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Send out your light and your truth! Let them guide me. Psalm 43:3

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# A Fruitful College Campus Ministry: A Mixed-Method Case Study of Vassar Christian Fellowship at Vassar College

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## Introduction

“InterVarsity Christian Fellowship has lost campus access in America's largest university system because it requires student leaders to affirm Christian doctrines”(Zylstra, 2014). This headline, describing the removal of university recognized status for InterVarsity groups through-out the California State University system, demonstrates the challenging reality of college and university ministries. Other colleges such as Bowdoin and Vanderbilt have made similar moves to ‘derecognize’ Christian student groups (Walker, 2014). This decision by these schools come as a result of Christian student groups, such as InterVarsity, requiring that its leaders be Christian. Due to this InterVarsity requirement, some schools are derecognizing the student groups. Derecognition has been described as a “bureaucratic way of saying, ‘You’re Not Welcome,” and results in a loss of important necessities such as free (and equal) access to rooms, the ability to participate in or have access to student activities programs, and the loss of standing among students, faculty and administration as a legitimate student group (Zylstra, 2014). InterVarsity and other Christian groups expect an increase in this activity following the 2010 Supreme Court decision that made it legal for public colleges and universities to derecognize student groups who required among its leadership an adherence to a set of beliefs (InterVarsity, 2015).

Couple this situation with the reality that “emerging adults are, on most sociological measures, the least religious adults in the United States today,”(Smith, 2009, p.102) and the difficult landscape of Christian Campus ministry begins to come into view. As has been noted by sociologist Christian Smith and groups such as the Pew Research Center, college age adults form a segment of our population that is much less involved in religion or religious activity than culture as a whole. In fact, in 2012, Pew found that “a third of adults under 30 are religiously unaffiliated,” compared to “one fifth of the U.S, public” at large; specifically 32% of adults under 30 to 20% of all adults (Funk and Smith, 2012).

In light of the religious and academic climate that many campus groups find themselves in now, further research is needed into the life of campus groups. Areas of the needed research include: the health of campus ministries with limited or no outside organizational leadership (para-church or church), the spiritual health of students who lead such organizations, and the importance of the leaders having a vibrant Christian walk. Such research is important, for the benefit of both the groups themselves and the local church (Cawthon and Jones, 2004, p.170). It is also important for Christian groups into the future, as the presence of vocational campus ministry staff cannot be counted on in future. As groups lose official status, campus ministers also lose the ability to freely access the campus, having to turn in materials such as their electronic keys (Gregory, 2014). In turn,

the importance of healthy student leadership is necessary for the group to continue to function (Warren, 2014).

This paper seeks to begin addressing the research gap by focusing on a vibrant student led campus ministry with no professional leadership from an outside para-church organization. Specifically, this paper presents a case study that identifies factors which have led to the success of a thriving college campus ministry.

The campus ministry that the case study focuses on is Vassar Christian Fellowship (henceforth VXF), a student run Christian ministry on the campus of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. This paper describes the background of VXF, the research process, the research results, and the application to campus ministry and the local church.

### **Background**

Vassar Christian Fellowship is an evangelical student ran Christian campus organization on the campus of Vassar College. VXF is an independent student group that voluntarily affiliates with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (InterVarsity, 2015). In its past history, the VXF has had paid staff from InterVarsity to lead the group; however, the last five years VXF has been entirely student run, with no paid staff leading them. The reason for this was two-fold. First, the economic situation made it difficult for InterVarsity to have staff with all of their campus groups, which directly impacted the schools in the Poughkeepsie area, including Vassar College, Marist College, The Culinary Institute of America, and Bard College. (the colleges in the Poughkeepsie area were chosen for research due to accessibility of the schools in proximity to the researcher). Of these colleges, Vassar and Bard had official InterVarsity groups, the CIA and Marist had voluntarily affiliated InterVarsity student groups. Secondly, the participation among InterVarsity at these campuses was minimal at best, which made it difficult to secure a staffer.

In 2010 VXF became a student organized and operated campus ministry. Since that point, a fascinating event has taken place. While the other major InterVarsity group in the area, Bard College has an estimated 3 members in their fellowship, Vassar has seen a tremendous growth in their student membership. Table 1 below describes the growth of VXF:

Year	Student Membership
2010	28
2011	28
2012	14
2013	30
2014	51

Table 1: Student Involvement 2010 – 2014, numbers from VXF.

Given this growth of student involvement at VXF in a completely student led organization, researching the factors behind this growth may provide helpful information for other Christian Campus groups that are dealing with the new realities mentioned above.

### **Research Process**

In order to effectively study VXF a research process was developed to identify factors which those involved in the ministry self-identify as important for the growth and vibrancy of the ministry. This research process was established in order to figure out exactly what to study and how to study it. The process involved identifying relevant research questions and deciding upon the best approach at answering those research questions.

#### *Research Questions*

In conducting this case study, several research questions (RQ's) were needed to give guidance to the researcher. Four RQ's were developed to guide the study, these questions were:

RQ1: Is VXF a fruitful and growing campus ministry?

RQ2: If VXF is a fruitful and growing ministry, what perceived factors do student leaders and involved faculty identify as important to the thriving and vibrancy?

RQ3: If VXF is a fruitful and growing ministry, what are the general opinions of participants to the perceived factors identified by student leaders and faculty members?

RQ4: If VXF is a fruitful and growing ministry, in what ways are the perceived factors actually present in the ministry?

For these research questions to be adequately answered, a specific research method would have to be chosen. The method decided upon was an exploratory mixed-method approach.

#### *A Mixed-Method Approach*

An *exploratory mixed-method* approach of research can be defined as “the collection and analysis of qualitative data followed by the collection and analysis of quantitative data”(Terrell, 2012, p.260). The reason for this selection was due to the specific nature of the phenomenon present and the absence of a workable instrument to study the phenomenon. As Creswell notes: “this design is based upon the premise that an exploration is needed for one of several reasons: measures or instruments are not available, the variables are unknown, or there is no guiding framework or theory.” (Creswell and Clack, 2011, p.75). Furthermore, this method was chosen because the purpose of the research lined up with one of

the main purposes of using an exploratory research design, which is “to explore a phenomenon in depth and then measure its prevalence”(Creswell and Clark, p.75).

Following the exploratory design, the research design of this paper was broken into two stages. First, for the qualitative component, a set of open-ended interview questions were developed. These questions (see appendix A) were based on the purpose statement of the group (see appendix C), the perceived health of the group, and other basic questions that developed from the researcher’s observation of the group from the outside. The interviews were given to involved faculty members at the college, as well as student leaders within VXF. Access to these students and faculty was a result of their involvement in the local churches in the Poughkeepsie area. All participating students and faculty members agreed to be interviewed on the topic of their involvement in VXF. From the answers given, a factor analysis was conducted to determine the most frequently perceived elements of the ministry which they believed led to the vibrancy and health of the group.

Secondly, the factors that were mentioned in the interviews, were then developed into a Likert-style survey. In this style of research design, the quantitative elements serves to test the emerging theory that developed out of the qualitative phase (Creswell and Clark, p.77). For the research study at hand, the quantitative survey sought to test the factors for vibrancy among VXF identified in the qualitative interview. In other words, the survey instrument was designed to determine if VXF at large agreed with the opinions of those who were interviewed. Also, the instrument would serve to answer RQ4, and determine if the perceived factors were present in a real sense among the students who participated in VXF.

### **Research Results**

The research design was implemented among those involved in VXF, and the results yielded were analyzed through the four RQs. Beginning on December 28, 2014, through January 20, 2015 interviews were conducted among three faculty members that voluntarily advise VXF and the five student leaders within VXF. These interviews were done in person, over the phone, and through email correspondence.

After the interview process was over, a simple factor analysis was conducted to determine the most frequently perceived elements of the ministry which they believed led to the vibrancy and health of the group. The factor analysis led to the development of a 36 question, Likert-style questionnaire, which was available for the students to fill out between the dates of February 3, 2015 and February 17, 2015. The survey was anonymous, voluntary and were offered to be completed at the churches the students attended as well as after one

off campus event held at one of the local churches near the Vassar campus. Out of the 51 students who are members of VXF, 25 students or 49.02% completed the survey. Finally, the results of the survey were analyzed using the Excel software program.

### *Research Question Results*

RQ1: Is VXF a fruitful and growing campus ministry?

To answer RQ1, two different measures were used. First, the statistical growth of VXF and secondly, the analysis of involved Vassar College faculty members who could speak into this from a unique perspective.

The numerical growth of VXF (seen in Table 1), helps give evidence towards the fruitfulness and growth among the group (Rainer, 2005, Kelly, 1972). Percentage wise, the numerical growth is seen below in Table 2:

Year	Student Membership	Percentage Change Year to Year (rounded to the nearest hundredth)	Percentage Change from year 2010 (rounded to the nearest hundredth)
2010	28	0.00	0.00
2011	28	0.00	0.00
2012	14	-50.00	-50.00
2013	30	+ 114.29	+ 7.14
2014	51	+ 70.00	+ 82.14

Table 2: Percentage Chang in Student Participation in VXF

Increased participation of students in VXF over the last five years is an important indicator of the growth of the ministry, as compared to its recent past.

The second measure used to determine if the group is a fruitful ministry was interviews with faculty members, in which they were all asked the question: “How do you see the health of VXF? Do you believe the groups is growing/stagnate/shrinking?” (See Appendix A). Each of the Faculty members clearly affirmed that VXF is a strong and growing ministry at Vassar College. As one faculty member noted: “the numbers are diverse and growing. Their ministry and presence on campus is very strong now.”

With this quantitative and qualitative evidence, RQ1 can be answered, that compared to its recent past, VXF is a fruitful and growing campus ministry.

RQ2: If VXF is a fruitful and growing ministry, what perceived factors do student leaders and involved faculty identify as important to the thriving and vibrancy?

This RQ was answered by the interviews conducted with student leaders and involved faculty members. Each person (3 faculty members and 5 student leaders), answered the 11 question interview and their answers were compiled and organized. They were organized by the themes of the answer. From this organization, the various factors were ranked in order of how often they were brought up by these leaders. Table 3 below details the factors mentioned and the order of how often they were mentioned.

<b>Factor for VXF health and vibrancy</b>	<b>Number of Faculty who named this (n=3)</b>	<b>Number of Students who named this (n=5)</b>	<b>Total number &amp; Percentage of Faculty and Students who named this (n=8)</b>	
<b>Ethnic Diversity</b>	3	4	7	87.50
<b>Student Leadership</b>	3	4	7	87.50
<b>Christian Faculty Involvement</b>	3	1	4	50.00
<b>Christianity Central to Personal Identity</b>	3	5	8	100.0
<b>Open to Sharing the Gospel</b>	3	3	6	75.00
<b>Committed to the Scriptures</b>	3	5	8	100.0
<b>Support of Local Churches/Pastors</b>	2	5	7	87.50
<b>Strong Christian Background</b>	0	2	2	25.00
<b>Local Pastor Mentoring</b>	1	3	4	50.00
<b>Sense of Community and Belonging within VXF</b>	2	5	7	87.50

Table 3: Factors Identified through Interviews

As the table above shows, there were ten total factors mentioned during the qualitative process. These perceived factors show the belief among the leadership of what is leading to the vibrancy and growth in the ministry. Two factors, a commitment to the scriptures and Christianity being central to personal identity were present in 100.00% of the interviews, the only two to be mentioned in each interview. Four factors were mentioned in 87.50% or 7 of 8 interviews, these were: ethnic diversity, strong student leadership, support of local churches and pastors, and a sense of community and belonging within VXF. One factor was mentioned by 6 of 8 or 75.00%, that being an openness to share the gospel. The rest of the factors were mentioned by 50.00% or less of the respondents, and they included: Christian faculty involvement in the group and local pastoral mentoring were at 50.00% (interestingly enough, these numbers were the opposite of each other, only 1 student reported the importance of Christian professors, while only 1 professor reported the importance of local Pastors), and a strong Christian background was at 25%.

RQ3: If VXF is a fruitful and growing ministry, what are the general opinions of participants to the perceived factors identified by student leaders and faculty members?

In answering RQ3, the factors found in the interviews from RQ2 were developed into a quantitative, Likert survey, which was offered to all the student participants of VXF. Of the 51 students, 25 students completed the anonymous survey. For this RQ, the student responses of the questions that corresponded with the qualitative factors that garnered over 50.00% in RQ2 were analyzed. Thus seven factors were analyzed for RQ3.

#### *Ethnic Diversity*

When questioned on ethnic diversity, 76.00% or 19 students said they considered it to be very important, with 24.00% or 6 students considering it important to VXF. Thus, 100% of surveyed students agree that ethnic diversity is important or very important to the ministry of VXF.

#### *Student Leadership*

Students were surveyed on their opinion of the importance of student leadership within VXF. The opinions result in 48.00% or 12 students saying student leadership is very important to VXF, 40.00% or 10 students agreeing that student leadership is important, and 12.00% or 3 students that believe student leadership is moderately important. This results in 88.00% or 22 student that

agree with the faculty and leaders that student leadership is important for the health of VXF.

### *Christian Identity*

To effectively investigate VXF student perception of the importance of Christianity to their self-identity, each student was asked how Christianity factors into that self-identity. This question resulted in 92.00% (23 students) responding that Christianity is very-important or important to their self-identity, while 8.00% (2 students) responded that Christianity was somewhat important.

### *Open to Sharing the Gospel*

The group as a whole was asked their view of the importance of sharing the gospel to other students on campus. The results were dispersed rather evenly from moderate importance to very important. Students who rated this as very important was at 24.00% , important at 40.00%, moderately important at 32.00%, and of minor importance at 4.00%.

### *Committed to the Scriptures*

In measuring the students' commitment to the scriptures, they were asked to measure the importance of the role the Scriptures hold in the life of VXF. In responding to this question, 92.00% (23 Students) said the scriptures were very important or important, while 8.00% (2 students) said the scriptures were somewhat important in the life of VXF.

### *Support of Local Churches/Pastors*

To measure the student's opinion on this factor, the survey used two questions, one on the local church, and one on local pastors. On the question of the support of local churches, 56.00% of students saw them as very important in the life of VXF, while 36.00% saw them as important. Thus 92.00% agreed that local churches were either important or very important. Their opinion of local church pastors were similar, with 88% agreeing that local church pastors were important or very important to the life of VXF.

### *Sense of Community within VXF*

The seventh and final factor taken into consideration for RQ3, is on the students' opinion of the importance of a strong sense of community within VXF. To discover the degree of agreement or disagreement with this factor, the survey asked the students to measure the importance of building relationships within the community. This measure was used because the building of relationships is necessary for community (Thoennes, 2008). In response to this question, 96.00%

of students believed this was very important or important to them, while only 4.00% or 1 person believed it was of minor importance.

The above discussions describe the students' opinions regarding the factors present in VXF for its growth and vitality. Before finishing with RQ3, a helpful comparison of the factors determined by the qualitative interview and the quantitative survey based on percentages would be helpful to fully grasp the opinions of the student participants as compared to the leadership and faculty advisors.

<b>Factors for VXF health and vibrancy</b>	Percentage of Faculty and Leaders who identified this as a Factor during Interview	Percentage of Students who identified this as Important or Very Important
<b>Ethnic Diversity</b>	87.50 %	100.00%
<b>Student Leadership</b>	87.50%	88.00%
<b>Christianity Central to Personal Identity</b>	100.00%	92.00%
<b>Open to Sharing the Gospel</b>	75.00%	64.00%
<b>Committed to the Scriptures</b>	100.00%	92.00%
<b>Support of Local Churches/Pastors</b>	87.50%	88% (for Pastors) 92% (for local churches)
<b>Sense of Community and Belonging within VXF</b>	87.50%	96.00%

Table 4: Comparison between Faculty/Student Leaders and Student Participants of VXF

As Table 4 shows, there is a striking similarity between the responses of the faculty and student leaders, and the opinions of the student participants. Further study that contains more in-depth statistical analysis would be advantageous in determining the amount of correlation between the data sets. At this juncture, the surface research demonstrates a closeness in the responses between the two groups. (Given the small data set of the interviewed group, a full analysis of a correlation coefficient was not in the best interest of this particular research project. I am not seeking a statistical significance, and as Salkind notes “the eyeball method is perfectly acceptable for a quick assessment of the strength of the relationship between variables” [Salkind, 2008, p.88].)

RQ4: If VXF is a fruitful and growing ministry, in what ways are the perceived factors actually present in the ministry?

This final RQ is focused on the student’s actual participation and involvement in the seven factors discussed through the interviews: ethnic diversity, student leadership, Christian identity, sharing the gospel, commitment to the Scriptures, support of local churches/pastors, and a strong sense of community within VXF. The information for RQ4 came from the quantitative survey portion, in which specific questions were asked to the students about their involvement in activities that involved these factors. Admittedly, a complete and in-depth study of each student’s specific involvement in each factor is beyond the scope of this research, and a quantitative analysis of the students ‘valuing’ of each factor by participation is rather difficult to achieve. However, the answers the students gave do shed some light on the presence of these perceived factors in relationship to the growth and vitality within VXF.

### *Ethnic Diversity*

Thus far, it has been seen that ethnic diversity is highly valued by the VXF (100.00% of students and 87.50% of leaders saw it as a factor for the thriving of the ministry). The students surveyed do view themselves as an ethnically diverse ministry. In total, 21 students (84.00%) of the students agree that they are very ethnically diverse within VXF.

However, when asked about how they viewed the diversity of the ministry when compared to the campus as whole, they saw themselves in a different light. That is, they didn’t believe they were particularly diverse when compared to their overall campus environment.

<b>Ethnic Diversity</b>	Less	Equally	More
<b>30. I consider VXF to be _____ ethnically diverse in comparison to the overall Campus</b>	5 20.00%	14 56.00%	6 24.00%

Table 5: Perception of Ethnic Diversity compared to the Campus as a whole.

Yet, when the actual data of the ethnic breakdown of the participants of VXF and the College as a whole are compared, a different result is shown:

<b>Ethnic Diversity Breakdown, VC vs. VXF</b>	Vassar College Student Population	VXF
<b>Asian &amp; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</b>	9 %	40 %
<b>Black/African American</b>	6 %	32%
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	11 %	4%
<b>Native American</b>	0 %	0%
<b>White</b>	62 %	24%
<b>Chose not to disclose</b>	12 %	0%

Table 6: Ethnic Breakdown of Vassar College vs. VXF (Forbes, Vassar College Profile, 2015)

While VXF participants may not see themselves as particularly diverse as compared to the college as a whole, the numbers themselves show that they are more ethnically diverse and balanced than the college as a whole.

*Student Leadership*

The students in VXF see student leadership as important (88%); however, of the 51 students involved in VXF, there are only 5 student leaders at the present time. That comes to 9.80% of those involved are in leadership. The class breakdown of those in leadership shows a coming vacancy in leaders as two of the leaders are seniors and will graduate in May, while 3 of the leaders are sophomores.

### *Christian Identity*

Students were asked about how their Christianity factored into their identity on campus. Campus identity is important for how a student views herself among their peer group and how vested in the faith a student is within their college community (Mankowski and Thomas, 2000). In other words, the way this survey measured the student's value of their Christian identity was to have them view themselves through their college community as a whole and give a measure of how their Christianity factors into their life within Vassar College.

This question resulted in the same results as their general self-identity, with 92.00% agreeing that Christianity is very important or important to their identity within the College and 8.00% saying Christianity is somewhat important.

### *Sharing the Gospel*

In RQ3, it was seen that sharing the gospel was the least important of the factors. In survey, the students were also asked to share how active they were in sharing their faith with others. The results of the survey showed that 32.00% of the students considered themselves as frequent or very active in their sharing the gospel, while 64% shared the gospel sometimes or infrequently, and 4.00% (one student) reported never sharing the gospel.

### *Commitment to the Scriptures*

To measure the students' personal commitment to the Scriptures, they were asked about their personal commitment to Bible reading and attendance in Bible Study. This is obviously only two measures of a student's commitment to the Scriptures, but it is a helpful view into their personal practices.

In self-reporting their Bible reading habits, 44.00% or 11 of the 25 students said they read their Bibles frequently or very frequently, while 56% or 14 of the 25 student responded that they read their Bibles sometimes or infrequently.

Secondly, the students' involvement in Bible study showed that 64% or 16 of the 25 students attended a Bible study three or more times a month during the school year. Three students or 12.00% attended Bible study one or two times a month, and six students or 24% never attend Bible study during the school year.

### *Support of Local Churches/Pastors*

The involvement in this factor of vibrancy was measured not by how many churches were active in supporting the ministry (there are three churches that are heavily involved and two churches who are less involved). Instead, the research looked at the involvement of students in local churches. A student's involvement in a local church demonstrates the student's value of that local church, as Jesus notes in Matthew 6:21: "For where your treasure is, there your

heart will be also” (HCSB). A student who invests their time in participating in a local church demonstrates that they value that church.

In asking their attendance in local churches, 88.00% attend a local church three or more times a month. While 8.00% attend twice month, and 4.00% never attend church while at school. That 96.00% of VXF students are involved in a local church at least twice a month demonstrates their value of the local churches.

#### *Sense of Community within VXF*

Measuring the students’ involvement in the VXF community was done by asking them to describe their participation in the ministry. Their involvement demonstrates their desire for a strong sense of community (Thoennes, 2008). In their self-reporting, 88.00% or 22 of the 25 students said they were either very frequently or frequently involved in VXF. One student each, or 4.00% reported being involved sometimes, infrequently, or never.

To answer RQ4, students were actively engaging in that which they believed to be important to VXF health. That is, they value diversity, and they are more diverse than the campus. They value making Christianity central to their identity and those involved believe that it is. Similar statements can be made with all seven of the factors.

### **Conclusion and Application**

This research has examined, through a mixed-method process, perceived factors relating to the health and growth of Vassar Christian Fellowship at Vassar College. These seven factors (ethnic diversity, student leadership, Christian identity, sharing the gospel, commitment to the scriptures, local church support, and a strong sense of community) not only are seen as important, but students are actively participating and engaging in these factors. As a conclusion and application, the focus will now turn to a theological evaluation of the seven factors as well as applications for campus ministries and local churches.

#### *Theological Evaluation of the 7 Factors for a Vibrant College Ministry at VC*

As an evangelical group, VXF holds to a high-view of the Scriptures and their importance in the Christian life and ministry. The Scriptures are “authoritative for Christian faith and practice” (Maddix, 2010, p.255) and as such, these seven factors should be evaluated to determine if they line up with said Scriptures.

The first factor is ethnic diversity. The gospel is a call to reconciliation, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:18. This is a reconciliation between us and God through Jesus Christ, and it is a reconciliation to one another. As Paul again makes clear in Colossian 3:11: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free; but Christ is all and in all”

(ESV). The gospel has brought together into one people, those from many different ethnoses. Jesus himself gives the command for the gospel to go to “all nations” in Matthew 28:19. As France notes Jesus presents himself as the King over heaven and earth, it is a “universal kingship” and “all the nations are included in its scope” (France, 2007, p.1113). Scripture calls for a multi-ethnic approach to ministry, because the kingdom is for all people who come by faith (France, p.319).

The development of leaders is an important scriptural call as well. The leadership examples of Moses, Nehemiah, and others demonstrates the importance of effective leadership. Paul commands Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (ESV). The concept of developing leaders is a crucial aspect of Christian ministry (Bredfeldt, 2006, p.130). A Christian ministry must constantly be developing new leadership, especially in a college environment.

The third factor is a strong sense of Christian identity. In Galatians 2:20 Paul tells the church, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (ESV), and in Philippians 1:21, we are reminded that “to live is Christ.” (ESV). The Christian is called to view oneself as ‘in Christ’ for her identity (Parrett and King, 2009, p.297).

The sharing of the gospel is the fourth factor, and this has a clear precedent for Christians to follow from Christ himself to his Great Commission, and the example of the Apostles and early church (France, p.1112-1113; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 13). This also ties in to the importance to the fifth factor, a commitment to the Scriptures. A commitment to the Scriptures is necessary, as texts such as 1 Timothy 4:13, 2 Timothy 3:15-4:2 demonstrate. Gregg Allison notes: “People cannot know about salvation in Christ Jesus unless Christians communicate the gospel, the Word of God, to them. It further means that Christians cannot sustain their walk with Christ and know the will of God so as to please him unless they read Scripture, study Scripture, and hear Scripture taught...as Jesus himself said, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ (Matthew 4:4)” (Allison and Anthony, 2008, p.93).

The sixth and seventh factors – the support of the local church, and the importance the strong sense of community - are related as well. Hebrews 10:25 as well as 1 Corinthians 3 point Christians towards involvement in the local church as well as a healthy community within that church. For VXF, the support the local church gives weekly through its ministries are vitally important for the student members, (Cawthon and Jones, p.169) and building a strong community within the campus ministry is theologically important as it builds their faith and fruitfulness (Thoenes, p.86).

### *Application to Campus Ministries*

Applying the factors discovered at VXF to campus ministry in general comes with an important delimitation; this research is on a specific ministry, in a specific location, at a specific time. The growth and vibrancy seen here can't necessarily be duplicated in other places by enacting these seven factors. However, given the theologically universal nature of the factors, they could be important in campus ministries in other areas.

One of the reasons it may be beneficial can be seen in the similarities between these factors and in the purpose statement of InterVarsity, which in part describes the goal of the ministry as creating: "ethnically diverse witnessing communities that are committed to scripture, prayer, spiritual formation, community, leadership development, evangelism" (Cawthon and Jones, p.169). Five of the seven factors found at VXF are explicitly mentioned in their purpose statement, and Christian identity can be seen as the goal of spiritual formation (Maddix, p.244). The only factor not mentioned is the support of the local church.

As campus ministries strive to thrive in an era of increasing difficulty, looking towards these factors could be a component in bringing faithfulness and fruitfulness. What is remarkable about the factors is how unremarkable they are. Campus ministries can begin to cultivate these within their own groups with very few resources required. They can also reach out to local churches and request support. There may be local churches who desire to have an impact on college campuses, but don't know where to start. By being willing to reach out to churches, campus groups can utilize their resources for the ministry on campus. VXF has three churches who support the group with Bible study aids, training for small group leaders, while the pastors of the churches volunteer to take turns teach at their large group gatherings. This equipping support is invaluable to VXF, and could benefit other groups on other campuses as well.

### *Application to Local Churches*

The connection to a local church is important for college students as it "a church setting with infants, children, youth, adults and seniors as a part of the faith community...allows the student to appreciate the diverse community while in college"(Cawthon and Jones, p.169). This may be underappreciated by many local churches and campus ministries, but "students benefit from forming relationships with other members of a congregation," in other words, it is spiritually healthy for college students to be plugged into a local church (Cawthon and Jones, p.169).

Given this importance, local churches must be willing to dive into campus ministry. Many churches may be located near university, college, or community college campuses and could get involved in this ministry. The churches are able to

serve this school, and they are able to benefit as well. Because of the local churches partnership with VXF, 96.00% of the students are involved in local churches. This includes playing in praise bands, teaching children and youth, and serving in outreach ministries.

For a church to get involved, they simply need a willingness to partner with a campus ministry and have a desire to see not their church kingdom grow, but to see the kingdom itself grow. Because while this ministry may have a financial cost, the opportunity to invest in college students is incredible. One church particular chooses to view the ministry like missionary training. They have the opportunity to pour into students for four years, and sending them out into the world to be a blessing to community and churches they end up in after graduation. In that way, they are able to have a global impact through this ministry.

In today's difficult college culture, a thriving ministry is still possible. Through this case study on VXF, this paper has described the seven factors which have played a part in the vibrancy of this ministry. Further research could be done in this area to help equip college ministries which face increasing challenges in the years to come.

## **Appendix A**

### **Semi-Structured Interview**

#### **Questions for VC VXF Student Leadership and Faculty Advisors/Encouragers**

1 How long have you been associated with VXF?

2 How would you describe your role within/relationship with VXF?

3 How do you see the health of VXF? Do you believe the groups is growing/stagnate/shrinking?

4a (If they answer the group is healthy)

If the group is healthy, what do you attribute to the health of VXF? What are some factors?

4b(If they answer the group is unhealthy or not sure)

If the group is not as healthy as you think, what do you attribute to that? What are some factors?

5 Your group has no full-time staffer, what impact does that have on the group?



How long have you been involved with VXF?  
A Less than 1 year    B 1 -2 years    C 3+ years

Christian Background

What is your Ethnicity? (categories come from the National Center for Educational Statistics/Federal Government)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White

5 Are you a Christian? (If B or C, Skip down to #7)  
A Yes            B No            C Not Sure

6 If you answered A to #3, how long have you been a Christian?  
A Less than 1 year    B 1 to 2 years    C 3 to 5 years    D 5 + years

7 Were you a Christian before you came to Vassar or were involved in VXF?  
A Yes    B No

8 Would you consider your family (parents or guardians) to be Christians?  
A Yes    B No

9 Were you active in church or school ministries in High School (Bible Clubs, FCA, Youth Groups, etc.)  
A Yes    B No

Current Christian Participation

10 How Active would you rate your participation in VXF?  
Never            Infrequent            Sometimes            Frequent  
Very Involved

11 How Active would your rate your personal Bible Reading life? I read my Bible...  
Never            Infrequently            Sometimes            Frequently  
Very Frequently

12 How Often do you Attend a local church worship service during the school year?

Never            1x a Month            2x a Month            3x a Month    4+x a Month

13 How Active would you say you are in your local church?

Never            Infrequently            Sometimes            Frequently    Very Active

14 How Active would you rate your involvement in sharing your faith with others?

Never            Infrequently            Sometimes            Frequently Active  
Very Active

15 How would you rate the Importance of the Scripture in the life of VXF?

Not at All      of Minor Important      Somewhat Important      Important      Very Important

16. How would you Rate the sense of Community within VXF?

Nonexistent            Weak            Somewhat Strong            Strong  
Very Strong

17. How does Christianity factor into your self-identity?

Not at all      of Minor Importance      Moderately Important      Important      Very Important

18. How would you rate the importance of student leadership within VXF?

Not Important      of Minor Importance      Moderately Important            Important  
Very Important

19 How would you rate the importance of the local church in your life?

Not Important      of Minor Importance      Moderately Important            Important  
Very Important

20 How would you rate the importance of support of local churches in the life of VXF?

Not Important      of Minor Importance      Moderately Important            Important  
Very Important

21. How would you rate the importance of the support of local pastors in the life of VXF?

Not Important of Minor Importance Moderately Important Important  
Very Important

22. How would you rate the importance of your support and involvement in local churches?

Not Important of Minor Importance Moderately Important Important  
Very Important

23. How important is having a Christian Faculty member here at VC to your walk as a Christian?

Not Important of Minor Importance Moderately Important Important  
Very Important

24. How does your Christianity factor into your place/identity within Vassar College?

Does not factor A Minor Factor Somewhat Factors An  
Important Factor A major factor

25. How do you feel about sharing your faith to other students?

Not Important of Minor Importance Moderately Important Important  
Very Important

26. When it comes to building relationships within the Christian community on campus, it is \_\_\_\_\_ to me.

Not Important of Minor Importance Moderately Important Important  
Very Important

27. Growing in my faith while in college is \_\_\_\_\_ to me.

Not Important of Minor Importance Moderately Important Important  
Very Important

28. I consider ethnic diversity to be \_\_\_\_\_ at VXF.

Not Important of Minor Importance Moderately Important Important  
Very Important

29. I consider VXF to be \_\_\_\_\_ ethnically diverse.

Less Equally More

30. I consider VXF to be \_\_\_\_\_ ethnically diverse in comparison to the overall Campus.

Less                      Equally                      More

31. I consider authenticity within VXF to be \_\_\_\_\_ to my Christian growth

Not Important    of Minor Importance    Moderately Important                      Important  
Very Important

32 How Often do you Attend a local church small group during the school year?

Never                      1x a Month                      2x a Month                      3x a Month                      4+x a  
Month

33 How Often do you Attend a VXF small group during the school year?

Never                      1x a Month                      2x a Month                      3x a Month                      4+x a  
Month

Mentoring34. I am currently mentored by a Local Pastor

A Yes                      B No

35 I am currently being mentored by a faculty member

A Yes                      B No

36 I have in the past, while at Vassar, been mentored by a faculty member or local pastor.

A Yes                      B No

35b. If Yes, circle one:

Pastor/church leader    Faculty Member                      Both

### Appendix C

InterVarsity Purpose Statement: “An ethnically diverse witnessing community that is committed to scripture, prayer, spiritual formation, community, leadership development, and evangelism.” See Tony Cawthon and Camilla Jones, “A Description of Traditional and Contemporary Campus Ministries” *The College of Student Affairs Journal*. 23, no.2 (Spring 2004), p.167 for more on this statement.

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