic approach where every aspect of campus life was influenced by the Christian faith. Staff members talked about a holistic, worldview approach. And, faculty members explained the integration of faith and learning was about more than academics. In fact, the phrase “integration of faith and learning” was perceived as an inadequate way to describe what the college hoped to accomplish through its mission.

Participants preferred to describe the integration of faith and learning using the Christ-centered language of the college mission statement. In a faculty focus group, one faculty member said using the term integration was “not the best way to talk about it.” He referred to the provost saying the phrase integration of faith and learning implied they were “two separate things,” when they should not be separate. A similar discussion occurred in a staff focus group. An employee from Admissions shared the provost would probably be “a little bristly” over using the term integration, because:
That implies that we have to integrate faith and learning. And, in fact, if we are Christians, it should be that we are simply allowing the students that we teach in the classroom—and I would say the same thing for my staff in the admissions office—allowing them to see that God is in science, God is in biology, God is in music; and drawing out how the creation of the universe has to do with everything that we are involved with. It’s not a matter of two separate pieces that we are trying to fit together. It’s how He created it, and we explore that as we work together.

The staff member also shared he had never heard anyone explain it the way the provost did, but that he felt it was the way it should be explained. He continued, “If, at our core we’ve been changed by Christ, that is how everything that we are learning should be looked at.” The director of spiritual formation agreed, and explained that even though he focused on being Christ-centered as he planned for chapel and other spiritual events, he felt strongly it was important this was a campus-wide focus. He said, “It isn’t just that we go to chapel and it happens there and we leave.” Others nodded in agreement. He continued, “I want to make sure the classroom doesn’t separate itself from spiritual formation. That it’s not, I go here to learn history and then the Christ-centered stuff happens outside. But, it all happens together.” This holistic approach was mentioned by other staff members as well. A resident director listed the four elements of the Fit Four, and said, “it’s very holistic education.”

The Fit Four Model itself was about more than academics; it included mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional components. This model was often referred to when participants described how their campus community approached the integration of faith and learning. One faculty member said, “With our Fit Four model, fit soul, the spirituality is part of our holistic learning, and we don’t separate it out… You don’t have to leave your faith at the door.” Even
the president viewed the integration of faith and learning as encompassing all aspects of daily life. He said, “Integrating faith and learning is working with people. Integrating faith and learning is the ‘Four Fits,’ is it not?” He described this work as “everybody’s mission.” He also saw the work as “asking hard questions, like, what is Christian Worldview? What should we be teaching in our curriculums? How are we different?”

The provost would have been pleased to hear the perspectives of integration of faith and learning shared by the campus community. He shared a viewpoint similar to what the faculty and staff had perceived him to have. When asked about bringing Christ into academic conversations, he agreed, but corrected the language, stating, “Yeah. Well, out of those conversations.” He continued, “That word integration really rubs me raw because I think our job is to discover God in the midst of science, not to bring him into it. It’s not like he is removed from it.” He described the integration of faith and learning as a challenge:

It is something that people don’t know how to do, to be honest. Because, I think some people think that integration of faith and learning is I’m a Christian, I teach, therefore I am, you know. And, that’s integration of faith and learning. I think some people think beginning class with prayer and having a devotional is the integration of faith and learning. You can go through numerous… having a Christian text, or reader that is Christian, that somehow that’s integration of faith. I think those are an easy way out. I think they are a way to “Christianize” the educational process. But, that’s not integration of faith and learning. Because, again, go back to the definition. If the idea is to discover God in the midst of a discipline, then integration of faith and learning is identifying God in the midst of a discipline.
Both the provost and the campus community emphasized the importance of a holistic approach to integrating faith and learning. They perceived the phrase used in the mission, Christ-centered education for character, as a better way to describe what they hoped to accomplish. The Christ-centered element was often described as a Christian worldview, and the character component was manifested in the Fit Four model. These two essential components of the holistic approach to education at Midwestern Christian College are described in the following two sections.

**Christian Worldview.** A holistic, Christ-centered approach to education was described in terms of having a Christian worldview. When asked to define Christian worldview, almost all of the participants offered their descriptions. The upper-level administrators offered similar views. The president described it as, “Biblically based, Christ-centered, (pause) intentionally living a life in a way that pleases the Lord so that we can allow Him to change us.” Another key leader shared, “I think Christian worldview is… how we use our faith, our relationships, the Bible, to then view the world and interact with it.”

Several focus group participants described a Christian worldview using the eyes or a lens analogy. One student said, “A worldview is often classified as the lens in which you perceive the world.” Faculty members shared the following descriptions using the lens metaphor. One faculty member talked about a Christian Worldview implying “that you are looking at the world from the eyes of a Christian. Starting with God, or the Word of God, and really trusting that that has the answers to life. And then, processing everything through those things.” Another faculty member thought of rose-colored glasses when asked to describe a Christian worldview. She used the phrase “Christ-centered glasses” to describe the meaning succinctly, then elaborated:
We are trying to say, look at the world with Christ-centered glasses. Everything is intertwined. We want our students to leave here using what they have learned out in the world. Use your belief. Think of the world with your belief. That’s it in a nutshell.

Another faculty member also described a Christian worldview as applying faith to interactions with the world. He said, “I really think it is how we use our faith, our relationships, the Bible, to then view the world and interact with it.” A faculty member in a different focus group voiced something similar. He stressed the importance of interacting with those who hold a different worldview, because the college was non-sectarian. He stated, “You have to understand the world, so you can reach out.” These ideas were summarized well by a long-time faculty member. He said, “It’s not only that which you know, but it is also addressing that what we do as well.”

These data suggest the idea of a worldview includes both knowledge and action. Both what one thinks about the world and how one chooses to apply those beliefs and interact with the world. At Midwestern Christian College, then, a Christian worldview was described as encompassing two elements. The first element was knowledge, and included both Biblical knowledge—viewing the world as Christ would view the world—and knowledge of other worldviews. The second element was implementation, or Christ-like action—choosing to interact with the world as Christ would interact.

**Biblical knowledge.** The Bible, also referred to as scripture or Word of God, was perceived as foundational to a Christian worldview. An upper-level administrator also described a Christian worldview as looking at the world “through the lenses of Christ.” But, he went on to explain, that involved understanding the Bible. He said:
If we are going to look through the lenses of Christ, we have to understand who the Christ in the Bible is. Not the Christ that we’ve been told about. Because often times the Christ that we’re told about is a reflection of our western evangelical bent towards whatever we define Christian culture to be. It could be political, it could be denominational, it could be very biased towards or against certain presuppositions on how we think family and life should work, and we have to be very, very careful about that.

Looking to scripture for understanding was an important element of how he viewed a Christian worldview. Another administrator also talked about the Bible. In describing a Christian worldview he said, “Go to the Word [of God] and find out and see. What are our instructions?” He believed Biblical instructions and Godly principles were the foundation for a Christian worldview.

Faculty members also talked about having a firm foundation in faith and Biblical knowledge. One faculty member stated, “Ideally, a Christian worldview would be a thorough infrastructure mentally and faith wise and so forth that would underline everything that you truly believe.” A colleague in the second faculty focus group shared a similar idea, stating, “So, we would be wanting to teach students to understand the Christian faith through scripture… well, through the Wesleyan quadrilateral: reason, faith, tradition, and scripture. And so, we would want them to understand the world from that viewpoint.”

One of the staff members elaborated on some of the essentials of the Christian faith found in scripture, and described what some would view as a conservative mindset. He listed some of these key beliefs:
Scripture being inspired by God, that God is the Godhead, the trinity, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father. The only way to get to God is through Jesus. Not all religions are valid. That there is such a thing as right and wrong. That morals are not relative and that ethics are not situational.

In sharing, he also referred to the book, *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, which he described as articulating the foundational elements of the Christian faith.

The general education curriculum at Midwestern Christian College supports the scriptural emphasis articulated by the faculty and administrators. Focus group students mentioned four specific classes required as part of the general education curriculum as evidence of the college’s commitment to integration of faith and learning. These classes were Introduction to Biblical Literature, Old Testament, New Testament, and Contemporary Culture and Worldview.

Understanding the Bible was perceived as an important foundation for a Christian worldview.

**Worldview knowledge.** A second foundation for developing a Christian worldview is an understanding of the multiple and varied worldviews that exist. The Contemporary Culture and Worldview class that is part of the required curriculum at the college helps build student knowledge of various worldviews. Students from both focus groups talked about the Contemporary Culture and Worldview class as helping them clarify their own faith. One student described learning about different worldviews in the class:

If you have an Islamic worldview, then you are going to see things in a much different way than someone with a secular humanist kind of lens. So, I think it’s talked about, especially in that course. We go through different chapters on each lens, if you will, to view the world in, and we talk about that.
Different worldviews specifically mentioned during the focus groups and interviews included Judeo Christian, humanist, Marxist, cosmic humanism, Islam, and secular humanist. These were not intended to be an all-inclusive list, but were provided by various participants as examples of different worldviews the participants had discussed.

One student described the Contemporary Culture and Worldview class as challenging. She said, “I would say that that class is overwhelming, because you do learn about all the other worldviews.” She described taking that class and philosophy at the same time, which added to the confusion. However, she also stated:

I think that taking it and talking about it and having those discussions is what helps us. [The faculty] still allow us to form our own opinions, and if that is what you believe, they help you research so you can back what you believe. And, I think that’s the part that separates us from our parent’s faith and our own faith and being independent.

Another student, a young man currently taking the Worldview class as an independent study agreed the class was challenging. He talked about the professor providing a chart with questions you answer, which was supposed to help him figure out his beliefs. He said:

She gave me some type of chart that goes through and has different things. Pantheism, Theism, and then just go, if you believe in it you go on the next and then you get to where you actually are at the moment. So, mine, like when I took it a few months ago, I was at the point where I don’t think God created the world, but I believed in God somehow, so just a lot of things. So, this class will blow your mind. I’m going crazy right now (laughs) but it’s pretty cool.

He was wrestling with the various ideas and trying to figure out his own, personal beliefs.
Students appeared open to discussing various worldviews, and felt professors did a good job of recognizing not all students on campus articulated a Christian faith. One young man stated, “They see that, and they kind of are willing to show both sides… just show the different options, the different lenses to pick from.” These comments revealed students were thinking about their personal worldview and faith-related issues. The comments also revealed the college was encouraging students to examine different perspectives and come to their own conclusions, which fits the description of the college as a mission school rather than a discipleship school. A mission school is open to people from various backgrounds, but a discipleship school is intended to serve a specific denomination, and instruct students in one particular view.

Faculty members described a freedom in not being tied to one particular doctrine, particularly Free Methodist since the school was founded by the Free Methodist church. The director of spiritual formation clarified his perception that being Christ-centered did not mean being tied to a particular doctrine:

Christ-centered really summarizes all faculty and staff. But at the same time, I don’t feel cornered into teaching Free Methodist doctrine, but instead into teaching Christ. I feel like I could go to different faculty and staff and get slightly different living this out, but yet we are still all Christ-centered. So, it’s not like we’re saying here is the church and here is the way you do it exactly. We are saying, be Christ-centered and figure this out. How does this look in your life?

As he shared this perspective, many other focus group participants nodded their heads and made agreeable comments. This reinforced the perspective that Midwestern Christian College was not intent on instructing students in one particular doctrinal approach to a Christian worldview.
The provost of the college described the challenge of teaching the Contemporary Culture and Worldview class. Since the goal of the class was not to indoctrinate students in a particular worldview, it was difficult to find a resource which addressed all the worldviews in an unbiased way. He shared:

You would think it would be fairly easy… but it’s hard to come up with a good text on worldview that doesn’t try to destroy each other in the process, or looks at them in a balanced way. So, there’s not very many resources.

Or, at least resources that would approach a subject fairly from various viewpoints. He continued, explaining that this is where he would support the use of the word integration.

You are really taking two divergent populations and helping build the bridge between the two. Because this person is very right over here, and this person is very right over here, but they won’t talk to each other (laugh). So, what we are doing is building the bridge between the two. I think some teachers are fearful of going down the integration route because they are afraid of what is going to come out. Part of it is-- I just don’t think all of the time that we have to give all of the answers. We need to raise the questions.

Data collected in the focus groups illustrated that the Contemporary Culture and Worldview class was indeed raising the questions. But, according to the description of a Christian worldview articulated by those at the college, knowledge about scripture and various worldviews was not enough. A Christian worldview needed to be applied.

**Implementation: interacting with the world.** One faculty member described a Christian worldview as “putting feet to my faith; living it out.” Another faculty member talked about “helping students think about how they can interact with a world of varying worldviews and yet not compromise their own ethics and morals.” Another shared he had recently read that “culture
is simply an outworking of a group’s or society’s world view. That your worldview is really expressed in the things you do.” These individuals articulated the second element of a Christian worldview described by the participants in this study—implementation.

The responses of many participants revealed knowledge was not enough. A variety of examples were provided by the participants related to acting on their faith. Many viewed this as building relationships with others, particularly students. One faculty member explained, “It’s not just about the classroom. We interact with the students. It’s a small college.” He then provided examples where conversations began and relationships were developed:

I’m getting ready to do a radio show and I need someone to do a devotional. You want to do a devotional with me? “Yeah, sure, I’ll help.” Or, hey we are getting ready to go work on set; let’s just go work on set together and we can talk. “Yeah, cool. I’ll help you work on set.”

These times of working together in areas of study without the time and content limitations of the classroom were described as very rewarding for both the faculty member and the student. “I think it really helps them when they are struggling, when they are stressed,” he said. “That’s where I think we shine.” Other faculty agreed.

An employee in the office of student support services viewed her work with students as acting out her faith. She described being appreciative of the freedom to incorporate the spiritual component when interacting with students:

It makes it nice when I can pray with the student that’s hurting. And, that’s something a lot of institutions cannot do. So, I feel like I have been able to not only minister in counseling or direction, but I am also filling another very important component that holds it all together, since we are spiritual beings. That’s the spiritual part of it. And, that
component often times gets left out of a lot of things. And, a lot of the state schools—where that’s not allowed—you can take care of them mentally, you can take care of them psychologically, you can take care of the physical, but you can’t take care of the spiritual side.

She perceived this holistic, Christ-centered approach as enabling her to implement her faith in her career as well as providing a stabilizing element central to the mission of Christ-centered education for character.

One faculty member described the difficulty of fully enacting a Christian worldview that incorporated both Biblical knowledge and implementation. He described a Christian worldview as being a “thorough infrastructure mentally and faith wise that would underline everything that you truly believe.” However, there is a challenge in actually living that out. He continued:

There’s two disconnects. I don’t think any of us has a full grasp of all Biblical truth. So, even cognitively we don’t truly have a Biblical understanding. But, then, secondly, even though we SAY we believe that God is faithful, that doesn’t mean we TRULY believe God is faithful and live it out in terms of not worrying and being obedient and those kind of things. So, I don’t think any of us have a truly worldview cognitively, let alone in the way we truly live out what we think we believe.

However, in spite of the challenge to truly live life from a Christian worldview, the faculty member stressed the importance of striving to do so. The challenge is that human beings are imperfect and fallible; inevitably, they fall short. But, he said, “At the same time, we strive to understand the truth about God and to live our lives in accordance with that understanding.” He perceived living out a Christian worldview as a work in progress.
The Fit Four Model of Education for Character. The Fit Four model was developed as a way to communicate and assess the character component of the college mission, Christ-centered education for character. This element, in conjunction with the Christian worldview element, comprised the holistic approach, which was evident on campus. The Fit Four model was already described in communicating the mission, an earlier section of this dissertation. Here, the four categories will be used to organize the different examples participants provided to illustrate how faith and learning were integrated at their school. The majority of examples pertained to classroom and spiritual connections. Therefore, the categories of mind and soul will be described first, followed by the categories of heart and body.

Fit mind. When focus group participants shared their perceptions of what the integration of faith and learning meant to them, several examples they provided related to classroom instruction. This was not surprising, as education involves learning and the mind, and Midwestern Christian College defines a fit mind as rationally competent, both intellectually and psychologically. One student described the importance of having a fit mind in this way:

I think we are very focused on our education here. We have very intelligent professors that sometimes blow my mind with the way they think about things, and we’re always pursuing academics. Even recently, our registrar made it available to us to have two more hours per semester at no additional cost. That’s encouraging the fit mind.

That’s important to me.

Students viewed their classroom experiences at the college as helping them grow academically while integrating the Christian faith in the academic content areas. Evidence of this was seen in the results of the TIGER Survey described earlier. Table 4.1 illustrates the average responses for this specific question over the course of six semesters. Each semester, the average response was
over 4.3 on a 5.0 scale. This data illustrate the students believe faculty are effectively integrating Christian perspectives into the academic coursework at Midwestern Christian College.

Table 4.1

*TIGER Survey Question 16: The Instructor Integrated Christian Perspectives into the Academic Discipline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Classes surveyed</th>
<th>Responses received</th>
<th>Mean (scale of 1-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>1437</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1172</td>
<td>4.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>1104</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2013</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>1221</td>
<td>4.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1063</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One way Midwestern is intentional about integrating the Christian faith and encouraging a fit mind is by requiring specific general education classes. The general education curriculum for the college includes four Bible courses. These courses are Introduction to Old Testament, Introduction to New Testament, Introduction to Biblical Literature, and Contemporary Cultural and Worldview. Academic training in the Bible provides a foundation for integrating spiritual principles into other academic subjects studied at the college. Students and faculty both provided specific examples where content was taught from a Christian perspective. As discussed earlier, members of the Midwestern Christian College community described a Christian worldview as incorporating both knowledge and action. One faculty member stated, “I am interested in them learning from the material, but also… to know how to apply the things that we
present in class into real life.” The knowledge element of teaching from a Christian worldview would include incorporating Biblical knowledge; the action element would include applying that knowledge to real life situations.

Integration of scripture. Faculty talked about sharing scripture related to the topic of study and linking course content to the Bible. One example was to approach a particular field of study from the perspective there were two sources of truth—Biblical truth studied through theology, and the truth found in nature studied through the scientific process. One participant said, “I actually spend some time talking about the limitations of science. And, that, even though science is a wonderful tool, it really can’t tell us everything that matters about the world. I want the students to see that.” Another faculty member also talked about connecting the Bible with the content being studied. Although it did not happen in every single class period, he believed a connection did occur somewhere in all of his classes. He said, “Not every day do I talk about the Bible, or God, or Jesus, but there are points in probably all of my classes where at some point or points we are making some kind of an integration between the subject content and the Bible.” Other faculty members agreed, and shared specific examples, which are provided in the application section to follow.

Students also perceived the sharing of scripture in the classroom as an important part of integrating faith and learning. One student described professors integrating faith in a majority of coursework through bringing scripture into their lessons. He stated, “They usually will incorporate scripture into it. I think the professors do a really good job.” Another mentioned a specific general education class where the teacher “tends to relate a lot of the information in the book back to the Bible.” Biblical references were seen as common in the majority of courses across campus. However, one class was specifically mentioned as not making reference to God.
or scripture. One young lady shared, “You do have those courses like first aid. I mean, you can incorporate Christ, but it’s just like, common sense and stuff. That’s the only course that I can think of that you really don’t hear God talked about.” This example appeared to be an exception to the norm. Bringing in scripture related to the topic of study was one way faculty and students viewed the integration of faith and learning occurring in the development of a fit mind.

Application of content to life. Faculty and students both described examples where they perceived integrating faith and learning occurring through the application of scripture and content they were studying to real-life situations. Several content areas were mentioned, including science, mathematics, psychology, business, education, and sociology. Some of the examples discussed are provided here.

The sciences were commonly mentioned when participants of the study provided examples of integrating faith and learning. One student shared, “We talked about different lenses on how to view creation and evolution and the many different theories within creation and evolution.” Another student, who had taken the same class, agreed. He shared that the professor would always incorporate “Christian studies along with non-Christian studies.” While the Christian worldview was part of the instruction, it was not forced. This was demonstrated by another focus group student who described the way a science professor interacted with students who did not believe in creation. He was “really good about telling what he believed but then not pushing it on you and just kind of letting you learn and I thought it was cool how he did that.”

A faculty member provided another example. The subject was environmental science, and the topic was population control. While some worldviews would say there were too many people, a Christian worldview would look at things differently. He explained:
The traditional viewpoint is that there are too many people, and we gotta watch out because we are all doomed to destruction. If you look Biblically, that’s contrary. God says be fruitful and multiply. There is no admonition to limit your population to this size. He’s interested in people.

He continued, describing the idea that God created the world and it has everything we need. Then, he talked about implications. First, he felt we needed to be good stewards with what we had. But, he said, a shortage of food does not mean we have to get rid of people; God loves people. The amount of food wasn’t the problem. He said, “They don’t have food, not because there’s not enough food in the world, it’s because of sin, and sin… there’s another worldview. The idea that man is sinful and we’re not getting better.” His perspective was there was plenty of food to go around, but selfishness kept people from fulfilling their responsibility to help.

Another example related to God loving all people was also provided. The science professor talked about how he approached the topic of stem cell research. A Christian worldview would be that man “is a special creation of God.” This view would influence perspectives related to stem cells. He said:

You are going to look at abortion much differently than you are if [man] is just a product of this gradual sort of evolution and he is just a chemical accident, basically. …Stem cells is one I talk about. Are you opposed to stem cell research? Why? We narrow it down to…well, it’s not the stem cell problem or issue, it’s where do you get the stem cells. That’s the issue. Do you get it from fetal tissue, or do you get it from adult stem cells?

This provided another example of ways a Christian worldview was discussed in the content area of science.
The provost also mentioned the sciences as perhaps being the easiest subject area to teach from a Christian worldview. He said, “I think it is paramount for my professors to say, here is the science of this and here is where we discover the fingerprint of God all over this.” This was his way of emphasizing the perspective that God needed to be identified in the midst of the content, not simply integrated into it. He continued to describe how he had incorporated a Christian worldview into an online mathematics class. When the students were studying order, he wrote some discussion questions related to order:

What does it mean that there is order? And, what might this say about a designer? And what clues does this give us? Or, if you believe in God, to know that two plus two always equals four, and God says to ask and I will forgive, do you doubt that two plus two will ever equal four, therefore, if it is true there, and there is structure and order and discipline, in God’s structure why can we not have the same level of trust?

He explained these types of discussions can occur in “the most unlikely of places,” and described it as the teacher’s responsibility to “build those bridges” and make those connections.

Psychology was another content area described as integrating faith with the content. Students mentioned more than one faculty member from this field as being effective in this area. One student articulated described a particular professor, stating, “He would integrate how Christians are pursuing their faith within the realm of study.” A professor provided a specific example when she described teaching about Freud’s understanding of superego and then discussing the topic from the Christian worldview:

Now, how can I give you a picture of, in Christian worldview, of that same thing? It being our flesh nature, ego being our conscience, our social norms that we are given by
growing up. Our superego being, what we consider the Holy Spirit in us, giving us that
discernment and that direction of right and wrong and morality.

This example of integrating faith and learning was provided by one of the professors in the
psychology department as an example of teaching content from the perspective of a Christian
worldview.

A psychology major described applying a Christian worldview to her content area as part
of her goal to help victims of abuse. She said:

I want a Christian perspective, because you have the whole sin issue—original sin—and
how that plays into stuff. You know, people don’t realize that and stuff. Whereas, I have
a different belief as other people, you know, like, I believe that Christ… did what he did.
I realize that and now I have a different perspective. So when you get that from a public
point of view, they don’t necessarily believe that. They just think, oh, it’s OK. All
people are good.

This young lady was describing how she would use a Christian worldview as a psychologist to
view an abuse situation. Rather than approach a problem from the perspective that all people are
basically good, she chose to approach it with the perspective that there is sin in the world, and
bad things can happen.

Students described other examples where they perceived specific content being applied to
real life. One male participant discussed an outdoor recreation class:

The class in general is to get you more connected with the outdoors… seeing how God
has worked in the outdoors. So, one of our projects is nature observation. We are
supposed to go out in nature and find something that speaks to us, like God speaking to
us through nature.
The assignment required personal action, and was perceived by this student as a way a Christian worldview was incorporated into the content of the class.

The Christian ministries department was another area where students described the professors teaching through a Christian worldview. While this initially seems obvious, one student described the importance of not only knowing what you believe, but also acting it out. He said:

It’s one thing to know how to do Bible study properly and how to preach properly and things like that, but it’s another thing to actually live it out. Especially when it comes to community. I know many times [my professor] has challenged us ministry majors to not be the typical judgmental Christians and the typical hypocritical Christians. Instead, he gave us assignments to go to a different table than you would normally sit at at lunch. He viewed the assignment as a way to reach out and get to know people who are different, and as a way a professor in the Christian ministries department encouraged acting out a Christian worldview.

In the area of business, one student described business classes where students lead a devotional that was related to content being studied. She shared, “It’s nice when they think about it and apply it to whatever you are learning in class.” Another student described efforts by the department to bring in guest speakers who would talk about how their faith influenced the decisions they make in business:

I know that the business department has brought in people to talk about unethical things that are happening in businesses and how us as Christians are supposed to act in the business and how us as Christians are supposed to run a business ethically and morally based on our Christian beliefs.
Faculty also talked about the business lectures, explaining that Christian business people were asked to make presentations on topics of their choice, but are strongly encouraged to articulate how their own faith and beliefs are incorporated in their businesses.

Two other departments were also mentioned as hosting guest lecturers. The music department was one, and the ministry department was the other. The music lecture series revolved around musicians who also articulated how music and faith were combined. The ministry lecture series speaker was someone who spoke on faith or a related topic in ministry. Students in the specific majors were required to attend, but everyone was welcome. Several community members attended these traditional lecture series as well. The lectures were seen by both faculty and students an opportunity to encourage a fit mind.

Other, more general comments revealed other subject areas were also perceived as being taught through a Christian worldview. One young man described this approach as common across campus. He stated, “I think that’s what a lot of classes [do] at Midwestern. They are trying to help you figure out who you are so you can bring it out into the world.” These examples illustrated perceptions of teaching from a Christian worldview where Biblical knowledge is applied to life. They also illustrated the perceptions the of the campus community relative to the Fit Four category of the mind.

**Fit soul.** The college described the fit soul as being spiritually responsive. One young man described the fit soul aspect as “where we really hit the Christ-centered education for character.” This section provides an overview of spiritual formation at the college, followed by data related to the spiritual disciplines of Bible study and prayer, and involvement in a body of believers.
Spiritual formation. Midwestern Christian College has requirements for spiritual programming in addition to requirements for general education. The campus has an Office of Spiritual Formation and a Director of Spiritual Formation. The Policies and Procedures Manual also described a Spiritual Development committee, which “assists the Director of Spiritual Formation in the development and evaluation of events, activities, and ministries that will benefit the Midwestern Christian College community, the greater [town] Community, and missions/ministry around the globe.” The SAS Student Handbook articulated the goal of the spiritual formation office along with the expectations and standards for spiritual life. It stated:

Midwestern is intentional about ministering to each student at his or her level of spiritual maturity. That means whether a student comes to Midwestern as a pre-Christian or as a mature believer – we are dedicated to equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to help them know God more and to help them make Him more fully known.

The college offered several opportunities for spiritual formation. Students received points by participating in different events, and were required to earn 27 “Spiritual Formation Touch Points” each semester. One point was achieved for each event attendance. Primary options for spiritual formation included attending Chapel (offered two days per week), Healthy Biblical Community (HBC) groups, and Sunday evening vespers. There were also elective options, which had to be approved by the Director of Spiritual Formation.

The SAS Handbook described Chapel as “specifically designed to personally challenge students to encounter God individually while worshiping corporately.” Even though students were allowed to choose how they achieved the touch points, they were required to attend at least one chapel service per week. One student described a tradition related to the first Chapel service
of each month. He said, “We always do all campus praise and worship along with communion. So, that’s a faith-based tradition that we have here.”

Faculty and staff focus group participants also talked about Chapel. One faculty member described how the tradition of chapel has evolved at the college:

I imagine years and years ago it was five days a week, and everybody showed. Now, we have evolved into Healthy Biblical Community (HBC) points. So, they can go to Vespers on Sunday night, they can go to Chapel, they can go to small group, there’s various types of ways they can get their touch points. I don’t think we used touch points in ’82 when I came here. It just was chapel. You went to chapel three days a week.

Another faculty member described chapel as the “heart and soul” of the college. He went on to describe his own lack of attendance, “because I’m always doing other things; preparing for classes and so forth. But I can’t imagine [our college] without chapel. Isn’t that terrible, I don’t attend even though I think it is really important… for the STUDENTS of course.” This was followed by another faculty statement that “Chapel is set up for students, not for faculty—which may have been different in the 1930’s.” One final faculty member weighed in on the topic, stating, “I would say each department has their own philosophy of their supervisor deciding how they can go or not go… In the academic office it was not pushed, so, it’s by department of how important that chapel service is.” These data show the tradition of attending chapel is perceived by faculty as required of students but not required of faculty. This was interesting because the SAS Faculty Handbook described Chapel attendance as expected for faculty. The following statement is located under the heading of Event Attendance:

In order to serve as role models and demonstrate character in their duties, faculty members are expected to attend scheduled meetings, school-wide events, and
chapels/convocations. In addition to these events, faculty members are encouraged to attend special events, cultural offerings, and athletic competitions.

There was no mention of Chapel at all in the SPE Faculty Handbook. Chapel was briefly mentioned in the SPE Student Handbook under the Fit Four outcomes, which included a link to the Chapel schedule posted online.

The SAS Handbook described the HBC program as a “small group ministry where students can mutually support one another as they develop campus community.” HBC groups were also seen as “an attempt to enhance community, increase spiritual development options, empower students and student leaders, and to provide common structure.”

A student participant described an HBC as being “like a small group, weekly kind of meeting run by one person—usually an RA or RD or faculty member. There is kind of a facilitator of that conversation.” One of the staff members described the facilitator role. She shared how faculty, staff, and even the current president and his wife traditionally provided leadership for these small groups, which students had an opportunity to sign up for. This allowed employees to build relationships with individual students, which she described as an important aspect of the community culture:

That’s one thing that through the years Midwestern has done really well. Maybe possibly because it’s a small family atmosphere, but faculty and staff connecting with students in certain ways, whether it is small groups, or having them over to their houses… it is intentional, and it’s relational… I think that is one thing that makes a huge impact.

She described the impact HBC groups had on her when she was a student, and talked about relationships she had developed with students while serving as a facilitator. These small group Bible studies were perceived as an important part of building community at the institution.
In addition to Chapels and HBC options, students could also attend Sunday night Vespers. At Midwestern Christian College, these services have traditionally been led by students. One student explained that probably over one-third of the campus students attend this touch point event weekly.

Students have a variety of opportunities to achieve the required touch points each semester. One student, an athlete, explained that it really was fairly easy to achieve all the points required. He said:

It’s a bunch of options to, wherever they want to worship God. They could, maybe they experience God more really hearing from peers, so maybe they go to more vespers than they do going to Chapel services. Or, maybe they like the HBC talk in a small group kind of thing, so they have that option to go to HBC. All to achieve 27 touch points, which is very realistic, because last year I did it through baseball season and I got 50 touch points. So, it’s very easy to do. But it’s a unique way to give students different opportunities to encounter God differently.

Many focus group students discussed participating in these types of faith-based activities. And, even though participation was a requirement, these events were perceived as an integral part of student experiences related to the integration of faith and learning on campus.

*Spiritual disciplines.* The disciplines of daily devotions and prayer were discussed in the student focus group sessions as examples of integrating faith and learning. Several classes were mentioned as beginning with prayer or a devotional. Specific content areas mentioned included business, mechanics, education, communication, and science. Sometimes the faculty member would lead the devotion or prayer; other times students were expected to take turns leading the devotional. One student described the devotional time as an opportunity for extra credit in the
lower-level courses but required in the upper-level courses. Another student reflected on the process used in a mechanics class. He stated, “Everyone in the class gives a devotional. …We take prayer requests; lead the class in prayer every day.” The instructor had a list he would check off as students completed their turn. Once everyone on the list had a chance to lead the devotional time, the process would start over.

One business student described beginning a business class with prayer every morning. Another business student described being required to sign up to give a small devotional in class:

> In business, there are a lot of people who aren’t ethical, or have integrity. And, to really incorporate that into our business classes is nice and it helps you prepare for public speaking… but you also get to hear what your classmates think. It’s nice when they think about it and apply it to whatever you are learning in class.

She viewed the experience as helping students gain presentation experience as well as hear ideas about applying the Christian faith in business-related fields, where making money is usually valued above everything else.

Prayer and devotions were talked about in other content areas as well. A focus group student recalled a prior science class which began each week with a devotional and prayer requests on Monday mornings. She stated, “I saw a lot of students who weren’t really [professing Christians] step out and share stuff and really trust each other to pray.” She also described a communications class where “every person has to sign up to give a devotional.” Another focus group student described devotionals and prayer time occurring in education classes. He remembered the faculty member praying before tests and having devotionals at the beginning of class, and described the importance of faith to the faculty member:
He wants to make sure that more than anything you are strong in your faith and who you are. Because, if you can’t do that, then you can’t teach others, because you are still trying to figure out who you are, and you can’t help others figure out who they are if you don’t know who you are.

These data illustrate spiritual disciplines such as devotionals and prayers were occurring in many classes across campus and were perceived by students as a method of integrating faith and learning.

Employees of the college also described praying for each other, with each other, and with the students. One staff member described coaches praying with hurting students and colleagues praying with each other. She said, “Even with people going into someone’s office, and you watch, and they end up praying together.” This tradition of praying was more formalized on Monday mornings. Another focus group participant stated, “Every Monday morning at 7 a.m. they meet together for prayer and that is open for anyone on campus.” The spiritual discipline of prayer was perceived as a traditional activity on campus which brought people together.

*Involvement in a body of believers.* The SAS Student Handbook stated, “Students are encouraged to get involved with churches in the area, not only for worship and community development, but also for service and training.” Students were encouraged to contact the Director of Spiritual Formation for assistance in finding a place to attend worship. Although the Free Methodist Church was listed, the handbook also stated, “There are many other wonderful churches in the community.” It was clear, the college was not about indoctrinating students, but rather, helping them develop their own, personal faith.

The Fit Soul was described by one administrator as “How we view God and our relationship with Him.” He perceived the fit soul and fit heart areas as being the easiest to plan
for, because “our Christian RAs and RDs naturally are drawn to trying to do spiritual programming, and programming how we interact with one another building relationships and how we interact with one another dealing with conflict, and residence halls.” Data collected through the document review and focus group participants illustrated a commitment to spiritual formation at the college. This commitment supported the Fit Soul, one of the Fit Four outcomes of the mission.

**Fit heart.** The document review provided a description of how the college described the outcomes for a fit heart. A fit heart was described as demonstrating:

- an appreciation for individuals from diverse cultures, backgrounds and worldviews,
- participation in hospitality, social justice and community service, [and] the practice of civil discourse and empathetic communication.

Themes identified in the data collected from focus groups and interviews related to empathetic communication, appreciation of diversity, social responsibility, and service are presented here.

**Empathetic communication.** Students often described the caring nature of faculty. One freshman in the second focus group stated, “The professors try to help the students as much as possible. I have been enjoying most of my professors. They are all awesome.” Another freshman in the group spoke of having discussions with instructors outside of class time. He shared, “Even outside of the classroom, the teachers—if you talk to them outside—they will even incorporate scripture into like, if you are just having a problem.” These types of caring discussions were articulated by students in both focus groups. A sophomore who participated in the first student focus group explained how the faculty “make you think. They push your faith. They are the ones who really ask you why you believe in what you believe, you know. But they also care for your personal faith.” He described a recent experience:
Like the other day. We had theology class, and then after class he called me in and just asked me how I was doing. I had some stuff going on. It’s just really cool to see how they care for you, outside of class, about your faith.

He appreciated the faculty member taking time to care about him, personally. Another student shared a similar sentiment about a coach. She described him as a “great man, [who] really cared about his players, and more importantly, their spiritual life.”

The president discussed caring for students and the importance of communicating that to parents. He described a ceremony where, “We pledge to the parents that we are going to take care of their young people.” This ceremony took place during the first weekend students come to campus. Faculty and staff also talked about caring for each individual student. One faculty member said, “For me, my approach is to interact with each one of the students as much as I can in the classroom and off the classroom. And… I make things personal with them.” And, a staff member talked about the importance of caring for the whole person, including mentally, psychologically, physically and spiritually. She valued the freedom she had to include spiritual care as an employee of a Christian college.

Understanding the “practice of civil discourse” was described as one of the ways students could demonstrate fit hearts. One student described the importance of this concept when talking to others who had different worldviews:

I think it is definitely how you were raised. So, like the people who aren’t necessarily Christians. You really get to talk to them. But, you have to be careful, because you don’t want to push them away. As Christians, we don’t want to push those who aren’t Christians away to what we believe. So, you have to have that healthy balance. You have
to have that within yourself, self-discipline, not to get in a heated argument over some little thing.

Her comments illustrate she had internalized the concepts of civil discourse and empathetic communication.

Another student also provided a personal example of growth in this area. He described being very set in his beliefs as a freshman, and having “many arguments in theology class with other people and even with my professor about why I believed what I believed and why they believe what they believe.” This made him feel awkward because he did not want to offend his classmates, professors and advisor; yet he felt there were obvious differences in theology. He described some of the students in the class as judgmental towards him and his beliefs, but emphasized the professors had never been judgmental. Then, he went on to describe a change in heart he experienced over the summer. He was no longer concerned with minor theological differences. He explained:

I came to the realization this summer that it’s very clear in our Bible that Paul says, if the gospel is being preached, I shall rejoice. And, I learned … we’ve just got to put our denominational differences aside, and know that Christ is being proclaimed; the gospel is being preached. Why do I have anything to disapprove of? Why do I have the right to be judgmental? … I’ve came to the realization that we shouldn’t be that way.

These examples illustrate how faculty, staff, and students are learning to practice civil discourse and empathetic communication.

*Appreciation of diversity.* Midwestern Christian College was perceived as a diverse campus for its size. One administrator shared, “Almost 20% of our campus is of a different ethnicity. I haven’t run those numbers for this year, but that’s a pretty solid 18-22% that we run
annually.” He compared this number to other CCCU schools, which averaged between eight and 12%.

In addition to diverse ethnicities, the campus was also described as being diverse in religious backgrounds and beliefs. One student shared, “We have the strongest atheists that do not believe in Christ whatsoever and will challenge Christians, and then we have people that just don’t really know right now.” He continued, “We have people that have accepted [Christ] but really aren’t living a lifestyle similar to what He would want us to. Then, we have Christians that are growing and then we have our strong Christians.” Another student agreed. She said, “I know one kid really doesn’t believe in God. He doesn’t know exactly what he believes. So you definitely have that diversity and that openness to struggle; to deal with those things.” Even the students who professed to be Christian came from a wide variety of backgrounds, with many different denominations represented.

Faculty and staff also came from diverse denominational backgrounds. The provost explained, “We’re not Free Methodist. A few are, but we’ve got Baptist, we’ve got Assembly of God… it’s a diverse population of instructors. The only thing they have in common is the Lordship of Christ.” Other focus group participants mentioned additional denominations as well, including Mennonite, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Independent Fundamentalist. These descriptions illustrate the college has diverse religious and ethnic people as part of the campus community.

Having diversity and appreciating diversity are two different things. Yet, data collected for this study illustrates the college community emphasized the importance of appreciating differences found in individuals from diverse cultures. A student described the diversity of the campus community as “something that we actually try to strive for here.” He perceived the
diversity as a good thing because it prepared graduates to “go into whatever field of study we’re going into and deal with those different kind of beliefs and ethnic groups and things like that.”

The provost articulated the importance of valuing multicultural and diversity, especially related to the mission of the college, which included a fit heart. He said the question needed to be asked:

How can my sensitivity to people of diverse populations be increased? Why is that important? Because Jesus did it. And, he was a man of character. Christ-centered education for character. He could reach out to the woman at the well, he could reach out to the Sadducees, and the Pharisees, and anybody else because he understood them. And we need to understand them, too.

These data reveal the importance the college placed on appreciating diversity in its many forms.

Social justice. Hospitality, social justice, community service. The college used these words to describe, in part, a fit heart. The college’s emphasis on issues of social justice was perceived as an important part of a holistic approach to a Liberal Arts education. It was also described as historically significant in the Free Methodist denomination. An administrator described freedom as a key reason the Free Methodists broke away from traditional Methodists:

Free Methodism made a break from Methodism as a result of a desire to have a freedom of expression in worship. A freedom that the poor would be allowed to worship with the rich. There was a movement in the late 17, early 1800’s that if you were a wealthy person, you could pay for your pew. And, the wealthy then, would sit closer to the front, while the poor would have to sit closer to the back or stand, or in some churches even they would open up the windows and allow the poor to observe the service from outside.
He explained the Free Methodists believed worship should be open to everyone, because “all men and women are created equal in the eyes of the Lord.” He also explained that the abolishment of slavery was a foundational element of the Free Methodist heritage.

One faculty member talked about students in a communications class completing practical assignments related to campus events. As part of the discussion, he mentioned Justice Week as an example. The Director of Spiritual Formation explained Justice Week as a new tradition he and his wife had helped develop on campus. Their emphasis on social justice issues began with one or two activities, but developed into a week long event. The first activity was to help students understand poverty. He explained:

The week before homecoming, essentially, students would live in boxes for two nights out on the front lawn. And they would fast, so they would understand what it was to go to bed at night cold and hungry and to know that tomorrow night you are going to have to do it again. Which is what 80% of our world lives with every day. To know that they are going to bed cold and hungry and to know that there is no hope of them not going to bed cold and hungry the next night.

Another project they started was building water wells in Africa. They were able to help develop two wells in Kenya. From that point, he explained, the emphasis continued to expand:

We brought in international justice mission. And, the next thing you know, we had a week of events that seemed to all fit together, and it made sense to do them all in one week. So, we have done justice week for probably the last five years.

He described student government and the spiritual formation office working together on the event, and stated that Chapel was an important part of the programming as well. A review of the Justice Week schedule on the campus calendar supported this statement. There were actually
four different causes emphasized during the week. One was at Sunday night Vespers, two others were incorporated into Tuesday and Thursday Chapel services, and the fourth was emphasized as part of a 5K benefit run on the weekend.

One staff member articulated the importance of social justice. He viewed taking action in this area as an important part of a Christian worldview. He said:

If that doesn’t make a difference in how you see the needs of the world, then all you are doing is trying to avoid hell… I think that if anybody reads Matthew, Chapter 25 and isn’t shaken to the core, they haven’t really understood what that statement is. As much as you did, or didn’t, do it to the least of these, you did or didn’t do it to me.

Reflecting on this passage of scripture caused him to really evaluate his actions. “Do I really see need?” he asked. “And, if I do see need, do I do anything about it?” He perceived taking action to help those in need as a critical part of the Christian worldview. Social justice appeared to be viewed by the campus community as an important part of a fit heart and an essential component of a holistic approach to education.

Service. Service to others was also described by the college as an element of a fit heart. Faculty, staff, and students all provided examples of serving others. Some examples happened within the campus community, some extended beyond the campus community, and some even were completed at the national and international levels.

Staff members viewed being available as one way they were able to serve the campus community, particularly the students. One staff member spoke of this as, “Letting the students know we are just there for them.” Another employee who worked in admissions saw his job as an opportunity to serve the students. He said, “I saw it as an opportunity to do ministry. So, that was one of the reasons why I was drawn. Because I knew that admissions was an opportunity
An employee in the registrar’s office also spoke of opportunities to serve individual students. She said:

It’s just a good chance to stop and see them as a person, and what can I do to help them make this work for them specifically. And, try to counsel that way. Having the Christian perspective gives that direction. I want you to succeed as a person and to really show Christ’s love, instead of, I want to get you packaged so you can get out of my office type of thing. It adds that component that is really important.

Looking out for the best interests of the students was one way staff members were able to serve them.

Students also talked about serving others. Some described serving the campus community through working in student government, serving on the student activities council, providing support to students in the dorm by being part of the resident assistant support staff. Others described serving through a specific campus organization called R58.

R58 referred to a campus Rotaract club. Rotaract clubs are typically sponsored by a local Rotary group, and are designed to provide college and university students various opportunities to develop leadership skills and serve others. One student described some of the activities of their group. He said, they “go to food pantries, they’ll go to build houses for the needy, they’ll do those kind of things.” He explained R58 offered students an opportunity to engage in “those kinds of opportunities on campus, off campus, in our community, nation-wide, and even globally.” He saw this organization as one way students were serving others beyond the campus community.

Staff focus group members also described observing students provide service to others. When asked to provide specific examples of service activities, a number of focus group
participants chimed in to the conversation. They listed several examples, including a Numana service project, building all-terrain wheel chairs for third-world countries, completing volunteer ground work for a museum, and participating in Operation Christmas Child, a ministry of Samaritan’s Purse, an international Christian humanitarian organization. Employees also talked about members of the campus science club, led by a faculty advisor, completing service projects at Christmastime.

Employees perceived service to others as evidence the mission of the college was being accomplished. One employee explained:

I think for evidence, too, we can look at some of the initiatives that our students take on campus. And, our graduates, too, after they have left here, the ministries and things that they have been involved in. But even right now on campus, the projects, service projects that students start up. It’s evidence. The fruit of the spirit coming out in them. That’s something that is measurable, tangible, things you can see.

Some specific examples of service activities by graduates were provided by a long-time staff member. He reflected on both graduates and non-graduates who continued the tradition of serving after they left the college. He said:

It’s easy for me to sit here and I could give you names of alumni and what they are doing; the impact that they are having all around the world. You could pick on [name], an attorney at one of the largest most prestigious law firms in downtown [city]. Who spends a large portion of his time in [an overseas country]; [He] started a school over [there] with his own resources. And, now a seminary over there. You can pick on these kind of super stars if you will. Whether it is in law, or medicine, or ministry.
He also shared an example of how the college impacted a former student who was asked to leave the school because of lifestyle. Even though this student did not graduate from the college, he remembered the training he received later in life, and ended up giving back to the college. One of the main buildings on campus was named after him. This employee saw both examples as a testament to the mission and legacy of the college. He said:

Alumni, no matter where they are across the world, will tell you that the one true thing was that Christ was center. And, there wasn’t any question about it. It was lived out. Although with flaws, it was lived out in front of the students.

The participants of this study perceived service as an important part of developing a fit heart and acting out a Christian worldview.

To honor those who demonstrate a life of service, the college has a tradition of honoring a servant leader at one of the first chapels of the year. One faculty member explained the purpose of the convocation was to:

honor someone who has really made an impact based on their Christian worldview and their activities. Some of them aren’t even Midwestern alumni. But there is this tradition of honoring people who have given their lives, in some sense, to serve the Lord.

This tradition relates to social responsibility, a key element of fit heart. The president stressed the importance of a fit heart, and stated that “the real test of a fit heart” is finding out if they apply these things to their life after they leave Midwestern Christian College. He said, “Do they really care about their church five years after they leave? Is that important? Do they care about their family? So, we have got to go find out from our constituency… Do they apply the things they learned?” Again, the emphasis was on application of knowledge as demonstration of a fit heart.
**Fit body.** The college described a fit body as being professionally astute, both physically and vocationally. The provost explained there has been some confusion over this last component of the four fits. People often assume a fit body means being physically fit, and question what that has to do with being a person of character. While physical fitness is one piece, he clarified his perception of a fit body as including much more:

The concern of fit body is that in my chosen field or vocation that I can utilize my body to do it. So, I have to learn… It’s not the knowing, it is the doing side of it. I know chemical compositions, but, can you pick up test tubes? Or, if you are physically handicapped, can you manipulate what you need to so that you can actually mix the chemicals? … I think being successful in the work that you do demonstrates that you are a person of good character.

While this was the perspective articulated by the provost, the majority of examples provided in this category related to being physically fit.

One student mentioned a fitness and wellness class which was part of the general education curriculum for underclassmen. He described a physical fitness test students took as part of the class. This test was generally taken as a freshman, and then retaken at the end of the senior year to “see what kind of improvements you have made with your body.” He continued, “That’s one area of the fit body that our school makes sure they hit on.” The provost provided additional insight, explaining that the initial test was taken as part of a freshman level class, and the follow-up test was to be taken in the spring of the senior year on a day the college set aside for senior assessments.

Another participant mentioned students were encouraged to use the weight room to work out as a way to maintain a fit body. This young lady shared, “I know you can go in there and
work out. If you have to work out late at night, the person who is locking up will be like, ‘Oh, I’ll come back. Just finish up.’ So, it’s always open.” Other participants nodded in agreement. In addition to the weight room, intramurals were also mentioned as a chance to maintain physical fitness. Students perceived these activities as the college providing opportunities for students to develop a fit body.

Even the provost provided examples related to physical fitness. In one example, he described his pleasure in hearing students articulate the four fits in casual conversation:

You know, it is fun to hear… When I walk in to running at the weight room and a student comes in and says, “Good job of fit body.” They are articulating the mission back to me, and that is good to hear.

He shared a second example from the admissions side where people were hearing and articulating the Fit Four message before they enrolled with the college. He said, “I had a parent say to me, just last week, ‘OK, I get the fit heart, fit soul, but what… is my kid going to have to lose weight coming here, with this fit body thing?’” He continued, “I think it is the embodiment of the message. We have to do that all the time. Things need to be in context. Why are we doing this? Because, it supports our mission.”

There was only one person, another administrator, who described a fit body as including more than being in good physical shape. He described some of the online programs offered by the college as addressing a fit body:

Organizational leadership, well, even the health care, and the criminal justice; they all really do point to not only the fit mind, but the fit body. And, the fit body is more than just being in physical shape. You know… Can I use, can I implement the learning that
was presented to me and apply it in real life? Can I write a resume that is well written? That’s kind of part of that.

His felt the description and the interpretation of the fit body could be approached with more leeway. This perception aligned with an earlier description the provost provided. Of all the participants in the study, only the two administrators articulated this view. However, regardless of the description of a fit body, it was evident that members of the campus community knew it was one of the four fits and articulated the importance of that element of the Fit Four.

The Fit Four model was perceived by all participants as very important in achieving a holistic approach to education. This holistic approach included a Christ-centered, or Christian worldview, component. It also included the Fit Four, the outcomes described by the institution as character. These components combined to provide clarity and focus to the campus community as they worked to live out the mission of Christ-centered education for character.

Living Life in Community

The third, overarching theme revealed in this study was living together in community. The mission, Christ-centered education for character, was accomplished through a holistic approach to education that was carried out in a supportive, campus community of faith. A faith community was perceived as an essential part of the process of integrating faith and learning. In addition to a supportive faith community, participants of the study also articulated the importance of campus traditions and mentoring. These events all occurred as people were going about daily life in a supportive community.

Supportive faith community. A supportive faith community was considered part of everyday life at Midwestern Christian College. The president stated, “Community. It’s just getting busy with everything that goes with our life… that is Midwestern.” Another upper-level
administrator talked about community as an important part of a holistic education, “which fits hand and glove with being a liberal arts college.” He described it as a “holistic understanding of who we are in Christ, and how that plays out in our everyday coming and going lives.” He also explained, “Faith manifests itself when we live in community with one another and when we strive to be interdependent, following after God’s will and way above our own.” A similar thought was shared by a student, who described the importance of a Christ-centered focus within the community. He said:

It’s kind of like, if everyone has that Christ-centered focus in mind, then they’re no longer focused on themselves and trying to please themselves. And, whatever they’ll do, they’ll do for Christ and for others. It would improve the community with that lack of selfishness.

These perspectives were not seen as some special event or promotion. Rather, a supportive faith community was part of everyday life, part of the culture of the institution.

A faith community was also perceived as an important part of integrating faith and learning. The provost stated, “Using prayer as an element of community is important.” Additionally, a staff member provided examples of people praying together in offices or coaches praying with hurting athletes. She said, “I think that is living out walking together in community with Christ. It’s not just in chapel, it’s not just in the classroom, it’s whatever we do. Do it all to the glory of God.” Her perception was, it was important for everyone who was part of the campus community to support and encourage each other as they daily applied a Christian worldview. This type of faith community was built on relationships, respect, and sustaining a Christ-centered culture.
Relationships. Relationships were perceived as an important element of a faith community. Relationships were often a reason staff members had chosen to work at the college. Almost two-thirds of the staff members who participated in the focus groups (64%) had some connection to the college prior to working there. Some had attended as students; others had family or friends who worked at the college. One focus group participant shared, “I came to Midwestern because I had some friends here. [A husband and wife] who I had known for 15 plus years and [my wife and I] had maintained that relationship with them.” Another staff member experienced the college as a student and wanted to remain part of the community. She said, “I knew the people here and they had a place for me, and it was a good fit culturally. It worked well, especially since I had been a student here, so I had that connection already.” Even a woman who didn’t articulate a particular person or connection as a reason for applying to work at the college described appreciating the family atmosphere. She said:

So, I came, and immediately just gelled with the student development office. It was like it was my family already. It was like, none of us knew each other, but we did. [An upper-level administrator] took me in, and an hour and a half later, he let me go. He let me ask my questions, and we had some wonderful discussion.

Staff members described appreciating the culture, family atmosphere, and relationships they had with their co-workers.

Faculty members talked about relationships in terms of supporting students. Encouraging students, especially through difficult situations, was a common thread throughout the focus group discussions. For example, one faculty member arrived late to the focus group. Later, during the session, a fellow colleague stated, “I wouldn’t doubt that he was playing a mentorship this last hour with this [student athlete]. Whether it was spiritual, or social, or academic or
whatever it was, that was his role, and he saw that as important.” Another example was provided by a faculty member who worked one-on-one with students giving private music lessons. The structure of private lessons provided numerous opportunities for conversations to occur and relationships to be built. The faculty member described an example where it was obvious the student had not practiced. He used that as an opportunity to demonstrate concern and support for the student. He simply said, “You didn’t practice a whole lot this week, what’s going on?” This approach opened the door for the student to respond and led to an opportunity to mentor and support the student.

One faculty member described sharing his own personal faith crisis with students in an effort to encourage them when they were frustrated, tired, or struggling in some way. He explained sharing about a time when he was a freshman athlete with numerous assignments and commitments, and he questioned if he would make it:

I found my faith scripture and I read it to them. It’s in Romans 8:31 on, about life or death or this or that. We are like lambs to the slaughter, but nothing can separate us from the love of God. How that just impacted me. That was my moment. My faith crisis and my moment moving forward where I made my faith my faith.

He continued, describing the importance of faculty to “just be there for when they start to fall,” and perceived the college as a “safe community environment” where faculty were the “guide rails.” His perspective reinforced the importance of relationships to the campus faith community.

Students also talked about the value of a faith community. One student particularly mentioned the importance of accountability. She said:
Christ calls us to be relational. Through that, our community and accountability, they all mix really well together. Since God has made us relational and has called us to be in relation with one another, it is just natural to have that accountability and that can come through a relationship with your RA, your RD, other classmates, teammates, or faculty and staff.

She continued, describing the “wonderful job” her boss, a staff member, had done of mentoring her in a variety of ways. She explained he had listened to her, prayed for her, provided accountability, and supported her when she was struggling. This type of accountability relationship was perceived as an important element of living together in a supportive, faith community.

Respect. A community of respect is important at a liberal arts college. A liberal arts college is often residential, requiring students to live in community with others. The liberal arts approach also exposes students to a variety of different cultures and ideas, and students are encouraged to study with an open mind and come to their own conclusions. A community of respect was essential for Midwestern Christian College. The campus community was non-sectarian, meaning the college welcomed a wide range of religious backgrounds and did not require students to sign a statement of faith. Additionally, about 20% of the students came from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. A community of respect was perceived as necessary for the holistic, liberal arts approach to education to be effective. This respectful atmosphere needed to occur both in the traditional campus community as well as the online programs.

Traditional campus community. Faculty described the importance of respect when working with diverse students. This was true for communication between faculty and student as
well as student-to-student. One faculty member described what would happen when working with someone who had a different worldview:

I might ask a question, but I certainly don’t belittle them for that or intentionally try to make them feel ostracized. I ask for respect in the way where if they disagree with me.

And, I would be respectful to them as well. It hasn’t happened a lot, but it has happened. Faculty described the campus community generally respectful of differing views. On campus, most conversations were one-to-one, and students were “very respectful in their sense, because, I mean, most of them, they are still 21 year olds and they have a lot more questions maybe that they are thinking through that I have at least thought through,” explained one professor.

Students agreed with this perspective. They described faculty members as respectful of students with different viewpoints. One student described the professors as willing to “meet the students where they are at,” and discuss various perspectives related to the content being studied. These comments were relative to the traditional, campus community.

**Online community.** Faculty who taught online courses explained establishing a respectful community was more difficult in an online format. The online programs were generally offered to non-traditional students, who were older and had more life experiences than the typical, undergraduate students on campus. One faculty member taught the online version of the Contemporary Culture and Worldview class. He described the online students as more set in their ways. This required more effort to maintain a community of respect:

We are dealing with 42-year-old people that have lived in the city their whole lives, and they have this perspective on things. And they know what a Muslim man is like, for example. They are not sounding very respectful to the other students, so I am having to kind of play a… more of a mediator or buffer (laugh) try to cool people down. So these
people, stereotypes come a lot more alive with the older community I would say, than even our younger students.

This professor felt that even in an online community, where conversations occurred through written word, it was still possible for participants to hear different perspectives and learn from each other. He explained, “It is a challenge, because a lot of times people that are not Christians—there is that potential for them to feel ostracized or out of the loop.” He saw it as his responsibility to be intentional in encouraging “open conversations” where it was okay for people to disagree, and described it as “healthy, healthy dialogue” if the conversation was handled in a respectful manner.

Overall, faculty described the campus and online community as warm, welcoming, respectful, caring, supportive, hospitable, and safe. When asked if there was somebody who would provide a different perspective, one faculty member stated, “I don’t know about that. I think we are all fairly unified in a lot of what we do.” This statement reinforced the theme of community.

**Sustaining a Christ-centered culture.** Part of sustaining a campus faith community includes clearly communicating the ethos of the institution to prospective students. One faculty member talked about the importance of explaining the community culture to prospective students so they were well aware of what life at Midwestern Christian College entailed. He said:

> When they came to visit campus, we made sure that chapel was on the schedule. That they heard about who we were. And, several said, “Boy, you’re too churchy for me.” And, they literally used those terms. “Too churchy for me, or too much religion here,” or however they stated it. And, that’s fine. You need to know who we are.
He went on to describe the college as being evangelical and sharing the claims of Christ while at the same time maintaining a “critical mass” of students who had made a statement of faith which was necessary to maintaining the Christian atmosphere on campus:

Our Board of Trustees can claim that we are Christian; our faculty can say I’m a Christian, we can have a Christian worldview, we can have a Christian mission statement… We can have all of those things, and if 90% of our kids are not Christian, that 10% are going to sit in that dorm room and hear all kinds of things going on.

The message was the college would not be seen as a Christian college if the majority of students either did not care or were openly working against the mission and worldview articulated.

One of the upper-level administrators agreed the campus needed to clearly communicate the culture of the institution to others. He stated, “We try to be very ecumenical, but very Christian. We don’t hide that from people.” He emphasized students did not have to profess a Christian faith to attend the school, but they needed to be willing to be part of living life in a faith community. Once the students knew the culture and mission of Midwestern Christian College, they needed to decide if they wanted to be a part of that. He believed it was up to the faith community to create an environment where all students were exposed to Jesus and had an opportunity to learn more about Him. He added:

We just have to be loving and patient and kind along the journey. … So, just reminding our students constantly that we are on the journey together. It’s okay. We can’t do this Jesus stuff alone; and that includes those of you who don’t know the Lord. We have got to figure it out together.

The faculty and administrators both discussed being open and supportive, while at the same time being very clear about who they were and the importance of the faith community.
The significance placed on living life in a faith community became clear when the Dean of Students told a story about denying admission to a professing Christian. The young lady was a national merit scholar who came from a conservative, Christian family. She did not want to live on campus because non-believers as well as people of different denominational backgrounds lived there. In short, “it reeked of, ‘We don’t want to be infected by kids who aren’t like us.’” The dean responded, “You cannot fulfill the great commission as a believer in Jesus Christ if you are unwilling to even associate with Christians who are not quite like you. I’m not accepting you to Midwestern.” He continued, “That’s what we talk about when we talk about fit. Can you be a part of this and what we are doing? You don’t have to be perfect, or even a believer, but… you have to have some buy-in.”

One requirement of the Midwestern Christian College faith community is all students must sign a community expectations covenant. The covenant is designed in two parts. The first part outlines community expectations based on Biblical standards. The Dean of Students shared those expectations included, “no given way to drunkenness, no premarital sex, no extramarital relationships, addictions of any kind …lying, treating people in a way that you would not want to be treated, with disrespect.” These types of things were listed out and each item supported with a Biblical reference. He went on to describe the second part of the covenant:

We have what we call “because we believe these to be best practices” for students in pursuit of a Christ-centered education for character. And, those include things like how we do open dorm, going to parties where alcohol is being served, those kind of things. Smoking, the things that could be marginally considered sinful, depending how or the frequency of which you engage in them.
The dean continued to explain, the best practice section did not mean it was sinful to do those things or that if a student violated something in that section the student was not a Christian. Rather, the best practice section was perceived as things that would detract the students from the goal of achieving a Christ-centered education for character.

Students in the focus groups also discussed the community expectations covenant. They agreed that some people did not like the covenant and chose to leave. However, they also talked about some of the students choosing to return. One focus group participant described students who did not really care about the mission who left “because they don’t like rules and stuff.” The group laughed when a girl responded, “And then they come back.” The speaker agreed, “Yeah. Then they come back.” Another student in the group confessed, “I did that,” and smiled wryly. One of the upper classman in the group responded, “There was quite a few that have done that. I know my class has had a couple that have come back because of that. It speaks for them, whether they know it or not.” He then turned to the young man who had left but chose to return, and asked, “Do you feel a different atmosphere from two, three years ago?” The young man responded, “A lot. Yeah. But, when I was here my freshman year, I wasn’t really in the Christian atmosphere.” The upper classman agreed the atmosphere had changed, and people were “finally getting into the spirit” of the mission. There was a perception of a much more unified faith community.

One of the young ladies in the group explained the biggest concern students had with the community expectations covenant was the no drinking policy. Some students thought it was dumb if they were of legal age to drink:

They are like, “I’m just having one drink. I’m not going out, I’m not getting drunk.”

Well, good, because that’s Biblical. You’re not supposed to be drunk. But a lot of
people say, “If I just have one, why can’t I?” Well, because you made that commitment.

So, it holds us accountable. And, it teaches us more discipline. … I do know how to be self-disciplined because I held this contract for four years.

She also described the best practices section in a manner similar to the Dean of Students. “We’re not saying that if you drink you are a sinner. You’re going straight to hell.” Instead, she said it was part of learning accountability and good practices. Another student in the group tied the community expectations covenant back to the idea of building community. He said, “It kind of tries to make a better community by bringing people that want to believe, that want to be a part of that.”

Faculty members also talked about community expectations. One said, “They have to follow certain guidelines or they are not allowed to be on campus, either. There is a process that students go through if they do get in trouble and break those covenants. There is a group that talks with them, works with them. Sometimes they are released from campus, because they just will not accept the covenant that we ask them to follow.”

Most of the participant comments related to the campus faith community. However, the Dean of Professional Education talked about how online students perceived being part of a Christian school. He described giving a survey to get a feel for what the online students appreciated about their programs:

I was amazed how high the spirituality ranked, resulting from that survey. Certainly, not all of our students are Christians. And, the bell curve is alive and well. We have the outliers. We have those that are just absolutely thrilled that we are a Christian school and there’s others that get real uncomfortable with the Christian talk. “Christian-ese” they
call it. So, the outliers are there. But, generally speaking, the perception is high that that is one of the reasons why they selected Midwestern.

He found this interesting, “because the base where they are recruiting is not necessarily a Christian environment.” It appeared the majority of both campus and online students appreciated being part of a faith-based learning community.

Campus traditions. One way a campus builds community is through traditions. Several traditions were perceived as important to those in the campus community. These traditions are presented here in the order they would occur during the academic year, beginning with “Connections Week” traditions. These activities begin when students arrive on campus for the first time in the fall. There is an all school dinner for freshmen and their parents. Following the dinner, the ivy ceremony, one of the prominent traditions at the college takes place in front of the main academic building on campus.

Ivy Ceremony. Ivy cutting at commencement is one of the longest standing traditions at the college. Many faculty members described elements of the ceremony, which begins with graduates standing in a circle holding one long piece of ivy. The president then cuts a section for each graduate (or a longer section for those who were married or engaged), and the graduate has a chance to share reflections of his or her time at the college. The ivy is very symbolic. One faculty member explained the significance of the ivy being described during the ceremony:

They talk about how this is a piece of Midwestern. You came in as a new part of the family, but now you are leaving to the world, but you are going to take part of Midwestern with you. Then, they line up for graduation, back at Science Hall with all the professors.
This graduation tradition was expanded about nine years ago, and became a process for acculturating new students to the institution every fall. The two ivy ceremonies, one for incoming students and one for graduates, were described as “bookends” to the students’ college careers.

The fall ivy ceremony follows a large dinner attended by new students and their families, and everyone moves outside to the front of the main academic building on campus. The ceremony begins with ivy arranged in a circle, with the student and their parents standing outside of the circle. The circle of ivy signifies unity as one new incoming class. Toward the end of the ceremony, the students move to the inside of the circle of ivy. A focus group student explained:

The students are all inside of the circle and the parents are outside. And that is to separate… I’m leaving my parents and I’m stepping out on my own. Then, after that, there is hugging and crying and all that.

A faculty member described this separation as symbolic of the students joining a new family. She said, they “are going to be part of this new family that is going to tie you together in this new community.” Following the litany and scripture reading, the students proceed to the academic building where the faculty are cheering and clapping to welcome them to campus. A student explained the building used was purposeful, as it was the main academic building, symbolic of the fact the students were there for an education—their “Christ-centered education” she said.

Faculty, staff, and student participants described the ivy ceremony as “a big event” or “a big tradition.” There were also several participants who connected the initial ivy ceremony with the culminating ivy ceremony for graduating seniors. A student who was a junior looked at some of the freshmen students in his focus group and said:
What the freshmen may not know right now, is that the ivy gets saved. And when they leave, I think they give them a piece of the ivy. When they graduate their senior year. So that ivy thing sticks with them throughout, and they tie it together because that is your class’ ivy, and then you break it apart when you are going your separate ways after college. So, that is a pretty big tradition here.

Another student described the ivy cutting ceremony for graduating seniors as coming full circle. She remembered not really understanding the significance of the event when she was a freshman. However, she had helped with orientation activities for new students this year, and the significance became clear. She said:

Basically, it encompasses everything. Where you go back and you say, this is what I’ve learned here at Midwestern. This is how my faith has expanded; these are the people I want to thank. …When I do it in May, I think it will have more significance.

Students described the ivy ceremony as a very important tradition for the campus. A tradition perceived as symbolizing the growth of the individual while part of the faith community at the college. The two ivy ceremonies at the beginning and end of students’ time at the college were described as bookends to their college career. The initial, fall ivy ceremony occurred during connections week, and was immediately followed by a rally called “Turning Tiger,” and singing the alma mater.

**Turning Tiger.** This event was also designed to welcome freshmen to the college and help them feel part of the community. Students in the focus groups talked about this tradition. The event was held in the old gym, which was smaller, and provided a community feel. It was described as sort of a pep rally where students are encouraged to leave their old, high school
mascot behind and claim a new mascot, the Midwestern Christian College mascot, which is a tiger. A young lady in the focus group described the tradition this way:

It’s just a really cool effect to say hey, I’m being a part of something. I’m leaving my high school behind and I’m becoming a tiger and I’m …taking pride in what we have and cherishing it and willing to foster that environment.

The event includes a cheering contest between the new and returning students. At the end of the cheer off, the campus pastor explains there are not sides at Midwestern, and they are all in this together. They are all Tigers now, part of that community. At the end of the event, everyone lights a candle and the entire group sings the alma mater together.

The Turning Tiger tradition is another way to build community on campus. Following this event, there is an evening of praise and worship, where the whole campus meets to worship together. These events are the main Connection Week traditions students described during the focus group sessions.

**All school picnic.** A few weeks into the academic year, the tradition of the all school picnic takes place. The college does not celebrate Labor Day because it is too close to the beginning of the semester. Past experience showed homesick students went home for Labor Day and did not return to campus. Therefore, the college holds classes on Labor Day, and takes Wednesday of the following week as a day off from classes for the all school picnic. This event is designed to build community, and attendance is mandatory.

Staff and students both talked about the all school picnic. The director of spiritual formation said it was the first event that came to his mind when thinking about traditions. He described the event:
We all go together; a lot of it is based on community; it fits in line with the ivy planting. We are all new together, let’s get to know each other, let’s hang out. We have lunch together, we have games, competitions as [dormitory] wings to see who wins, and a devotion time together as well while we are there.

Students provided more detail about the event. One student talked about it being held at a lake, and explained that the resident assistants created team t-shirts for students living in each wing of the dormitory, in preparation for the team building competitions. Other students identified some of the games, which included typical team-building activities and competitions. When a male student began talking about the most important competition, a young lady interjected, “egg toss.” She was quickly corrected by the males in the group, who all agreed it was the tug of war. One man said, “That’s the male pride!” Another shared proudly, “We won it this year!” Everyone laughed, remembering the fun times they had at the picnic.

The competitions provided a chance to be vulnerable with each other in a non-threatening environment. One student explained, “Everyone is laughing and doing something silly and stupid. And, if you fall, it is OK, because most likely the next person is going to fall and eat it during the bat race.” This event was referred to as “the great equalizer” by the provost. He described the event:

Bats are placed at the top of a hill, about 100 feet away. Students line up in teams, and one-by-one they run up the hill, put their head on the top of the bat, and spin around 10 times. Then they run back, and the next person goes.

He explained the game was intentionally chosen because “everyone can participate, regardless of skill.” It was also chosen because it provided a chance for everyone to be silly, laugh, and build community within a family atmosphere.
The all school picnic was perceived as a place where friendships were formed and relationships were developed. One student described the event as “bringing the brother and sister-ship between each wing.” He continued:

Honestly, you don’t really start making friends until that picnic… and then after the picnic, you are like, how was I never friends with this person ever? So, that’s like the third week in the school. Something like that. That’s honestly when the friendships really begin to bloom is that all-school picnic.

He described the event as “one of the most important things” the college did, and one he hoped the college would always keep. Other students in the focus group agreed: the all school picnic was a very important tradition at the college.

Ringing of the bell. There is a bell on campus that is rung after athletic victories. Faculty in the focus groups explained teams would ring the bell when returning to campus to let the entire campus community know they had been victorious in their athletic endeavors. One student, a non-athlete, smiled when recalling this tradition. He said, “Even like, sometimes if they get home at 2:00 in the morning, they still go ring it at 2:00 in the morning. So you can always hear it.” One of the staff members, who was also a coach, explained how the tradition was enacted with her team:

If we win away, when we come back, we ring the victory bell. …We would pick standout players of that game, or sometimes we would pick those that got injured that season to go up and ring the bell for us, and I think it helped to build team unity and let them know that we are all still a team, regardless of how you helped in the victory, or whatever.
This tradition allowed the entire campus community to know about the victory. In addition, it was yet another example provided by the focus group participants illustrating the overarching theme of community.

The bell has a special place in the history of the college. It was actually on the original campus, when the college was located in another state. The bell was a part of the college from the beginning, and was moved to the present campus. Just recently, it was moved to the center of campus and located in the newly erected clock tower. This move and the tower were described as symbolic. One student said, “The tower is brand new out there, and that really helps kind of bring in to what Midwestern really is. And, that’s community centered as well.”

The move of the bell, along with the significance and location of the tower were seen as possibly influencing the beginning of a new tradition on campus. One student shared, “They are starting a new tradition with the tower actually, for commencement. After they graduate, students are to come out and place a hand on the tower as they are passing through.” A faculty member described the event a little differently, saying both students and faculty placed their hands on the new clock tower on the way to graduation. The faculty focus group participants described this act as symbolizing the Lord was a “strong foundation” who was their “strong tower.” Even though the two descriptions of this possible new tradition were slightly different, both participants viewed the act as symbolic, and hoped it would continue. This tradition would bring together the two aspects of faith and community.

All of the traditions described by the focus groups emphasized building relationships and community. One participant summarized the importance of community in relationship to the mission of the school. He said, “When I see Christ-centered education for character… I see community with that because Christ was such a community centered person.” The idea of living
life together and helping each other apply a Christian worldview carries over to the theme of mentoring.

**Mentoring.** Mentoring was perceived as an important part of living life in a supportive community of faith. The concepts of encouraging, supporting, and advising others were all related to the theme of living life in community. These concepts were perceived by many in the campus community as occurring through mentoring. Mentoring was described as occurring on three levels, employee to student, student to student, and employee to employee. These mentoring activities were also described as intentional and relational. Because there was significant overlap among the three levels, data in this section are shared from the student, staff, and faculty perspectives.

**Students.** Student perceptions of how mentoring was related to the mission of the college were shared by upperclassmen from both focus groups. A young man who was a junior described it this way:

> Our mission statement now is Christ-centered education for character. I think one of the ways that character comes out is that Midwestern does a very good job of producing not only leaders, but mentors. I’ve had a lot of very, very good friends that graduated a couple of years before me and stuff. They are the kind of people I can go to. And… the experiences they have gone through here have helped build them up to where they can be a great mentor for younger people like myself. And, it’s something that it seems is a continual process. As they mentor people, the people they mentor end up mentoring other people and things like that.

He perceived this process as reflecting the character of those in the college community.
Another junior from the second focus group used the word discipleship to describe what he felt was an essential part of developing leaders. He stated, “A Christ-centered education for character is that—mentor, discipleship—that is a very essential piece to Christianity, especially to Christian leadership, and I think it is worth being noted.” This discipleship or mentoring was perceived as occurring between faculty and student as well as student to student. A young lady in the group shared:

RA's are normally sophomores or juniors, so they definitely have a lot of crazy fun things going on, but they also notice when the freshman is… like homesick and walking them through that. Or, like, “Oh, I had that professor. Here’s what you can do.” That kind of thing, yes. And, I think…our faculty and staff do a phenomenal job of mentoring to us, and I would say, yes, it just continues to trickle down.

Mentoring others was perceived as an important part of student experiences related to the mission on campus of Christ-centered education for character.

**Staff.** Several staff members shared comments related to encouraging and supporting students. Most of the comments were linked to the relational aspect of integrating faith and learning. One participant described being thankful for the “freedom to interact with students and pray for students.” Another participant talked about loving the students unconditionally:

I think of unconditional love. Because, you know, you get these students in here, and it’s just… how can they be so messed up, or how can they make so many mistakes? And then you think, just a few years back and we’re just as messed up as they are sometimes too. We’ve gone through some of the things they have, and I think we just love them unconditionally and direct them, and that’s all we can do. And tell them a little about God.
These data illustrate mentoring viewed from the perspective of encouragement and support.

Other focus group participants also talked about building relationships, but their comments were focused more on providing spiritual training through mentorship. One staff member talked about a single father with six children who was taking an online class. This man had been opposed to church prior to taking the class, but began taking his children to church as a result of his relationship with his professors. A staff member who was also a coach talked about making sure the girls she worked with understood “it’s not just about them.” She continued, describing her work as “focused around the students.” She wanted to “make sure that they have a better grasp of a relationship with God. So, once they leave here, they go out into the world and they can be the light.” Another participant talked about mentoring students in the HBC groups. And, yet another participant described the process of helping students on their spiritual journey. She said:

We are so spiritually strong as a faculty and staff, but how do you instruct students and journey with them in that? That looks different for every student. If students want to find Christ here, it is evident that He is here. But, what they come out with, really does depend a lot on how much they access what we have to offer; and what Christ has to offer, obviously. So it is not a cookie cutter… we are not trying to produce that “this is Free Methodist theology and we all embrace it 100%.” No. But, we embrace Christ, and letting him transform each one of us individually. And, as that plays out, we offer ourselves to you in this way. And, now go and do likewise.

These opportunities were seen as a priority, and focus group participants talked about being intentional and available. One member explained, “I think an open door policy and leading by example… Letting the students know that we are just there for them. That also plays
a huge role as far as just working with everybody.” Another picked up on the open door policy phrase, and continued:

The intentionality and open doors is huge. In fact, the majority of my job is just hanging out with college students and just chatting. So, you just get to interact with life. They watch a movie or they go hang out with friends. You get to discuss… What does that mean? What does that look like? And, how does that fit with being Christ-centered and following and being faithful?

These types of conversations on a daily basis are ways of building community through the use of mentoring. They also align with the relational aspect of integrating faith and learning.

When asked how they learned how to mentor and/or integrate faith in their daily interactions with others, one staff member recalled learning from past mentors. She reflected:

For me, it’s legacies that have been left here before I was ever a student… It’s more of following examples that have been left before us. Which, goes back to what Christ left for us which was… yeah, just lead by example. For me it is just a lot of the legacies that were here before I ever came through the doors.

The importance of living life in community was perceived by many staff members as occurring through mentoring the students on campus. This mentoring was described as being intentional in developing relationships and helping the students to grow spiritually.

**Faculty.** Faculty also shared perspectives related to mentoring. Their articulation of mentoring included the same relational and spiritual components articulated by students and staff. However, faculty also included the intellectual component as an important part of the mentoring process. One faculty member described faculty and staff coming along-side students to help them make decisions, whether they are “spiritual, or social, or academic or whatever.”
Another described being intentional about asking tough questions and encouraging students to find answers for themselves. He said:

I will point blank ask questions that may challenge what they already think. I don’t back away from anything like that. … That is one way where I see students really grow. You leave them with a difficult question, a lot of times they will come to me afterwards and ask me what my thoughts are on that.

This faculty member thought it was important to “let them wrestle” with questions themselves prior to sharing his thoughts and opinions, but he made sure to be available for informal mentoring conversations.

Mentoring was perceived as an important part of integrating faith and learning because it supported the underlying assumption that community was a high priority. Participants in the study mainly discussed mentoring in terms of relational and spiritual elements. A few faculty members also mentioned an intellectual element of mentoring. One interesting trend in the data was faculty tended to talk about being mentored themselves when it came to the process of learning how to integrate faith and learning in their specific content areas. This unique element of the study is discussed in the next section of faculty experiences.

**Faculty Experiences**

The holistic approach to integrating faith and learning works well when applied across the entire campus community. In keeping with the Fit Four model, the integration of faith and learning at Midwestern Christian College occurred relationally (fit heart), spiritually (fit soul), academically (fit mind), and physically (fit body). Indeed, participants from all focus groups readily provided examples from the categories of fit soul, fit heart, and fit body. The examples from these categories occurred across the entire campus and involved faculty, staff, and students.
However, the category of the fit mind was discussed only in connection to the classroom. While numerous examples of developing a fit mind were provided from all focus group participants, it is important to recognize the responsibility for the category of fit mind fell almost entirely to the faculty. The president summarized this perception when he used a military analogy to describe the integration of faith and learning at Midwestern Christian College. He described the faculty as the “shooters” and everyone else as the support personnel. As a result, the data related specifically to teaching and classroom decisions are presented here, in a separate section of this dissertation.

Faculty described their experiences related specifically to integrating faith and learning in the classroom. Their perceptions fell into two main categories. The first area faculty talked about was making conscious teaching decisions in an effort to integrate faith and learning. The second category related to challenges they faced in their efforts.

Teaching decisions. Teaching decisions emerged as a prominent theme in the faculty focus groups. In addition to deciding how to teach content from a Christian worldview perspective, which was described earlier in the holistic approach section, faculty also described making conscious choices about class structure, teaching strategies, and resources used for teaching.

Class structure. Data from the faculty focus group sessions revealed several faculty members chose to integrate faith by using certain classroom structures or routines. Examples of this included opening class with a devotional, sharing prayer requests, opening class with prayer, and asking students to sign up to lead a devotional. The provost described this approach as “an easy way out” when it came to integrating faith and learning. He perceived these approaches as “a way to Christianize the educational process” if they were not tied to content. However, some
faculty did perceive these activities as demonstrating an integration of faith and learning. These types of examples were provided earlier, in the fit soul section of this dissertation.

Teaching strategies. Other teaching decisions related to teaching strategy choices. Several faculty talked about how they interacted with students and described classroom discussion as a preferred delivery model for helping students learn. One faculty member described deliberately thinking about creating good questions, because, “If I can get them talking about it, and talking in terms of their faith, then I have succeeded.” This sentiment was reflected in the other focus group as well when another faculty member shared, “I’m real intentional on asking questions that may help students find answers themselves.” He continued, “I tend to give my opinion as well, but it is important to let them wrestle awhile with that first.” Another described a recent class experience. He said, “I had a few questions I wanted to ask and it totally drove the whole class period… we probably all bring those questions to play in the classroom to see how their worldview is going to match up.”

Students also talked about how classroom discussions helped them to think about faith related issues. One student described a professor who required students to articulate how their faith related to the content they were learning. This was the professor’s way of encouraging students to move from simply memorizing content to applying what they learned. Another student described how classroom discussions often created opportunities for extended conversations outside of class. These opportunities allowed additional faith-related dialog to occur. A female athlete shared:

There are a few girls on our team who came in knowing about God, but they just came because they wanted to play sports. And, I’ve had several opportunities this year to share my faith and kind of like just see where they are. And, it’s been cool, because I don’t
think I would have had that opportunity if it wouldn’t have been for my coach or this class they were taking.

Students and faculty both perceived classroom discussions as an effective strategy for integrating faith and learning.

In addition to using a classroom discussion model and developing good questions, faculty also described incorporating higher-level thinking skills into lessons and assignments. One example was asking students to explain the implications of what was being discussed with regard to the Christian worldview. Another example was requiring students to complete outside readings and then summarize and evaluate them. One professor said, “I have them look for two things when they evaluate. One, is it a good scientific method? The second is, what is the worldview that is displayed? Is there any obvious bias?” This strategy required students to apply their knowledge and use critical thinking skills.

**Teaching resources.** Another example of teaching decisions related to resources. This included resources they used in classroom instruction as well as resources that helped them teach their content from a Christian worldview perspective.

Resources for classroom instruction included informational text choices. Faculty members referred to referencing the Bible, selecting specific religious articles, choosing specific texts based on content and philosophy, and requiring outside readings related to the current topic of study. One professor described selecting textbooks by Christian authors or publishers for certain subjects. He also spoke about being intentional in the type of textbooks he chose:

When I tried to find a textbook for abnormal psych, I looked specifically at the chapters that talked about sexuality to see how they were approaching different sexual issues and trying to pick one that was not the most liberal, you know.
He also talked about using a best-selling book for psychology; one that was not Christian, but was fairly conservative.

A colleague in the other faculty focus group also talked about how a Christian worldview influenced choices he made in the classroom. He said, “It has definitely driven my book selection. In media, I bring in articles all the time. So, it definitely drives the articles I choose to bring in and share.” He continued with another example from a communications class:

I picked the book *How to Argue Like Jesus*. I did a lot of research out there and every chapter of the book gives scripture, gives different ways Jesus approached arguments, or debates, or persuasion so to say. Then it also gives modern day examples and stories from history. So, it marries the two together.

He described reading reviews for different texts as he searched for a book for the class. One review was by an atheist who said he used the book because he appreciated how well it articulated the logical, practical advice. The professor continued, “I appreciate it because it’s got scripture and it’s about faith. But, it marries the two together so they get to see real world aspects and biblical aspects.” These examples illustrate faculty were intentional in choosing resources for their classes.

There was limited discussion of physical resources to assist faculty with the integration of faith and learning. One faculty member mentioned having scholarly journals that they received at the beginning of the year, but did not elaborate on the helpfulness of the journals. Even the upper-level administrators realized there were few resources. One of the deans talked about library resources or additional readings, but then said, “But much of it, now that I think about that a little bit deeper, much of it will come out of their personal lives, out of their experience.” The provost felt many resources were not very good. He shared:
I’m quite nervous whenever I see a Christian version of a textbook. I hate to be the one to say this. But, it’s just like the old Christian music industry. Where you just slap Jesus on something and you can sell it as Christian, but the quality is always bad, and it doesn’t have the same sense of rigor. I’ve put to bed a number of Christian texts that could have been great but they just don’t deal with the subject because the person is being SO Christian.

Even the president recognized there were few resources. He stated, “The truth is, we don’t have enough resources to do it better.” He continued, “I have to rely on those faculty and staff who are here to creatively use the resources God has given us.” However, he realized more resources were needed and viewed it as his responsibility to get those resources.

**Challenges.** Faculty faced several challenges in their quest to integrate faith and learning at Midwestern Christian College. These challenges were particularly experienced by newer faculty members, or those teaching at a Christian college for the first time. Four different faculty described initial experiences trying to integrate faith and learning as a challenge. Two faculty members who had been teaching less than five years talked about the challenge of integrating their faith. One said, “It’s really hard to work that in… my first year was really tough… I didn’t do a very good job.” The other shared, “I don’t know that I felt very prepared at all.” Another faculty member who had taught seven years, described beginning to feel comfortable. However, when remembering his first year, he said he was “petrified,” and “just worried about getting the content right.” A long-time faculty member also spoke about a void in learning how to integrate faith and learning. He said, “I’m not sure that I’ve been taught or given material,” and explained he had learned through years of experience.
These challenges articulated by faculty fall into four categories. First, faculty are concerned with accurately teaching the content of the course. Second, it can be difficult to integrate faith with content. Third, there is an element of fear associated with integrating faith and learning. And, fourth, there is often little to no training provided in this area.

**Content comes first.** One of the challenges faculty face is the desire to do justice to the content of the courses they teach. When talking about how prepared they were to integrate faith and learning when they first came to campus, one participant said, “I was just worried about getting the content right.” Another articulated the need to feel comfortable with the academic content first, stating “You get your content down, and you feel a little bit more free.” A faculty member who had been teaching for seven years was beginning to feel more comfortable, having “figured out how to build upon that.” A newer faculty member described the transition from a secular school to a private, Christian school:

When I came here, I knew that I wanted to share my faith, but at the same time, I still took very seriously that I needed to cover the amount of material. Plus, it is very hard to… relate [mathematics] to… “that makes me think of God.” I tried to throw a few things in here and there. The second year, I tried to do a little bit more, but still it didn’t feel… it felt awkward… like, you know, like it didn’t fit.

Another faculty member described challenges for new teachers as well. He spoke from personal experience, remembering his first years at Midwestern:

The first couple of years I was here, the integration of faith was one of my lower aspects because I know I was focused on content. And, as I felt comfortable with the content—I think it was somewhere in the third year… I made it a definite focus of mine. OK, I’m good with my content now, so how can I correct this area.
He continued, “But, it is something I think comes with time at first. I don’t think early teachers are going to be able to jump in there and automatically do it.” These data revealed faculty felt compelled to focus on accurately teaching the subject matter first, and then, when they were comfortable with that, they felt free to focus on integrating faith. When faced with teaching new content, it was perceived as very difficult to also think about related spiritual content at the same time.

**Integrating faith and learning is hard work.** One reason for the difficulty may be attributed to the lack of resources. As described earlier, most subject matter texts do not include faith-based perspectives. And, if they do, they are often perceived as not being academically rigorous. Initial attempts to integrate faith and learning were not viewed as easy. One participant stated, “I think, if we were not Christian from the start, it wouldn’t happen.” However, faculty talked about efforts to improve in this area and described the process as a progression which required time.

Personal growth in one’s own faith, continued learning, and experience and confidence in the classroom were all elements which contributed to faculty feeling more comfortable integrating faith and learning. As faculty grew in their own faith, what they learned could be applied spontaneously in the classroom, “as something hits,” in the middle of a lesson. This element was described as:

Our natural faith beliefs come out in what we say, how we express that. Because I have that faith, because I have that belief system, I’m going to cover the content differently. We are focused on content, but because we have that background, it comes out in our coverage of the content.
To achieve this spontaneity, however, required faculty to be intentional about growing in their own, personal faith. One faculty member described the process as taking “years of experience and confidence… feeling comfortable sharing your faith and speaking about spiritual ideas in a business classroom.”

A more intentional approach to integrating faith was described by another faculty member. He said, “I kind of take a class each semester that I really attack to do that way. I’m not through all of mine, but the others have elements in there and I’m working on increasing them.” This was his approach to making intentional teaching decisions related to integrating faith and learning.

Another long-time faculty member described his development as also occurring over a period of time. He said:

For me it was just an outgrowth of growing in my own faith. And, just looking at materials. I don’t know if there is any specific materials on campus that are available to us, there probably are… but just reading in my discipline from people that have a biblical worldview, or what I would consider biblical worldview. And then, putting those, integrating those in my class.

These types of approaches were not easy, quick fixes to integrating faith and learning. They were intentional, and took focused effort and time.

**Fear.** Fear was also articulated as an emotion experienced by faculty when they reflected on their initial attempts to integrate faith and learning. One male faculty member used strong language, stating he was “petrified.” The provost also perceived fear as a possible deterrent to integrating faith and learning. He said:
I think some teachers are fearful of going down the integration route because they are afraid of what is going to come out. Part of it is, I just don’t think all of the time that we have to give all of the answers. We need to raise the questions.

The provost perceived the fear of not being able to answer questions as one reason faculty were hesitant to integrate faith with their content area.

Training. A lack of training was articulated by numerous faculty members. Professional development is often focused on content knowledge or pedagogical approaches to teaching, not on faith integration. This concept was articulated by one faculty member who could not think of any outside training he had received. He said, “I’m not sure I can think of any… I mean, our professional development really focuses more on our content teaching and style of teaching or the technology that is available.”

Faced with limited training opportunities, faculty turned to colleagues and mentoring as ways they learned how to integrate faith and learning. The group nodded in agreement when one member stated, “I think a lot of times, we really lean on each other when it comes from that standpoint. We are each other’s resources.” Having discussions with other faculty members was viewed as an important resource. One faculty member who attended a seminary for his masters and doctoral level work described the importance of mentoring:

I think that I learned a lot through my Master’s and Doctoral work, doing education. I mean, really what happens when you go do your Master’s and Doctoral work, is I was mentored by my professors, since I’m in education, on how to do it. So, I took note of those professors that did it well and those that didn’t.

This individual described the mentoring process as helping “a lot.” This type of mentoring was also described by a current faculty member who had completed her undergraduate work at
Midwestern Christian College. She described three different professors who “led by great examples.” She perceived teaching from a Christian worldview as an expectation, and described faculty who had both demonstrated and mentored her through “the process of how” to integrate a Christian worldview in a very secular content area. Describing one particular professor, she said, “It was so much of a core of his heart and the teaching and he has definitely poured that into me. …So, I think it really speaks highly of the leading by example here.” Another participant also described supervisors as “role models” who taught her a great deal about integrating faith. The type of mentoring described in these examples was supervisor role modeling, or faculty-to-student.

Other participants discussed peer-to-peer mentoring and sharing of ideas. One faculty member recalled a specific conversation with a colleague about sin nature. He said, “We had a conversation about how to incorporate in our classes the sin nature. So, we tried to kind of bounce off some ideas from each other.” Another shared, “We lean on each other as well. I mean, if someone had a discovery or an ‘ah-hah’ moment, why not share that with everyone?”

The idea of sharing with colleagues was promoted at the college. Professional development sessions provided by the college were mentioned toward the end of the focus group discussion time, almost in passing. One member stated, “We have had seminars and professional development on integrating your faith… we’ve had a few of those.” Other faculty members in the group agreed. One stated, “I think some of our development that we do and conversations are centered on that. It’s a constant, oh yeah, I need to do better at that.” Another faculty member added, “teachers that score well in certain categories [on the TIGER Survey], like the integration of faith and learning, they’ll run a professional development that we are all allowed to attend—usually strongly encouraged to attend.” Group members agreed they were strongly
encouraged to attend the campus professional development sessions designed to help them integrate faith and learning more effectively. These peer-to-peer mentoring types of activities comprised the majority of training provided for faculty as they worked to improve their skills of integrating faith and learning.

One final experience of faculty is worth noting here. Many faculty members perceived the integration of faith and learning to be modeled for them at faculty meetings. One faculty member said, “We’ll even model it in faculty meetings. We’ll start a faculty meeting with a devotional. That is a resource to help us keep it in mind and thinking about it, obviously.” The group nodded in agreement. Another talked about the provost, who was “very apt to throw in suggestions for how to teach.” She also explained that he would “send emails and devotionals out.” Both focus groups for faculty articulated the concept of devotionals at faculty meetings as modeling the integration of faith and learning. In addition, a faculty member in one group also talked about praying during faculty meetings as also modeling the integration of faith and learning. Another added, “We share with each other our faith, and things like that.” These faculty meeting experiences described by faculty are in the relational and spiritual categories of faith integration; categories the provost described as taking “an easy way out” when it came to integrating faith in academic content areas.
Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

This research study provided insight into the way one particular Christian college perceived the integration of faith and learning. The conclusions and implications are presented through the theoretical lenses of organizational culture and transformational leadership.

Conclusions

The research conducted for this study revealed an interesting story. It was the story of an institution who had lost its focus, due to a lack of mission clarity. However, under new leadership, the institution was able to re-discover its heritage, and return to its foundational roots. Not only was a new mission created, the campus community had a renewed focus and commitment to the mission. They were putting talk into practice—actually walking the talk.

As the study progressed, the theoretical lenses of organizational culture and leadership provided important insights into the findings. Three levels of culture (Schein, 2004) are used to organize and discuss the conclusions for changing the culture. Related elements of transformational leadership will be interwoven throughout the discussion, and summarized in a separate section. Finally, conclusions regarding the mission of integrating faith and learning at Christian institutions of higher education will be discussed.

Changing the Culture

This study provided interesting insights into the process of cultural change at Midwestern Christian College. I will begin with the underlying assumptions, the deepest level of culture described by Schein (2004). These underlying assumptions were evident in the observations described by the new president when he first arrived on campus. These underlying assumptions are discussed in connection with a need to change. Following, will be a section discussing how
the level of beliefs and values were re-evaluated by the community. Then, the results of the articulated beliefs and values will be discussed in relation to the most visible level of culture, the artifact level. Finally, underlying assumptions will be revisited and discussed in relation to the changes that transpired under the new president’s leadership.

**Underlying assumptions.** Schein (2010) described assumptions as something that everybody knows, yet no one talks about. Midwestern Christian College had lost focus, largely because the underlying assumptions of the institution were never discussed. There was no clear understanding of the mission or how the underlying assumptions influenced the day-to-day activities of the college. The data revealed three underlying assumptions present within the campus community at the time the new president arrived on campus in 2010.

**Assumption 1: Everyone understands the mission.** One underlying assumption at this institution was everyone knew what the mission of a Christian college should look like. Yet, it was never discussed or clarified. This was true for both new hires and long-time employees. As revealed in the findings in Chapter 4, when questioned about the mission, faculty and staff assumed they knew what the mission of a Christian college was. Even when a prior president had been asked about the mission statement, his response was vague, stating “it’s hanging up around here somewhere.” When the president could not articulate the mission, it is no surprise the employees could not. The underlying assumption was that everyone understood the mission of the college, yet no one could explain it.

The assumption that everyone knew what Christian education should look like proved incorrect. When a new president arrived on the scene, not one employee of the college could articulate the mission of the school. Although everyone intuitively thought they understood the mission, there was no clarity; there was no common goal for which they were working. This
lack of clarity was observed in the realm of athletics. It was almost as if the college had lost its focus, and wasn’t sure exactly what aspects of the campus community were included in the Christian education focus. Were athletics included? There appeared to be some confusion as to what was more important: a Christian focus or a winning athletic team. The lack of discussion about the mission led to a lack of clarity in purpose, a loss of clear direction, and the mistaken underlying assumption that everyone knew what the mission of the college was.

_Assumption 2: Community is a high priority._ A second underlying assumption was the importance of community. Almost all participants discussed the support and encouragement they received from others on campus, the family atmosphere, or the importance of living life in community. Even the president recognized the emphasis on community when he first arrived as he observed the shutting down of campus for an hour every morning and an hour every afternoon so the employees were able to meet together. No classes were scheduled during this time. Productivity standards appeared low, in light of the fact that no faculty were publishing scholarly work and the previous provost went golfing every afternoon. When the new president questioned the campus community about these practices, they explained the gatherings as, “That’s our community.” The underlying assumption was, community was more important than accomplishment.

The prior provost’s reaction to the new president’s early arrival time accentuates the underlying assumption that a lack of productivity was okay. The provost perceived the new president’s early arrival as a violation of community norms. His anger illustrated his deeply held belief that community was more important than accomplishment. This underlying assumption was held throughout the organization.
Assumption 3: God will take care of us. The third underlying assumption is related to the previous one. The president described a weak work ethic. He also observed a lack of stewardship and poor management of finances. These characteristics were an outgrowth of the underlying assumption that God would provide for the institution. Because of this assumption, the campus community became less likely to take action, and appeared content to set back and wait for the Lord to provide. This approach was not increasing the viability of the college. In fact, the college was facing some very large challenges, including a lack of financial stability. These challenges would require change in order for the college to survive.

A Need for Change. The president believed the culture needed to change for the college to survive. Yet, culture is not something which can be imposed on a group (Morgan 2006). Schein (2010) described culture as being created when a group worked together to solve “problems of external adaptation and internal integration.” The college was definitely facing problems of external adaptation. They needed to figure out how to adapt to external pressures of low enrollment and financial problems in order to maintain existence. However, internal integration at the college implied that everything was fine. The status quo was okay, they just needed to have faith. Obviously, a need for change existed.

Research has shown transformational leadership to be effective in dynamic, changing environments (Humphreys, 2005). Would the new president provide the type of transformational leadership needed by the college? The data revealed the new president demonstrated all four of the behaviors described in transformational leadership, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. The first evidence was his use of intellectual stimulation when he asked them, “What are we going to be when we grow up?” The college had reached a critical state which required them to re-evaluate
the real purpose of the school. The president asked questions, held group discussions, and led the campus community in dialog about espoused beliefs and values, the second level of culture articulated by Schein (2004). He did not try to impose his own vision, nor did he try to manipulate the culture. Rather, he provided a sense of direction and empowered others in the process of creating a new mission for the school.

**Espoused beliefs and values.** When the new president asked, “What are we going to be when we grow up?” it prompted the campus community to have numerous conversations about values. He brought them together into groups, and they were forced to think about deeply held assumptions about who they were and what purpose their organization served. The college community reacted in a manner described by Ravasi and Schultz (2006), when they looked at their history along with organizational symbols and practices. The community was “making sense” of their organization, and using questions to help them understand their identity (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). They engaged in conversations about their historical roots. They questioned who they were and where they had come from. This process helped address the underlying assumptions and facilitated the internal integration (Schein, 2010) needed as the group worked to develop a new mission statement. They determined they had always been a Christ-centered institution. They were proud of their Free Methodist roots, which included an emphasis on social justice issues, and they wanted this emphasis to remain. They valued an educational philosophy that was intentionally Christian, and wanted that value to be reflected in the new mission statement.

Data for this study was collected three years after the adoption of the new mission statement. It revealed insight into the values and beliefs of the campus community following the cultivation of a new mission. A prominent theme revealed in the data was the importance of a
holistic approach to integrating faith and learning. It became very clear, the college community believed all aspects of a student’s time at their school should be Christ-centered. This value was translated to action with the change in coaching staff that occurred. Before the new mission statement, it was unclear how athletics fit into the mission of the school. Now, following the process of determining a new mission statement, it was clear athletics were additional opportunities for integrating faith and learning. The values of the community were clearly reflected in their discussions regarding a holistic approach.

Likewise, the process of self-reflection and working together to determine a new mission statement also clarified beliefs about the meaning of Christ-centered. The data revealed a unified theme from all participants. Christ-centered meant having a Christian worldview. When asked to clarify a Christian worldview, participants described both Biblical knowledge and taking action. It was evident, discussions across campus had helped the college community clarify their beliefs. Of interest was the emphasis on action. A worldview included more than belief. It required one to interact with the world. This focus on action appeared to support a shift in the third underlying assumption mentioned earlier. The underlying assumption that God would provide could be viewed as having faith without action. Now, there was much more emphasis on action.

Artifacts. Interestingly, the process of questioning and seeking to understand their historical roots led to the discovery of the original seal of the college. The Latin language written on the seal was found to be translated “Christ-centered education for character,” the very words the college had selected for their new mission statement. Items such as the seal, the stated mission, and published values are what Schein (2004) called artifacts, which constitute the first level of culture.
Artifacts are often used to “give sense” to organizational identity (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Once the campus had determined the new mission statement, they needed a way to communicate the meaning of the mission statement to others. This was accomplished by using existing traditions and artifacts. For example, all of the existing traditions described in this study remained in effect after the new mission statement was developed. These older traditions solidified and supported the new mission. Likewise, the original seal of the college was an old artifact. But, the meaning was renewed and brought back to life with the development of the new mission statement. Maintaining the use of old, important traditions while bringing in new artifacts to enhance communication of the mission solidified and supported the implementation of the new mission.

Clear communication and a demonstrated commitment to the vision illustrates the use of inspirational motivation, one of the four elements in the transformational leadership model (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The new mission, Christ-centered education for character, was short and easy to remember. Giving a renewed purpose to old traditions and the original seal, along with the new mission statement and the new, Fit Four model provided important artifacts which reflected the changing culture of the institution.

Once the new mission statement was determined, the provost was given the responsibility to enact it. The provost developed the Fit Four model as part of a campaign to communicate the meaning of the mission. The Fit Four was a visual representation that gave sense to the mission statement. This clear communication and the use of symbols were strategies research has shown transformational leaders used to promote the mission of an organization (Kezar, et al., 2006). The artifacts of the short mission statement and the Fit Four model were symbols which quickly became embedded in the organizational culture of the college.
Underlying assumptions revisited. It is important to revisit the underlying assumptions discovered when the new president first arrived on campus. Atwater and Atwater (1994) studied transformational leadership at several benchmark companies. They found that successful major changes took time to accomplish—typically five or more years. They also discovered “many of the traditional assumptions on which the organizations operated came into question” (Atwater & Atwater, 1994, p. 170). This section of the conclusions will look at the original underlying assumptions from three years ago and discuss perceived changes in those underlying assumptions observed in this study.

Assumption 1: Everyone understands the mission. Initially, it was clear, everyone did not have the same understanding of the mission. It was assumed everyone knew what a Christian college education should look like, but no one could articulate the mission. Furthermore, there was no consensus on how the mission was lived out. Now, following much discussion about who they were and what they wanted to be, the values and the beliefs of the campus community were clarified. The result was, everyone could articulate the mission. But, even more important, they could explain what the mission meant and the Fit Four outcomes expected as a result. A holistic approach that required both belief and action was clearly described by the participants of the study. Now, the underlying assumption that everyone understands the mission is a correct assumption.

Although everyone could articulate the mission and the outcomes, there was more ambiguity when it came to describing what that meant to them personally and how they applied it on a daily basis. When discussing the relational and motivational aspects of integrating faith and learning, the entire campus could articulate activities related to these areas. However, when it came to the intellectual approach to integrating faith and learning, the data did not reveal
consistent approaches or understanding of what that meant. Additional work appears necessary to help faculty clearly articulate a unified view of what the mission looks like when it is enacted on a daily basis in the classroom, where content specific applications occur. This is where increased application of the transformational leadership approach of individualized consideration would be helpful. The provost demonstrated this element when he encouraged professional development for faculty, and provided suggestions and ideas through individualized communication, which the faculty viewed as helpful. However, this element of transformational leadership was less evident than the other elements—perhaps due to the relatively short time that had transpired since the new mission statement was adopted.

**Assumption 2: Community is a high priority.** The underlying assumption of the importance of community has not changed. What has changed are the values and beliefs related to that assumption. Before the new president arrived, the underlying assumption was community took precedence over productivity. The new president used the transformational leadership element of idealized influence (charisma) to influence this assumption. He became a role model for productivity, showing up for work at 7:30 a.m. every morning. He displayed high moral and ethical standards, and earned the trust of the employees and students. These actions align with findings described by Bass (1999, p. 22) where “only charismatic leadership could maintain high productivity in the face of conflicting low productivity norms.” The work ethic modeled by the new president contributed to the sustained efforts and increased productivity of the entire campus community.

Community remains a high priority for the entire campus. However, the beliefs and values they articulated during the focused conversations around the new mission statement brought new meaning to this assumption. The definition of Christ-centered was determined to
include a Christian worldview that required both knowledge and action. This clarification helped
the campus community understand they needed to take action. Now, the underlying assumption
is that while community is important, work must also take place. Productivity happens in
community.

Assumption 3: God will take care of us. The idea that God would provide for the
institution was the third underlying assumption. While the assumption itself did not change, the
values and beliefs enacted as a result of the assumption have altered. This change occurred
through the process of understanding the institutional culture and questioning the traditional
assumptions. When the campus community clarified what a Christian worldview meant, it
influenced the way this underlying assumption was interpreted. For example, numerous
individuals talked about a Christian worldview being both belief and action. When this
viewpoint was clarified, it became clear the campus community had become more focused on
what they believed than on taking action and living out those beliefs. Now, the community is
taking action to support the mission rather than being content to sit back and passively wait for
God to provide.

Applications of Transformational Leadership Components

The new president worked within the existing culture to understand the underlying
assumptions of the campus community. This approach is recognized as effective by a variety of
researchers (Atwater & Atwater, 1994; Basham, 2012; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Kezar,
et al., 2006; Rhoads & Tierney, 1992). The new president worked within important cultural
functions at the institution while also utilizing transformational leadership approaches necessary
to facilitate change at the institution. Bass and Avolio (1994) articulated four elements of
transformational leadership. Each of these elements was evident in the actions of the new
president as he guided the campus community through the development of a new mission statement.

The new president began the conversation with intellectual stimulation. He asked questions about who they were and what they wanted to be, revealing deeply held beliefs and values along with underlying assumptions. He used idealized influence to model the way (Kouzes & Posner, 2013), and set an example of high moral and ethical standards by working hard and aligning his actions with the newly discussed beliefs and values of the institution. The president also employed inspirational motivation and individualized consideration in the process of communicating the new mission and outcomes to the campus community and encouraging others to develop in ways consistent to the mission. These last two elements, inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, were largely carried out through the actions of the upper-level administrators—particularly the provost.

Integration of Faith and Learning

This study also led to several conclusions regarding the integration of faith and learning. First, some conclusions about the phrase itself—language is important. Second, conclusions related to the culture of the institution—culture is important. Third, challenges exist, especially for faculty members. And, fourth, support is needed to facilitate successful integration of faith and learning. These conclusions and their relationship to other empirical literature are further explained below.

Language is important. I began this study with the perspective of looking at the integration of faith and learning as a concept, rather than getting caught up in the semantics debate. However, data from the participants led me to revisit that perspective. In the eyes of the participants in this study, language does matter. Upper-level administrators and focus group
participants alike articulated concern about the phrase, “integration of faith and learning.” They much preferred to talk about the concept in terms of their new mission statement, “Christ-centered education for character.” As the study progressed, I began to understand their viewpoint and ponder semantics. The irony is, the phrase integration of faith and learning is both too broad and too narrow. Allow me to explain.

Much of the debate around the phrase has been focused on the word “integration.” Some feel the term implies faith and learning are separate entities, and they strongly disagree with this idea (Hall, et al., 2006). This was the perspective of the participants in this study. Rather than use the term integration, they stressed the phrase Christ-centered. This perspective stemmed from deeply held beliefs and values of the campus community, and relates to the importance of culture. However, for now, I would like to focus attention on the words faith and learning.

The act of integrating of faith and learning has been described in a variety of different ways. Several of these approaches were described in the literature review of this dissertation (Burton & Nwosu, 2003; Holmes, 1987; Nwosu, 1999; Ostrander, 2009). Even though each of these approaches were developed from the Christian faith perspective, there were still several variations in the frameworks provided. Much of this variance is due to a lack of clarity in the phrase. I propose the word faith is too broad and the term learning is too narrow to allow for a consistent, agreed upon definition or application model.

**Faith.** Faith has many connotations for differing religions and various theological perspectives. Rather than attempt to describe an approach to integrating faith and learning that works for everyone, perhaps it makes sense to create differing models for different faith traditions. Midwestern Christian College appears to have been successful in utilizing that approach. A narrow, more clearly defined view of faith as specifically Christian allowed them to
develop a mission statement and an approach which was clearly articulated. The framework they developed was holistic and encompasses all of the aforementioned approaches. By narrowing the term faith to specify Christ-centered, the focus became clearer and allowed for the development of a model of implementation directly aligned with the Christian faith.

**Learning.** The problem with the term learning is that it is often interpreted in a very narrow manner. Although learning can occur in a variety of arenas, some involved in the faith and learning debate isolate the concept to the academic classroom. For example, Ostrander (2009) described the integration of faith and learning as “relating one’s Christian worldview to an academic discipline” (p. 96). Several books have been written to support the integration of faith into specific content areas (Beck, 1991; D.S. Dockery, 2007; David S. Dockery, 2012; Nord & Haynes, 1998). Additionally, some research and literature have focused on pedagogical approaches used in the classroom (Burton & Nwosu, 2003; Sherr, et al., 2007; D. I. Smith & Smith, 2011). These are all important and needed aspects of integrating faith and learning. However, they limit the responsibility of integrating faith and learning strictly to the faculty. Midwestern Christian College took a broader view of learning. They articulated learning in terms of education—a holistic education—one that encouraged all participants of the campus community to be involved in the process. Although faculty played a very important role in educating students from a Christian worldview, they were not the sole providers; neither were they solely responsible. The approach at Midwestern Christian College was to include faculty, staff, and students in the organizational culture where the underlying assumption was that community was important and everyone was responsible for achieving the mission of Christ-centered education for character.
**Institutional culture is important.** The culture of an institution influences the implementation approach to the integration of faith and learning. At Midwestern, the mission statement of Christ-centered education for character was aligned well with the organizational culture of the institution. The underlying assumption that community was important facilitated the involvement of the entire campus community in the goal of achieving the mission. The espoused beliefs and values supported a holistic approach to education, and clarified that a Christian worldview involved both Christian beliefs and acting out those beliefs. The Fit Four model developed by Midwestern Christian College was a natural outflow of their organizational culture. They looked to scripture to define the outcomes. The Christ-centered focus led them to select scripture describing how Jesus himself “grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). They also referred to Mark 12:28-30, where Jesus said the greatest commandment was to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” These key scripture verses became the outcomes they would measure to determine if the college was achieving the mission of Christ-centered education for character.

The Fit Four outcomes were not limited to the academic classroom. However, it was no problem for the entire community to work together toward these outcomes because they had already established the underlying belief that the campus valued a holistic approach to education. Additionally, the inclusion of a fit body also made sense, because of the belief that a Christian worldview included more than knowing. It was important to actually apply those beliefs by *doing* something, acting them out in daily life.

By developing the Fit Four as an outgrowth of their organizational culture, the result was a holistic model which everyone on campus supported. This model is presented here as a new
framework for educating students from a Christian perspective. It is a model for Christ-centered education. It narrows the term faith to Christ-centered, and expands the term learning to education. Because it is holistic, it accommodates the categories, levels, and approaches put forth by other models; yet, it includes more elements. The alignment of other approaches to integrating faith and learning to the Fit Four model developed by Midwestern Christian College is illustrated in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holmes 4 approaches</th>
<th>Ostrander 3 levels</th>
<th>Nwosu 3 categories</th>
<th>Burton &amp; Nwosu 5 categories</th>
<th>Sherr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudinal</td>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Intellectual/Foundational</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Foundational (parallel processing)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundational (philosophy, history, Bible)</td>
<td>Applied/Ethical</td>
<td>(parallel processing)</td>
<td>Growth of faith</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethical &amp; Worldview</td>
<td>Applied/Ethical</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Faith application</td>
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<td>Pedagogical</td>
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The one category that does not clearly align with the Christ-centered framework is the pedagogical approach put forth by Burton and Nwosu (2003). Additionally, the Christian Vocation Model suggested by Sherr, et al. (2007) articulates the need for teachers to be competent in managing the classroom environment. This competence has connections to a pedagogical approach, but it could also fit in the relationship category of the Fit Four model.

**Challenges exist.** The holistic model of Christ-centered education encourages the entire campus community to be involved in the process of integrating faith and learning. However, a
large portion of the responsibility still resides with faculty. This study revealed several challenges faculty faced as they strove to accomplish the mission of Christ-centered education for character. These challenges included the need to focus on content, the difficulty of the task, fear, and lack of training. These challenges are not uncommon, and have been described by other researchers as well.

**Content comes first.** It is difficult to make connections between the content being taught and anything else if one does not have a strong grasp of the foundational concepts in the subject matter. Several faculty members in this study discussed focusing on content first, and making sure they “got it right.” These comments were typical of new teachers in the focus groups, and also articulated by long-time teachers as they reflected on their early years in the classroom. However, faculty appeared dissatisfied when their teaching did not include spiritual issues, and discussed working to get better as they became more comfortable with the course content. The attitudes of the faculty at Midwestern did not seem aligned with those described by Lyon, et al. (2002). This study found faculty at three out of four institutions believed academic goals should trump religious goals if a conflict arose. It is possible the culture of the institution influenced the different reactions to the reality that faculty need to focus first on content before they can apply it to other areas.

**Integrating faith and learning is difficult and takes time.** The task of integrating faith and learning requires depth of knowledge in both content and spiritual issues. Developing that depth of knowledge takes time and effort. Several faculty members articulated the necessity of time. The need for time can be viewed as long-term and short-term. In the long-term, time is needed to develop a depth of knowledge. In the short-term, the pressures of the daily lives of teachers contribute to a lack of time to prepare, reflect, and think about issues (Hall, et al., 2006).
Planning takes extra time when there is a lack of quality resources available. Providing resources or extra time would assist faculty in this area. Indeed, Jang (2012) found time was a significant factor in increased implementation of faith and learning at a Christian elementary school.

**Fear.** One faculty member in this study described being “petrified” when he first began teaching at the college. Fear is a common theme in the literature. One type of fear is that of being labeled anti-intellectual (Matthias & Wideman, 2009) because of a reliance on faith. Another type of fear was related to lack of knowledge about religious issues (Jang, 2012; Matthias & Wideman, 2009; Nord, 1995; Nord & Haynes, 1998). The fear arising from lack of spiritual knowledge has been attributed to faculty receiving their post-baccalaureate training at secular institutions (Beck, 1991; Matthias & Wideman, 2009). This was true of the faculty in this study. Although a very large percentage (82%) attended private, Christian schools, the attendance at these schools often occurred during their undergraduate years. Only two faculty members who participated in the study (18%) attended faith-based institutions for their post-baccalaureate training. The individual who had expressed the strong feeling of fear had attended a public institution for part of his undergraduate work and all of his master’s level work.

**Lack of training.** A lack of training in spiritual issues likely occurred at the masters and doctorate levels, since the majority of faculty in this study attended public institutions. In addition, numerous faculty articulated a lack of training in their current positions. This is also an area which is lacking information in the literature. Recognizing the need for training, the CCCU developed training videos which are available to faculty online (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2013). These videos provide content specific training for faculty.
This study found that resources to assist faculty in the goal of integrating faith and learning are limited. In the face of limited resources, faculty often turned to each other. Mentoring was described as an effective way to learn how to integrate faith. One faculty member specifically mentioned being mentored by professors at a seminary, and how that helped him integrate faith. Other faculty members described bouncing ideas off each other.

**Support is needed.** In light of the findings of this study and other research, it is evident faculty need support to enhance the integration of faith and learning in their classes. Time, resources, and mentoring were all areas that would be helpful.

**Implications**

This case study revealed several implications for a variety of constituents. First, there are implications for leaders who are guiding their institutions through the rapidly changing landscape of higher education. Second, there are implications for institutions wishing to make sure they are achieving their mission. Finally, faith-based schools with an articulated mission of bringing faith and scholarship together can benefit by reflecting on the lessons learned about integrating faith and learning. Several implications derived from this empirical study are discussed in the following section.

**Transformational Leadership Facilitates Change in Higher Education**

As the study progressed, the importance of leadership became clear. This was particularly important because of the need for change at the institution. One of the implications from this study is transformational leadership helps facilitate change in higher education. The findings of this study revealed a successful transformation of institutional culture over the past three years. The current campus community appeared committed to the new mission, had increased student enrollment through both campus and online growth, and was in a better
position financially than at the time of the new president’s arrival. These findings are in alignment with other studies of transformational leadership (Bass, 1998). The president’s actions aligned with five general lessons described by Atwater and Atwater (1994) from studying transformational leadership at several benchmark companies. Their work revealed that successful major changes were: a) initiated by upper-level managers who clearly articulated the vision, b) supported with skills training and a focus on outcomes, c) enacted through the process of questioning underlying assumptions, d) accomplished over time—typically five or more years, and e) reliant upon effective use of human resources. Although these findings were from the business field, the results from this current study imply transformational leadership can facilitate change in higher education as well.

This implication is important in light of other research which suggested transformational leadership might not work as well in higher education due to the culture of the institution. Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989) stated that transformational leadership “may not be compatible with the ethos, values, and organizational features of colleges and universities” (p. 74). Additionally, Wolverton and Gmelch (2002) found deans at research institutions to be less likely to engage in “community building” than those at more comprehensive colleges (p. 37). Indeed, the culture of the institution may determine the level of effectiveness of transformational leadership at higher educational institutions. Bass (1998) articulated a need to explore how the context of leadership affects the implementation of transformational components. This current study revealed data related to this need. The insights gained from the data are shared next, as the second implication derived from the study.
Align Leadership Approach with Organizational Culture

The data revealed the culture of the institution in this case study was a good match for a transformational leadership approach to change. First, the institution was a small, liberal arts college, providing a greater likelihood that community building would occur (Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). Second, the underlying assumption of the importance of community aligned well with a transformational culture, which encouraged followers to work for the greater good of the group. Bass and Avolio (1993) described a transformational culture as having “a sense of purpose and a feeling of family. Commitments are long-term. Leaders and followers share mutual interests and a sense of shared fates and interdependence” (p. 116). They continued, “Superiors serve as mentors, coaches, role models, and leaders, socializing members into the culture” (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p. 118). These attributes were clearly evident in the data provided by the participants in the study.

Transformational culture also places a priority on the good of the group. Bass (1999) called for research on ways leaders helped transform followers to this higher level of concern. Perhaps the transformation has more to do with the organizational culture of the institution than a particular process employed by the leader. If this is true, the challenge of influencing the culture of an organization may be key to helping an institution change. This leads to the third implication derived from this study.

Changing Culture Requires Mentoring and Modeling, not Mandates or Manipulation

Discussion about changing culture is risky business. This study took the view that culture is a root metaphor, something an institution is, not something an institution has. Therefore, culture is not something to be mandated or manipulated. However, Schein (2010) discussed ways leaders could embed and transmit culture through various approaches, such as
role modeling, coaching, and teaching. Bass explained the different approaches a transactional leader and a transformational leader took with regard to organizational culture. He said:

The transactional leader accepts and uses the rituals, stories, and role models belonging to the organizational culture to communicate its values; the transformational leader invents, introduces, and advances the cultural forms. The transformational leader changes the social warp and woof of reality. (Bass, 1985, p. 24)

The new president took time to understand the history and the culture of the institution. He demonstrated respect for what had been accomplished in the past. He then worked with the existing community and organizational culture to incorporate the strengths of the past and their current beliefs and values into a new mission statement. Finally, the provost created a new artifact, the Fit Four model, to promote the new mission. The new model was incorporated into all aspects of the campus community. This process was similar to the method Bass and Avolio (1993) outlined for fostering a transformational culture:

First, there is an articulation of the changes that are desired. Next, the necessary changes in structure, processes, and practices are made and are widely communicated throughout the organization. Finally, new role and behavioral models are established and reinforced that become symbols of the “new” culture. (p. 115)

Promoting change, however, does not happen overnight. Bass explained, “strong cultures were usually a consequence of leaders who had hammered away at particular sets of cultural beliefs in messages to their organization for many years” (Bass, 1985, p. 25). This aligns well with the findings of Atwater and Atwater (1994) who found transformation did not happen quickly; often it took at least five years. It was clear the new president utilized the elements of transformational
leadership in an effort to transform the culture of the institution in order to survive in a changing society. And even though change is difficult and takes time, it is not impossible.

**Mission is Possible**

One important implication from this study is that it *is* possible for an organization to articulate, understand and work together toward a stated mission. This finding runs counter to one of the main criticisms found in mission statement research, which is the lack of alignment of the mission statement with lived, daily experiences (Delucchi, 1997; Scouller, 2012). The findings from this study also differ from Morphew and Hartley (2006) who suggested mission statements were used more for communication with external audiences than for planning or cultural purposes. In this qualitative case study, the mission statement was communicated to those outside the community, but it was also clearly used for planning purposes and was grounded in the underlying assumptions of the organizational culture of the institution. This study also answered the challenge by Firmin and Gilson (2010) for CCCU member institutions to assess the degree to which their mission statements reflected their daily practice and values. This case study of Midwestern Christian College provides evidence that one institution is walking the talk.

So, what enabled the institution to fully implement the mission statement, when research revealed skepticism about the possibility? I believe the integration of faith and learning was occurring at Midwestern Christian College because of uniform agreement across campus about the underlying assumptions of what that meant. In other words, the mission statement was aligned with the organizational culture of the institution. To be fair, the mission was not clearly enacted when the new president first arrived. However, a thorough discussion of deeply held beliefs and values amongst the entire campus community led to a new mission statement. It is
this mission statement that is prevalent throughout the campus community today. There is a clear connection between the mission statement and all three levels of organizational culture (Schein, 2004).

When the new president worked within the culture of the institution to develop a new mission statement, he set the stage for successful implementation of the mission. Rhoads and Tierney (1992) identified eight principles of cultural leadership in higher education. These principles included: each institution has its own distinct culture, academic leadership requires connecting people and putting them first, innovation and change require adjusting values and beliefs, socialization of new members is important, and practicing effective cultural practices is important in cultural leadership. This cultural approach focuses on values, people, and socialization. Additionally, making meaning and relationship building are critical. Many of these principles were evident in the approach the new president took in developing and implementing a new mission statement.

With these insights in mind, there are four implications related to successful implementation of mission statements in higher education. First, it is possible for the mission of a school to align with the lived, daily experiences of the institution. Second, the mission statement needs to align with the underlying assumptions of the organization. Third, if the mission statement is not currently aligned to the actual experiences of the campus community, it is possible to work within the organizational culture to develop a new mission statement which more closely aligns with the underlying assumptions, beliefs and values of the institution. And fourth, socialization of new members should be intentional in order to maintain the common understanding of values, beliefs, and underlying assumptions within the community.
Organizations Should Define Integration of Faith and Learning for Themselves

Faith-based schools exist at all levels of education. Many of these schools articulate a mission of bringing faith and scholarship together. This case study revealed several conclusions for schools wanting to integrate faith and learning. These conclusions have already been discussed, and include the importance of culture, language, and addressing challenges. The implication of these findings is clear. Leaders at faith-based, educational institutions should facilitate discussion among the participants at their campuses to discuss what the integration of faith and learning means to their unique community. This process will take time, as understanding the underlying assumptions and deeply held values and beliefs is imperative for articulating an approach to integrating faith and learning consistent with the culture of the institution.

This case study of one private, Christian college illustrates it is possible to provide Christ-centered education for character in a manner which is upheld and promoted throughout the entire campus community. The endeavor to integrate faith and learning includes many challenges. Yet, this study revealed that if the mission is clearly understood, well-articulated, and embedded in the organizational culture, it is possible. Midwestern Christian College was walking the talk of Christ-centered education for character.
REFERENCES


Appendix A – Interview Guide

Administrator Individual Interview Guide (protocol and questions)

Hello, my name is Terri Gaeddert, and I represent Wichita State University’s doctoral program in educational leadership. I appreciate your willingness to assist me in this study, which will examine perceptions of how the mission of integrating faith and learning is applied and lived out at a Christian college. Midwestern Christian College was selected as the site of the study because of its affiliation with the CCCU and its mission of “Christ-centered education for character” (Midwestern Christian College, 2013). You have been selected because of your position as an upper-level administrator of (faculty, staff, or students) at Midwestern Christian.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis, no names will be used in the final report. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to record the conversation for accuracy and clarity. This session will last 45-60 minutes.

**Administrator Background Questions:**
Please state your name, administrative position, years as an administrator for Midwestern Christian, total years at Midwestern, and other higher education positions and/or experiences.

Name: Administrative Position: Years held:

How long at Midwestern Christian?

How long in higher education administration?
Other institutions?
Other Christian institutions?

Other higher education experiences?
Other institutions?
Other Christian institutions?

Degrees: Undergraduate: Institution:
Graduate: Institution:
Doctorate: Institution:

**Administrator Interview Questions**
Can you explain how you came to be in your current position at Midwestern Christian College?
Please explain the application process (asked about faith prior to/during the interview?)

What myths/stories are famous on campus? Traditions?
The stated mission of the college is
“Christ-centered education for character” (Midwestern Christian College, 2013)

How would you describe the mission of Midwestern Christian College?
What is your opinion of the mission statement?
How does the mission connect to your leadership? Your daily work?
Do current policies/handbooks reflect the mission statement?
(Christian perspectives on leading the institution)
Do you believe Christian beliefs are relevant to your work? Campus community?
Other areas of life?
Are there those on campus who feel differently?

Please explain the role you envision for yourself in communicating the mission of Midwestern Christian College to faculty, staff, or students.

How prepared were you for this role at the beginning of your time in this position? Now?

What do you think helps faculty, staff, or students understand this mission?

How would you describe efforts to integrate faith and learning at Midwestern Christian College?
Your efforts?
Efforts of faculty, staff, students?
Describe Christian worldview?

How is integration of faith and learning occurring on campus?
Provide specific examples of faculty/staff/student?

What resources are available to assist faculty/staff/students in the integration of faith/learning?

Describe some tangible evidence that the mission of Midwestern Christian College is being accomplished.

Is there anyone in particular you can think of who would be good to visit with regarding this study?

Thank you for your assistance today. It is greatly appreciated. I would like your feedback the accuracy of the data collected today. May I send you a transcript by email? Also, as I move forward in this case study, would you be willing to answer additional questions, if needed?
Appendix B – Focus Group Guides

Faculty Focus Group Guide (protocol and questions)

Hello, my name is Terri Gaeddert, and I represent Wichita State University’s doctoral program in educational leadership. I appreciate your willingness to assist me in this study, which will examine perceptions of how the mission of integrating faith and learning is applied and lived out at a Christian college. Midwestern Christian College was selected as the site of the study because of its affiliation with the CCCU and its mission of “Christ-centered education for character” (Midwestern Christian College, 2013). You have been recommended by your administrator because of your role as a faculty member at Midwestern Christian College.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis, no names will be used in the final report. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to record the conversation for accuracy and clarity. This session will last 60-90 minutes.

Faculty Focus Group Background Questions
Please state your name, position held, and number of years at Midwestern Christian College.

Name: Position: Years at Midwestern Christian:

Courses taught:

How long in higher education?
Other institutions?
Other Christian institutions?

Degrees: Undergraduate: Institution:
Graduate: Institution:
Doctorate: Institution:

Faculty Focus Group Interview Questions
Can you explain how you came to be in your current position at Midwestern Christian College?
Please explain the application process (asked about faith prior to/during the interview?)
Why did you apply to teach at Midwestern Christian College?

What myths/stories are famous on campus? Traditions?
The stated mission of the college is
“Christ-centered education for character” (Midwestern Christian College, 2013)

How would you describe the mission of Midwestern Christian College?
What is your opinion of the mission statement?
How does the mission connect to your content? The way you teach?
Does your syllabus reflect the mission statement? (Christian perspectives on subject)
Do current policies/handbooks reflect the mission statement?
(Christian perspectives on leading the institution)
Do you believe Christian beliefs are relevant to your work? Campus community?
Other areas of life?
Are there those on campus who feel differently?

Please explain the role you envision for yourself in communicating the mission of Midwestern Christian College to others.

How prepared were you for this role at the beginning of your time in this position? Now?
What do you think helps others better understand this mission?

How would you describe efforts to integrate faith and learning at Midwestern Christian College?
Your role?
The role of others (staff/students)?
Describe Christian worldview.
How is integration of faith and learning occurring on campus?
Specific examples?
Is there someone else on campus who could provide additional insight on this topic, but is not here today?
Challenges with varied religious backgrounds on campus?
Where or how did you learn how to integrate faith and learning?
Please describe new faculty orientation.

What resources are available to assist faculty in the integration of faith/learning?

Describe some tangible evidence that the mission of Midwestern Christian College is being accomplished.

I would like your feedback regarding the accuracy of the data collected today. If you are willing to provide feedback, please add your email address to the attendance sheet. Also, if you are willing to answer follow-up questions if needed, please check that box as well.
Thank you for your assistance today. It is greatly appreciated! (provide card w/contact info)
Staff Focus Group Guide (protocol and questions)

Hello, my name is Terri Gaeddert, and I represent Wichita State University’s doctoral program in educational leadership. I appreciate your willingness to assist me in this study, which will examine perceptions of how the mission of integrating faith and learning is applied and lived out at a Christian college. Midwestern Christian College was selected as the site of the study because of its affiliation with the CCCU and its mission of “Christ-centered education for character” (Midwestern Christian College, 2013). You have been recommended by your administrator because of your role as a staff member at Midwestern Christian College.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis, no names will be used in the final report. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to record the conversation for accuracy and clarity. This session will last 60-90 minutes.

Staff Focus Group Background Questions
Please state your name, position held, and number of years at Midwestern Christian College.

Name:     Position:     Years at Midwestern Christian:

Other work experience:

Degrees: Undergraduate: Institution:
Graduate: Institution:
Doctorate: Institution:

Staff Focus Group Interview Questions
Please explain how you came to be in your current position at Midwestern Christian College?

Describe the application process (asked about faith prior to/during the interview?)

Why did you apply to work at Midwestern Christian College?

What myths/stories are famous on campus? Traditions?
The stated mission of the college is
“Christ-centered education for character” (Midwestern Christian College, 2013)

How would you describe the mission of Midwestern Christian College?
  What is your opinion of the mission statement?
  How does the mission connect to your work here at MCC?
  Does your department reflect the mission statement?
  Do current policies/handbooks reflect the mission statement?
    (Christian perspectives on leading the institution)
  Do you believe Christian beliefs are relevant to your work? Campus community?
    Other areas of life?
  Are there those on campus who feel differently?

Please explain the role you envision for yourself in communicating the mission of Midwestern Christian College to others.

  How prepared were you for this role at the beginning of your time in this position? Now?
  What do you think helps others better understand this mission?

How would you describe efforts to integrate faith and learning at Midwestern Christian College?
  Your role?
  Role of others (faculty/students)?
  Describe Christian worldview.
  How is integration of faith and learning occurring on campus?
    Provide specific examples?
    Is there someone else on campus who could provide additional insight on this topic, but is not here today?

  Where or how did you learn how to integrate faith and learning?
    Please describe new staff orientation.
    Do you believe Christian beliefs are relevant to your work/job? Campus community? Other areas of life?

  What resources are available to assist staff in the integration of faith/learning?

Describe some tangible evidence that the mission of Midwestern Christian College is being accomplished.

I would like your feedback regarding the accuracy of the data collected today. If you are willing to provide feedback, please add your email address to the attendance sheet. Also, if you are willing to answer follow-up questions if needed, please check that box as well.

  Thank you for your assistance today. It is greatly appreciated! (provide card w/contact info)
Student Focus Group Guide (protocol and questions)

Hello, my name is Terri Gaeddert, and I represent Wichita State University’s doctoral program in educational leadership. I appreciate your willingness to assist me in this study, which will examine perceptions of how the mission of integrating faith and learning is applied and lived out at a Christian college. Midwestern Christian College was selected as the site of the study because of its affiliation with the CCCU and its mission of “Christ-centered education for character” (Midwestern Christian College, 2013). You have been recommended by an administrator because of your role as a student at Midwestern Christian College.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis, no names will be used in the final report. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission I would like to record the conversation for accuracy and clarity. This session will last 60-90 minutes.

Student Focus Group Background Questions
Please state your name, year in school, major, and number of years at Midwestern Christian College.

Name: Year in school: Years at Midwestern Christian:

Major:

Secondary school background: Private Public Home School

Parents/family attend Midwestern? Religious background?

Student Focus Group Interview Questions

Can you explain how you came to be a student at Midwestern Christian College?

Please explain the application process (asked about faith prior to/during the interview?)

Were you asked about faith in your application? On scholarship applications?

Why did you apply to attend Midwestern Christian College?

Have you attended other colleges? If so, why did you transfer?

What myths/stories are famous on campus? Traditions?
The stated mission of the college is “Christ-centered education for character” (Midwestern Christian College, 2013)

How would you describe the mission of Midwestern Christian College?
What is your opinion of the mission statement?
Describe the orientation process. Was there a connection to the mission?
How does the mission connect to your content? The courses you take? The activities you participate in? The campus community?
Do current policies/handbooks reflect the mission statement?
(Christian perspectives on leading the institution)
Do you believe Christian beliefs are relevant to your major? Campus community?
Other areas of life?
Are there those on campus who feel differently?

Please explain the role you envision for yourself in living out the mission of Midwestern Christian College.

How prepared were you for this role at the beginning of your time at Midwestern? Now?
What do you think helps others better understand this mission?

How would you describe efforts to integrate faith and learning at Midwestern Christian College?
Your role?
Role of others (staff/faculty)?
Describe Christian worldview.
How is integration of faith and learning occurring on campus?
Specific examples of what works and/or what does not work?
Is there someone else on campus who could provide additional insight on this topic, but is not here today?
Challenging with various religious backgrounds?
How important is it to integrate faith and learning?
Describe the orientation process. Was there a connection to the mission?

What resources are available to assist you in the integration of faith/learning?

Describe some tangible evidence that the mission of Midwestern Christian College is being accomplished.

I would like your feedback regarding the accuracy of the data collected today. If you are willing to provide feedback, please add your email address to the attendance sheet. Also, if you are willing to answer follow-up questions if needed, please check that box as well.
Thank you for your assistance today. It is greatly appreciated! (provide card w/contact info)
Appendix C – Consent Forms

Midwestern Christian College Administrator Interview Consent Form

Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership, Educational and School Psychology
Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142

**Purpose:** You are invited to participate in a study to examine administrator, faculty, staff, and student perceptions of the Midwestern Christian College mission statement. The study seeks to understand how the concept of integrating faith and learning is lived out on a Christian college campus.

**Participant Selection:** Your school was specifically selected by the researcher for participation in this study because Midwestern Christian College is an affiliate of the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) with a mission of “Christ-centered education for character” (Midwestern Christian College, 2013). You have been invited to participate in this study because of your administrative assignment and involvement in the Midwestern Christian community. Your participation will consist of an individual interview session with the researcher, and possible follow-up questions, if needed.

**Explanation of Procedures:** If you decide to participate, you will be asked to share your perceptions of the mission statement of Midwestern Christian College in an individual interview. The interview will consist of open-ended questions to seek your perception of how the mission statement of Midwestern Christian College is lived out on a day-to-day basis. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will take place at a time and location convenient for you. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded in order to create an accurate transcript, which will facilitate data analysis. Participants will be provided the opportunity to check accuracy and provide feedback on the themes and categories that emerge from the data. Approximately three to four individual interviews are planned with administrators.

**Discomfort/Risks:** There are no risks, discomforts, or inconveniences expected from your participation in this study. However, participants may choose to skip any question or stop the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable.

**Benefits:** The goal of this study is to provide information related to mission statements of Christian colleges and universities; particularly to understand how the integration of faith and learning is lived out on a day-to-day basis on a Christian campus. Cooperation, honest communication, and a genuine desire to work together will provide all involved with a better understanding of cultural implications, mission statements, and lived experiences at a Christian college.
Additionally, this study hopes to add to the body of knowledge regarding the organizational culture of Christian higher education institutions and the connection of the mission statement at a Christian college to the lived experiences of those on campus. Results may be published in journals and presented at conferences in order to share what is learned from the study with others.

**Confidentiality:** Confidentiality of all participants will be protected. Any identifiable information obtained in this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Raw data, including audio recordings and transcriptions, will be maintained indefinitely on a computer secured with password protection. No identifying information will be used in the final report or subsequent publications. No one other than the researcher will have access to the raw data.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University or the researcher. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this study, please contact Jean Patterson, (316) 978-6392 (office phone), or jean.patterson@wichita.edu or Terri Gaeddert, (620) 960-3264 or tgaeddert@sterling.edu. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007 at (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature indicates you have read the information provided above and have voluntarily decided to participate. Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

________________________________________ _______________________
Signature of Subject       Date

________________________________________    _______________________
Print Name        Administrative Role
Midwestern Christian College Faculty, Staff, and Student Focus Group Consent Form

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a study to examine administrator, faculty, staff, and student perceptions of the Midwestern Christian College mission statement. The study seeks to understand how the concept of integrating faith and learning is lived out on a Christian college campus.

Participant Selection: Your school was specifically selected by the researcher for participation in this study because Midwestern Christian College is an affiliate of the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) with a mission of “Christ-centered education for character” (Midwestern Christian College, 2013). You have been invited to participate in this study because of your involvement in the Midwestern Christian community. Your participation will consist of a focus group interview session with a possible follow-up interview with the researcher.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decide to participate, you will be asked to share your perceptions of the mission statement of Midwestern Christian College in a focus group session. The session will consist of open-ended questions to seek your perception of how the mission statement of Midwestern Christian College is lived out on a day-to-day basis. The session will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will take place at a time and location convenient for you. With your permission, the session will be audio-recorded in order to create an accurate transcript, which will facilitate data analysis. Participants will be provided the opportunity to check accuracy and provide feedback on the themes and categories that emerge from the data. Approximately 6-8 focus group sessions are planned with faculty, staff, and students.

Discomfort/Risks: There are no risks, discomforts, or inconveniences expected from your participation in this study. However, participants may choose to skip any question or leave the session at any time if they feel uncomfortable.

Benefits: The goal of this study is to provide information related to mission statements of Christian colleges and universities; particularly to understand how the integration of faith and learning is lived out on a day-to-day basis on a Christian campus. Cooperation, honest communication, and a genuine desire to work together will provide all involved with a better understanding of cultural implications, mission statements, and lived experiences at a Christian college.

Additionally, this study hopes to add to the body of knowledge regarding the organizational culture of Christian higher education institutions and the connection of the mission statement at a
Christian college to the lived experiences of those on campus. Results may be published in journals and presented at conferences in order to share what is learned from the study with others.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality of all participants will be protected. Any identifiable information obtained in this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Raw data, including audio recordings and transcriptions, will be maintained indefinitely on a computer secured with password protection. No identifying information will be used in the final report or subsequent publications. No one other than the researcher will have access to the raw data.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University or the researcher. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact: If you have any questions about this study, please contact Jean Patterson, (316) 978-6392 (office phone), or jean.patterson@wichita.edu or Terri Gaeddert, (620) 960-3264 or tgaeddert@sterling.edu. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007 at (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature indicates you have read the information provided above and have voluntarily decided to participate. Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

________________________________________ _______________________
Signature of Subject            Date

________________________________________    _______________________
Print Name      Role at Midwestern Christian College