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# Perceptions of Spiritual Formation Among Nontraditional Seminary Students

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Higher education, while never a completely stagnant field, is experiencing what has been called a 'flurry' of changes in recent years, driven mainly by technology.[1]  The technology of inexpensive computers, high speed internet, and high quality multimedia educational delivery systems have allowed for increased flexibility in higher education so that students  can easily take courses and earn degrees  from colleges and universities that are in different cities, states, or even countries through means of nontraditional education.[2]  As one writer has noted, we are in the midst of a "distance-education boom" that is taking place, with the main reason being "a convergence of AV hardware, networking, and collaboration software technologies that collectively enable teachers to deliver good interactive online education." Along with online education, another form of nontraditional education has grown in popularity, that being hybrid education.[4]

Both online and hybrid forms of nontraditional education owe their existence to modern technological advancements.

Theological seminaries are also experiencing effects from the 'boom' of distance education. Nontraditional education courses have become increasingly available in seminaries throughout the country. Though there are challenges with theological institutions of higher learning using nontraditional education, more schools are starting to see the potential it offers.[5] Yet, this potential is tempered by the reluctance of some institutions The reluctance stems from a variety of issues.

A major issue that causes reluctance among theological schools is the fear of "emphasizing convenience over quality."[6] This fear of being promotionally driven has given rise to much of the criticism among schools that are weighing distance education options.[7] A second issue that is raised among schools considering, or that are engaged in distance education, is that there can be too great a focus or "undue emphasis" on the delivery system or technology and too little focus on the contribution a learned faculty member can bring or on the importance of involving the student adequately through the learning experience.[8] While these first two issues can be true of any higher learning a final issue that comes with distance education particularly deals with theological education. Hines, et. al. notes that theological education requires "mutual nourishment of faith and intellect."[9] Theological seminaries exist for more than academic knowledge, they must involve spiritual formation. Spiritual formation has been and is a critical component of Christian higher education, a philosophy that is seen in the accreditation standards by both the Association of Biblical Higher Education and the Association of Theological Education.[10] A seminary that uses nontraditional education courses is charged with the responsibility of taking this into account. Thus, they have to approach distance education with a dual purpose of academic excellence and spiritual growth, both of which ultimately are to aid the local church. Nontraditional theological education "must incorporate expectations of ministry to enhance the study of theology."[11] While these challenges exist, seminaries are nonetheless utilizing nontraditional education.

The Association of Theological

Schools ruled in 2012 that seminaries may offer accredited Master of Divinity degrees through nontraditional means. According to the Educational and Degree program standards, seminaries may offer courses or whole degrees through extension centers[12], "exclusively online"[13], or through "a blend of intensive classroom and online instruction," which is also known as hybrid education.[14] Schools now have the freedom to offer more accredited masters level degree programs to students seeking ministry preparation through nontraditional means.

This research was conducted with the purpose of studying students who choose to attend seminary through a nontraditional means of online, hybrid, and extension centers. Specifically, exploring the relationship between mentoring and the spiritual formation practices of seminary students taking part in nontraditional theological education.

The students researched for this article included 1380 students from three evangelical seminaries. Each student was enrolled in master's level programs and attend class through nontraditional means of online, hybrid, and or extension centers. The participating students were surveyed on their mentor and spiritual formation practices while students at seminary.

## MENTORING AND MINISTRY PREPARATION

The concept of mentoring transcends time. While the modern idea of mentoring dates back to Homer's Odyssey[15], the practice develops through-out the pages of Scripture. From Moses and Joshua, Ruth and Naomi, Paul and Timothy, mentoring is a biblical practice and was the "way of life in Bible times."[16]

In our modern world, the literature on the subject of mentoring has been somewhat staggering over recent decades, as an extensive amount of scholarship developed in this historic discipline.[17] The result of this emphasis is that the value of mentoring has been recognized in many fields and industries, and "cuts across all academic disciplines, professions, and contexts."[18] The value is seen through positive impacts in areas of career growth, training, development, and retention.[19]

Mentoring has also, over the past decade, been studied in depth as it relates to theological education.[20] These studies have shown that there is value in a mentor relationship

for seminary students, as it aids in "forming and transforming the character, values, abilities, and thoughts" of seminary students.[21] Additionally, these relationships aid in forming students into ministers[22], and they have a valuable impact on the development of students while they are in school.[23]  Mentoring that occurs while in seminary, research has shown, also can have a positive impact on students once they graduate and begin serving in the ministry field.[24]  Pyeatt has found that as a student is more thoroughly mentored, his likelihood of retention in the ministry is increased.[25]  Yet, there has been little to no research among the importance of mentoring in relation to the spiritual formation practices among nontraditional seminary students.

## SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND MINISTRY PREPARATION

There have been a plethora of evangelical definitions given for spiritual formation. Many theologians and Christian educators have suggested definitions to help understand the concept.[26]  Dallas Willard defines spiritual formation as the "Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being

of Christ himself."[27]  Stranger defined spiritual formation as the "intentional and systematic process of growing into the image of Christ through obedience to the Scriptures by the power of the Holy Spirit in our total personality."[28]  Davis argues that spiritual formation is essentially made up of three parts or elements. Spiritual formation is first, a process.[29]  He writes: "attaining complete spiritual maturity is a lifelong process".[30] Secondly, it is God working in a believer as an "act of grace in the believer's life."[31]  Thirdly, it is human effort working with the Holy Spirit or "cooperation with the Holy Spirit."[32]  To synthesize Davis, spiritual formation is a process to become spiritually mature that involves God working in a believer and man cooperating with God.

This research, in studying evangelical seminaries, sought to use a working definition that is theologically inline with the biblically faithful view-point of the schools that were involved. It also sought to have a definition that takes into consideration the explanation of spiritual formation given in the latest ATS General Institutional Standards. These standards describe spiritual formation as a student's "growth in personal faith, emotional maturity,

moral integrity, and public witness."[33] Taking both of these concerns, as well as the literature on the subject, into consideration, this article defines spiritual formation using Whitney, as "the biblical process of being conformed inwardly and outwardly to the character of Christ."[34] Whitney's definition aptly describes spiritual formation as being a process that has a goal of Christian's whole being reflecting Christ.

Theological seminaries themselves have a vested interest in the spiritual formation of their students. Spiritual formation has long been seen as a vital aspect of Christian Higher Education.[35] From the beginning of higher education in the United States, a student's spiritual formation has been crucial. Major institutions such as Yale were founded with a goal of having every student to "know God in Jesus Christ and answerably lead a Godly, sober life."[36] Columbia, likewise was formed so that students would "know God in Jesus Christ and to love and serve him in all sobriety, godliness, and righteousness of life with a perfect heart and useful knowledge."[37] In modern Christian Higher Education there is a specific emphasis on "the importance of developing students spiritually as a part of their preparation for life after college."[38]

Spiritual formation is a vital component of accredited theological education. ATS requires that in basic graduate degrees that are geared towards ministerial leadership (M.Div., and M.A.) the program must contain a spiritual formation component. Specifically, the requirement states that "the learning outcomes shall encompass the instructional areas of religious heritage, cultural context, personal and spiritual formation, and capacity for ministerial and public leadership."[39]

Theological Seminaries themselves also see this as a component of their roles in training pastors. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, for instance, lists Spiritual Formation as one of their Core Competencies.[40] Other evangelical seminaries (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, etc.) have a similar emphasis of the importance of spiritual formation among their students.[41] Spiritual formation is seen as a vital component to the mission of seminaries as they train pastors due to the fact that it is "requisite to a life of pastoral leadership."[42]

### SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION PRACTICES

While one cannot fully measure a student's spiritual formation

from the outside, research on this topic has focused on a student's self-perceived formation through participation in spiritual disciplines.[43] These studies have examined the participant's self-perception of spiritual formation[44] along with the subject's participation in certain spiritual disciplines or practices.[45] The focus on specific practices or spiritual disciplines are used in these studies to "measure a person's involvement" in activities that "lead to desirable change" and "spiritual development."[46] Measuring spiritual disciples is an effective means because "spiritual disciplines are a catalyst for spiritual formation."[47] Not only are they a catalyst for spiritual formation, but they "reveal a believers commitment to spiritual growth."[48] It is in light of this research background, this article focuses on student participation in spiritual formation practices or spiritual disciplines.

Whitney describes spiritual disciplines as "those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth."[49] He goes on to describe spiritual disciplines as being a "catalyst," a "channel," and a "means," of spiritual growth and formation.[50] Willard argues that practicing the spiritual disciplines is essential to a person's spiritual

formation. He argues that spiritual disciplines are an "absolute necessity" if one is going to have a "full, grace-filled, Christ-like life."[51]

There have been many authors that have given lists of biblical spiritual disciplines.[52] These lists all seek to highlight biblical activities for the purpose of fostering spiritual formation. The disciplines are meant for use in spiritual formation, and are not an end in themselves.[53] As Dallas Willard writes: "the activities constituting the disciplines have no value in themselves. The aim and substance of spiritual life is not fasting, praying, hymn singing, frugal living, and so forth."[54] The spiritual disciplines can aid a Christian in the spiritual formation process. Thus, this article uses Whitney and Willard and offers the definition of spiritual formation practices as biblical activities and disciplines that are used for the purpose of spiritual growth and formation.

For this research, Thayer's list of 10 spiritual disciples was used, along with her Christian Spiritual Practices Profile. Thayer's 10 disciplines are Prayer, Confession, Evangelism, Worship, Bible Study, Fellowship, Stewardship, Service, Examen of Conscious, and Meditation.[55] Thayer then groups these 10 disciplines into four

spiritual discipline modes as seen in the chart below:

Table 1

CSPP MODES and Descriptions

| Spiritual Mode | Description | Spiritual Practice |
|---|---|---|
| Transcendent Scale | Growing through a relationship with God. This assesses a person's relationship with God. There are 16 questions for this scale, from 3 primary and 3 secondary spiritual practices. | Primary: Prayer Repentance Worship<br><br>Secondary: Service Stewardship Exanen of Conscience |
| Vision Scale | Growing through participation with the Word of God. This assesses a persons Involvement with the Bible. There are 12 questions for this scale, from 2 primary and 2 secondary spiritual practices. | Primary: Bible Reading Meditation<br><br>Secondary: Stewardship Woship |
| Reflection Scale | Growing through critical reflection. This assesses a person's participation in critical reflection of culture and one;s own life. There are 10 questions for this scale, from 1 primary and 2 secondary spiritual practices. | Primary: Examen of Conscious<br><br>Secondary: Bible Reading Stewardship |
| New Life Scale | Growing through relationships with others. This assesses a person's participations in relationships with others. There are 12 questions from this scale from 4 primary spiritul practices. | Primary: Evangelism Fellowship Service Stewardship<br><br>Secondary: None |

These disciplines were used to measure a student's involvement in spiritual formation practices and to determine what relationship, if any, is found between mentoring and involvement in these practices.

## RESEARCH PROCEDURES

In order to effectively investigate the research purpose, this study used a quantitative approach. Quantitative research was chosen for this project for a number of reasons, one of which is that much of the research in the field of mentoring is "qualitative as opposed to quantitative," especially in the "theological realm of mentoring."[56] The trouble of "finding quantitative data for supporting the use of mentoring relationships in developing church leaders" is a significant motivator to use that research design in this project.[57]

### Research Participants

The study surveyed students from three evangelical seminaries who were enrolled in master degree programs, and attended course through online, hybrid, and/or extension centers. The three schools that participated in the research were all located in the southeastern United States. All three schools are regionally accredited and two of the schools have ATS accreditation. The total nontraditional student population of the schools was 8875 at the time of the survey. Each of the three schools sent an email inviting their students to take part in this survey. If a student decided to participate, they went to the survey, which was hosted by Survey Monkey. Out of the 8875 students who were invited to participate, 1510 students logged into the survey site. Of the 1510 who logged in, 1380 students chose to continue past the informed consent page and actually take the survey.

The survey consisted of three parts, a demographic section, the Principles of Adult Mentoring Survey (PAMS), and the Christian Spiritual Practices Profile (CSPP). If a student reported having a mentor, he or she would complete all three parts, if the student did not have mentor, he or she would only complete the demographic section and the CSPP.

### Research Instrument

The PAMS was developed by Cohen to be a self-assessment instrument for mentees who were in a higher education environment.[58] The PAMS consisted of 55 Likert-type questions that sought to measure six functions of the mentoring relationship, these include: relationship emphasis,

informative emphasis, facilitative dimension, confrontive emphasis, mentor model, and student vision.[59] These six dimensions are formed by behaviors that Cohen describes as 'required' for a successful mentorship.[60] Each of these six dimensions is scored individually, and a final score assessing the overall effectiveness of the survey is then calculated. Each of the questions is given five choices for the student to select, and each of the choices are given a point value.

The answers that are available in the Likert format are: Not Effective, Less Effective, Effective, Very Effective, and Highly Effective. Each of these choices are then assigned a point value as follows Not Effective = 1 point, Less Effective =2 points, Effective = 3 points, Very Effective = 4 points, and Highly Effective = 5 points. Each of the points are then tallied from the overall survey and an overall score is given to measure the overall effectiveness of the mentor relationship.[61]

The PAMS scale has been tested by researchers for both reliability and consistency. Simmons notes that, "the reliability coefficient for the entire scale revealed an alpha coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of .9490."[62] Likewise, the individual emphasis' reliabilities are as follows: Relationship Emphasis - .77; Information Emphasis - .79; Facilitative Focus - .67; Confrontive focus - .81; Mentor Model - .78; Student Vision - .86.[63]

The CSPP, developed by Thayer (1996), this instrument studies a Christian's participation in the spiritual formation process through involvement in spiritual formation practices. It does not seek to determine a threshold whereas one becomes spiritually mature once they reach a certain score, but is built upon the notion that involvement in disciplines and spiritual formation practices can result in a crucial catalyst for spiritual growth and formation.[64] The CSPP examines if one is involved spiritual formation practices, which can lead to involvement in the spiritual formation process[65]. As Thayer herself notes, the CSPP is used to measure someone's self-reported "intensity" in the spiritual formation process, it "does not purport to assign a level of achievement or maturity."[66] The research that the CSPP is built on shows that involvement in the ten spiritual disciplines the more likely it is that spiritual formation is taking place.[67]

The CSPP takes spiritual disciplines and applies them to a

theory of spiritual development that is based on a person's learning – their grasping and transforming. The ten spiritual disciplines should lead to a person to experience desirable change, especially spiritual formation.[68] Thayer summarizes the CSPP as being "based on a theory of spiritual development that recognizes the redemptive work of God in every mode of spiritual development. The Holy Spirit is present in the process of each mode and can transform the person through the learning that occurs."[69]

Studying a student's participation in spiritual formation practices is an important indicator of a Christian's willingness and desire to grow spiritually.[70] Based on the literature, the study of spiritual formation practices is appropriate and helpful, as these are the God ordained means[71] by which "one engages God and others"[72], and are "indicators"[73] of one who is on a "journey of faith"[74] into "deeper transformation into Christlikeness."[75]

The CSPP is comprised of fifty Likert-type questions. The first section measures the frequency of involvement in ten spiritual disciplines. These disciplines are: prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of conscious, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship.

The Likert-type scale that is used is a six point scale that ranges has the following response: N = Never, VR = Very Rarely, R = Rarely, O = Occasionally, F = Frequently, VF = Very Frequently. Thayer then gave each selection a numerical value: N=0, VR=1, R=2, O=3, F=4, VF=5.[76]

Thayer places the ten spiritual disciplines into four spiritual dimensions that were developed using Kolb's experiential learning theory. Thayer defines these spiritual dimensions as spiritual modes or scales.[77] To determine a CSPP score the point values of each answer are added together. From this, each particular discipline can have an overall score and a mean score. The four scales can also have a total and mean score based on the totals of the disciplines within the scale.[78] To determine how much participation a student is engaged in, Thayer places the students into two groups based on their scores: strong intentional participation and weak intentional participation. For a student to have strong intentional participation their mean score for the discipline or the Scale is at 4.0 or higher; a weak intentional participation is a 3.99 or lower mean score.[79] A strong intentional participation shows the student is actively engaged in the spiritual

formation practice, while a weak intentional participation shows the student has weak intentional participation in the spiritual formation practice.

For the purposes of this research, the mean scores of each of the four scales, as well as the total overall score for the entire CSPP, are calculated and analyzed in the Research Questions. Also, the Research Questions in this article recognize this this is perceived involvement in spiritual formation practices, due to students anonymously self-reporting on their own perception of living out these practices and disciplines.

The CSPP has been found to have both high reliability and validity.[80] The high reliability of the CSPP comes from its internal consistency: the coefficient alphas for the four spiritual modes into which the ten disciplines fall range between .84 and .92. The Transcendent Scale has a coefficient alpha of .92, the Vision Scale has a coefficient alpha of .89, the Reflection Scale has a coefficient alpha of .84, and the New Life Scale has a coefficient alpha of .90.[81]

The survey was open for students to participate for a total of eight weeks from the day the students were invited by their respective schools to take the survey. The first survey was taken on May 22, 2013. The survey was closed eight weeks later on July 17, 2013. The data analysis of the survey responses was done using SPSS statistical software.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to guide the research purpose, this article will briefly describe the demographics, then focus on four research questions that the author developed for the study. The four questions are:

1. What portion of students report a mentoring relationship as a part of his or her ministerial training?

2. What, if any, is the relationship between mentoring and each of the individual types of nontraditional education?

3. What, if any, is the relationship between involvement in spiritual formation practices and each of the individual types of nontraditional education?

4. What, if any, is the relationship between mentoring and involvement spiritual formation practices?

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following analyses the results from the 1380 nontraditional seminary students who took part in this research. The research findings will discuss the demographic data which includes age, years a Christian, and the student populations involvement in nontraditional theological education. After the

demographic information, this section seeks to answer the 4 RQs that were raised by the research problem.

## Demographics

There are three pieces of demographic information that came out of the study that were of note. These were the age of the students, the length of time they self-identified as a Christian, and their specific involvement in nontraditional education.

In the age range of the students who attend seminary through nontraditional means and participated in this survey, the largest group of students were aged 25 to 35, making up 32.17% of the survey takers. This was followed by, in order, students aged 46 to 55 at 25.43%, then students aged 36 to 45 at 24.57%, then students aged 55+ at 14.42%, and finally students aged 18 to 24 at 3.43%.

Students were also asked how long they have been a Christian. A large majority, 84.67%, of the students self-identified as being a Christian for more than 10 years. This is followed by 12.34% of students who self-identified as being a Christian for 5 to 10 years. Students who self-identified as being a Christian for 3 to 4 years made up 1.97% of the population, and students who self-identified as being a Christian 1 to 2 years and less than 1 year made

up .80% and .22% of the survey population, respectively.

The final demographic statistic is concerned with the student's participation in nontraditional education. This particular demographic examined the particular populations of students who participated in each of the individual types of nontraditional education (online, hybrid, and extension center), and how many students utilized more than one type of nontraditional education.

Of the students who participated in the study, 1,310 students took courses online, 157 students took courses through a hybrid model, and 83 students took courses through an extension center. These numbers do add up to more than the 1,380 survey takers, and is due to the fact that students took courses through multiple platforms. However, as the students answered this question dealing with the types of nontraditional education they were involved in, three students quit the survey, bringing the total survey takers to N=1,377. The rest of the Tables for the demographic section will reflect the new N =1,377 number. Using cross tabulation, the following Tables 2 to 6 below give detailed information into the participation into various learning delivery systems.

Table 2
Participation in Online Courses

| Participation in Online Courses | Number | Percentage Total (rounded to the nearest .01) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 1310 | 95.13 |
| No | 67 | 4.87 |
| Total | 1377 | 100 |

Table 3
Participation in Hybrid Courses

| Participation in Hybrid Courses | Number | Percentage Total (rounded to the nearest .01) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 157 | 11.40 |
| No | 1213 | 88.60 |
| Total | 1377 | 100 |

Table 4
Participation in Extension Center Courses

| Participation in Extension Center Courses | Number | Percentage Total (rounded to the nearest .01) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 83 | 6.03 |
| No | 1291 | 93.97 |
| Total | 1377 | 100 |

Table 5

Participation in only one form of nontraditional education

| Students who Participation in Only 1 nontraditional education platforms | Number | Percentage based on N=1377 (rounded to the nearest .01) |
|---|---|---|
| Online Only | 1194 | 86.71 |
| Extension Center Only | 18 | 1.31 |
| Hybrid Only | 35 | 2.54 |
| Total Students who only use 1 plateform | 1247 | 90.56 |

Table 6

Participation in multiple forms of nontraditional education

| Students who Participation in multiple nontraditional education platforms | Number | Percentage based on N=1377 (rounded to the nearest .01) |
|---|---|---|
| Online and hybrid Only | 65 | 4.72 |
| Online and Extension Center Only | 8 | 0.58 |
| Hybrid and extension center Only | 14 | 1.02 |
| Online, Hybrid and Extension center | 43 | 3.12 |
| Total Students who only use 1 plateform | 130 | 9.44 |

The above tables give information as to student involvement in the three forms of nontraditional education (online, hybrid, and extension center). Of the 1,377 students who responded, 90.56% or 1,247 students used only 1 platform for their nontraditional theological education, compared with 9.44% or 130 students who used multiple platforms.

In detailing the students who used one platform 1,194 of the total 1,377 students (86.71%) used only online classes as their sole delivery system. Likewise, 35 of the 1,377 students (2.54%) used only the hybrid delivery system, and 18 of the 1377 (1.31%) used only extension centers.

Among the students who used

multiple forms of nontraditional education, there were four combinations possible: online and hybrid only, online and extension center only, extension center and hybrid only, and all three forms of nontraditional education. For online and hybrid courses, 65 students (4.72%) reported participating in these platforms. Eight students (0.58%) used online and extension center only, while 14 students (1.02%) reported using hybrid and extension center classes only. There were 43 students (3.12%), of the total population who reported using all three of the types of nontraditional means for their theological education. Now, the focus of the article will shift to answering the research questions raised.

## Research Questions

Research Question 1: What portion of students report a mentoring relationship as a part of his or her ministerial training?

To answer RQ1, the author analyzed student responses to demographic question 11 of the survey, which asked, "Do you currently have, or have you had, a mentor while enrolled in seminary?" In response to this question, 1377 of the 1380 answered the question, with 571 or 41.68% of the students saying they did or do have a mentor while enrolled in seminary, while 799 or 58.32% of the students said they did not have or do not have a mentor as a seminary student (see Table below).

Table 7

Question: "Do you have , or have you had a mentor while enrolled in seminary?"

| I have or have had a mentor while enrolled in seminary | Number | Percentage Total (rounded to the nearest .01) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 578 | 41.98 |
| No | 799 | 58.02 |
| Total | 1377 | 100 |

Research Question 2: What, if any, is the relationship between mentoring and each of the individual types of nontraditional education?

This question sought to determine what, if any, relationship existed between mentoring and the student's involvement in specific types of nontra-ditional education. In other words, did the way a student attended seminary have any relationship to their involvement in mentoring?

In order to effectively answer this question, two steps were taken. First, each student was grouped into the specific combination by which they

reported taking nontraditional classes. This led to seven combinations by which a student could take a class (see Table 8 below). Then, the student's answers to both question 11 from the demographic section of the survey and their overall scores on the PAMS were analyzed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference among the various combinations of nontraditional education.

Table 8
Mentoring Involvement per each nontraditional possibility

| Do you currently have or have you had, a mentor while enrolled in seminary | All Types | Online Only | Online and Hybrid | Online and Extension Center | Hybrid Only | Hybrid and Extension Center | Extension Center Only | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 21 | 482 | 38 | 4 | 16 | 6 | 11 | 578 |
| No | 22 | 712 | 27 | 4 | 19 | 8 | 7 | 799 |
| Total | 43 | 1194 | 65 | 8 | 35 | 14 | 18 | 1377 |

Given the information in Table 31, a Chi-Square was performed on the data to determine if there is any statistical significance between the seven different nontraditional scenarios and their involvement in mentoring. The results of the Chi-Square showed that the relationship was not statistically significant, $x2$ (6,N=1377) = 12.47, p=.052, with the Critical Value was below the necessary 12.59 and the p value is above .05. Thus, to answer RQ2, there is no statistical difference between the type of nontraditional education a student is involved in and their involvement in mentoring while in seminary.

Table 9
Chi-Square for All Nontraditional Possibilities

|  | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 12.474[a] | 6 | .052 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 12.294 | 6 | .056 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 3.617 | 1 | .057 |
| N of Valid Cases | 1377 |  |  |

Secondly, mean scores were calculated, and an ANOVA was performed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the seven groups. The mean PAMS scores of the students and the categories they fell into are as follow: students who took all three types of nontraditional education had a mean PAMS Score of 208.83, which is in the Very Effective category. Students who used Online Only had a mean score of 197.22, a score that is in the Effective category. For students who used a combination of Online and Hybrid, their mean score was 189.86, a score in the Less Effective category. Students who used a combination of Online and Extension Center had a mean score of 198.50, a score that places that groups mean score in the Effective category. The students who attended seminary through Hybrid courses only had mean PAMS score of 192.80, which is in the Less Effective category. For students who attended through a combination of Hybrid and Extension Centers, their mean PAMS score was 195.00, a mean score that fall into the Effective category. Students who used only Extension Centers had a mean score of 162.67, a mean score that places them in the Not Effective category. The ANOVA test to compare the means of these scores showed no statistically significant difference, $F(6,482) = .925$, p=.477. This result shows that while the scores may have a wide range, there is no statistically significant difference between the seven groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Table 10
Mean Scores of PAMS by Nontraditional Delivery System

| Type of Delivery System | Mean Score of PAMS | N | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| All Types | 208.8333 | 18 | 34.89522 |
| Online Only | 197.2153 | 418 | 44.79135 |
| Online and Hybrid | 189.8571 | 21 | 40.67836 |
| Online and Extension Center | 198.5000 | 4 | 49.08836 |
| Hybrid Only | 192.8000 | 10 | 38.49618 |
| Hybrid and Extension Center | 195.0000 | 6 | 33.24455 |
| Extension Center Only | 162.6667 | 6 | 56.65216 |
| Total | 196.7909 | 483 | 44.24141 |

Table 11
ANOVA of Mean Scores of PAMS by Nontraditional Delivery System

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 10872.253 | 6 | 1812.042 | .925 | .477 |
| Within Groups | 932547.627 | 476 | 1959.134 | | |
| Total | 943419.880 | 482 | | | |

In conclusion to RQ2, among the students who attend seminary through the various nontraditional delivery systems, there is no statistically significant difference among the groups in relation to either being mentored nor the self-perceived quality of the mentorship through scoring of the PAMS.

Research Question 3: What if any, is the relationship between involvement in spiritual formation practices and each of the individual types of nontraditional education? In response to RQ3, the researcher used student responses to the CSPP portion of the survey and analyzed them based on their participation

in nontraditional education. The CSPP results in four Spiritual Modes, with each mode having a mean score. The Spiritual Modes are: Transcendent Scale, Vision Scale, Reflection Scale, and New Life Scale. The descriptions of these scales can be found up in Table 1. For RQ3, the mean scores for the 4 Scales will be analyzed among the different nontraditional scenarios, as well as the mean overall scores of the CSPP.

The Total Average Score of the CSPP ANOVA shows no statistical difference between involvement in the individual types of nontraditional education and reported involvement in spiritual formation practices, $F(6,1222) = .365$, $p=.901$. For the individual scales of the CSPP, there was no significant difference found in the Reflection Scale, $F(6,1222) = .366$, $p=.882$; the Vision Scale, $F(6,1222) = .296$, $p = .952$; and in the New Life Scale, $F96,1222) = 1.1213$, $p = .297$. However, the ANOVA revealed that in the Transcendent Scale, there was a significant difference, $F(6,1222) = 2.250$, $p= .036$. This data indicates that among the scales and total average score, only the Transcendent Scale contains a statistically significant difference, with a p value of below the .05 level necessary for statistical significance at a 95% confidence interval.

A Bonferroni post-hoc was performed for the significant difference in the Transcendent Scale and showed the significance is located between the online-only (M=4.14, SD=1.78) and Online and Hybrid groups of students (M=4.064, SD=1.73), with the significance of this pair being, p=.029. Thus, the students who. took online-only classes had a statistically significantly higher score on the Transcendent Scale than those who took a combination of hybrid and online courses,  There rest of the pairings in the Bonferroni led to no statistical levels of significance. The tables below have the scores and ANOVA.

Table 12
Mean Scores by Spiritual Mode and Specific Type of Nontraditional
Educational Participation.

| Type of Delivery System | Mean Score transcendent scale | Mean Score Reflection Scale | Mean Score Vision Scale | Mean Score New Life Scale | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ally Types | 4.094 - Strong | 4.402 - Strong | 3.961 - Weak | 3.397 - Weak | 34 |
| Online Only | 4.142 - Strong | 4.417 - Strong | 3.970 - Weak | 3.472 - Weak | 1072 |
| Online and Hybrid | 4.064 - Strong | 4.272 - Strong | 3.925 - Weak | 3.620 - Weak | 52 |
| Online and Extension Centers | 4.050 - Strong | 4.406 - Strong | 3.903 - Weak | 3.833 - Weak | 6 |
| Hybrid Only | 4.122 - Strong | 4.246 - Strong | 3.904 - Weak | 3.492 - Weak | 32 |
| Hybrid and Extension Center | 4.079 - Strong | 4.344 - Strong | 3.875 - Weak | 3.327 - Weak | 14 |
| Extension Center Only | 4.023 - Strong | 4.341 - Strong | 4.019 - Strong | 3.878 - Weak | 13 |
| Total | 4.134 - Strong | 4.402 - Strong | 3.965 - Weak | 3.481 - Weak | 1223 |

Note: Strong = Strong Intentional Participation; Weak = weak Intentional participation[82]

Table 13
ANOVA for Table 12

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Transcendent Scale | Between Groups | 2.403 | 6 | .401 | 2.250 | .036 |
| | Within Groups | 216.521 | 1216 | .178 | | |
| | Total | 218.924 | 1222 | | | |
| Reflection Scale | Between Groups | .650 | 6 | .108 | .396 | .882 |
| | Within Groups | 332.159 | 1216 | .273 | | |
| | Total | 332.809 | 1222 | | | |
| Vision Scale | Between Groups | .421 | 6 | .070 | .267 | .952 |
| | Within Groups | 320.250 | 1216 | .263 | | |
| | Total | 320.672 | 1222 | | | |
| New Life Scale | Between Groups | 4.439 | 6 | .740 | 1.213 | .297 |
| | Within Groups | 741.928 | 1216 | .610 | | |
| | Total | 746.367 | 1222 | | | |
| SF SAVG | Between Groups | .471 | 6 | .078 | .365 | .901 |
| | Within Groups | 261.015 | 1216 | .215 | | |
| | Total | 261.486 | 1222 | | | |

In conclusion to RQ3, there was no statistically significant difference between the combination of nontraditional delivery systems and spiritual formation practices among the total average score of the CSPP. In other words, there was not a relationship between involvement

in spiritual formation practices and the type of nontraditional theological education.

When the four scales are broken down individually, there was also no significant difference among the Vision, Reflection, or New Life scales. However, there was a statistically significant difference in the means found in the Transcendent Scale. This was located between online only and those who used a combination of online and hybrid courses. There was no relationship between type of nontraditional education and spiritual formation practices, except online only students scored statistically significantly higher than students who took a combination of online and hybrid course.

Research Question 4: What, if any, is the relationship between mentoring and involvement in spiritual formation practices?

The final RQ sought to determine if there was any relationship between mentorship and a student's involvement in spiritual formation practices. For this question, the students were not broken down into specific involvement in nontraditional education, but were analyzed by their involvement in a mentorship and their answers to the CSPP. The goal of this question was to determine if there was correlation between mentoring and involvement in spiritual formation practices among all nontraditional students.

To answer RQ4, a T-test was used to compare the mean spiritual formation practice scores of students who were mentored as compared to students who were not mentored in order to determine if there was a significant difference between the groups. Furthermore a Pearson's Correlation was also utilized to determine correlation between having a mentor and score on the CSPP.

Once the T-test was run, the information indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the CSPP Total Average Scores of students who had a mentor verses those who did not. The mean of the total average CSPP Score of students who did have a mentor was 4.07, while the mean score of those who did not have a mentor was 3.95 (See Table 14 Below). These scores indicate that the average mentored students score is in the Strong category of the CSPP and the averaged non-mentored student is in the Weak category of the CSPP. There is a statically significant higher CSPP score for students who were mentored (M=4.07, SD = .491) than students who were not mentored (M=3.95, SD = .439), $t(1221) = 4.501$, $p = .000$ (See Tables 14,15 below).

Table 14
CSPP Total Average Scores

| | Do you currently have, or have you had, a mentor while enrolled in seminary | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CSPP Total | Yes | 445 | 4.0749 - Strong | .49121 | .02329 |
| AVG | No | 778 | 3.9521 - Weak | .43949 | .01576 |

Table 15
T-Test Statistics for CSPP Total Average Scores for Table 14

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | T-test for Equality Means | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | T | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| SFS AVG | Equal variances assemed | .011 | .915 | 4.504 | 1221 | .000 |
| | Equal Variances not assumed | | | 4.370 | 842.728 | .000 |

Table 15 Cont'd
T-Test Statistics for CSPP Total Average Scores for Table 14 continued

| Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Lower | Upper |
| .12287 | .02728 | .06935 | .17639 |
| .12287 | .02812 | .06768 | .17805 |

Among the four scales of the CSPP, a T-Test was also done to determine if there was a statistically significant different between the mentored and non-mentored groups. The Reflection scale showed no statistical significance between the mentored group (M=4.15, SD = .613) and the non-mentored group (M=4.13, SD=.462), t(1221) = .680, p=.496. The Transcendent Scale also showed no statistical significance between the mentored group (M=4.42, SD=.433) and the non-mentored group (M=4.39, SD=.417), t(1221) = 1.319, p=.187.

The Vision Scale did have a statistically significant difference between students who were mentored (M=4.05, SD=.521) and non-mentored students (M=3.92, SD=.501), t(1221)=4.310, p=.000. The New Life Scale also had a statistically significant difference between students who were mentored (M=3.678, SD=.730) and non-mentored students (M=3.37, SD=.788), t(1221) = .018, p=.000. Below shows the means scores and t-tests of the four scales of the CSPP.

Table 16
Mean Scores of CSPP Scales Based on Involvement in Mentoring

|  | Do you currently have, or have you had, a mentor while enrolled in seminary? | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| RO | Yes | 445 | 4.1488 Strong | .61302 | .02906 |
|  | No | 778 | 4.1277 Stong | .46198 | .01656 |
| CE | Yes | 445 | 4.4242 Strong | .43312 | .02053 |
|  | No | 778 | 4.3910 Strong | .41732 | .01496 |
| AC | Yes | 445 | 4.0493 Strong | .52110 | .02470 |
|  | No | 778 | 3.9190 Weak | .50135 | .01797 |
| AE | Yes | 445 | 3.6775 Weak | .73033 | .03462 |
|  | No | 778 | 3.3706 Weak | .78833 | .02826 |

Table 17
T-Test for Mean Scores of the Phases of the CSPP based on
Mentor Involvement

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Reflection Scale | Equal Variances Assumed | 6.465 | .011 | .680 | 1221 | .496 |
| | Equal Variances Not Assumed | | | .631 | 734.996 | .528 |
| Transcendent Scale | Equal Variances Assumed | .669 | .414 | 1.319 | 1221 | .187 |
| | Equal Variances Not Assumed | | | 1.306 | 896.314 | .192 |
| Vision Scale | Equal Variances Assumed | .227 | .634 | 4.310 | 1221 | .000 |
| | Equal Variances Not Assumed | | | 4.265 | 895.209 | .000 |
| New Life Scale | Equal Variances Assumed | 5.576 | .018 | 6.726 | 1221 | .000 |
| | Equal Variances Not Assumed | | | 6.867 | 983.410 | .000 |

Table 17 Cont'd
T-Test for Mean Scores of the Phases of the CSPP
based on Mentor Involvement

| Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the difference | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Lower | Upper |
| .02110 | .03102 | -.03976 | .08197 |
| .02110 | .03345 | -.04456 | .08677 |
| .03317 | .02515 | -.01617 | .08251 |
| .03317 | .02540 | -.01669 | .08303 |
| .13030 | .03023 | .07099 | .18960 |
| .13030 | .03055 | .07034 | .19025 |

Finally, a Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was calculated among the average total score on the CSPP and the four scales. The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient for the total average is a significant correlation (r= -.128, N=1223, p=.000). This indicates that there is a correlation between being mentored and one's perceived spiritual formation through involvement in spiritual formation practices based on answers given on the CSPP.

A Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was also calculated on the four individual scales of the CPSS as well. The Pearson Correlation statistic for the Transcendence scale and answer to Q11 of whether or not the student has a mentor was (r=-.038, N=1223, p=.187), indicating there was no correlation between having a mentor and their score on this CSPP scale. The Pearson Correlation for the Reflection Scale was (r=-.019, N-1223, p=.496), indicating there was no correlation between being mentoring and their score on this CSPP scale. The Pearson Correlation for the New Life Scale was (r=-.189, N=1223, p=.000), which shows there was a statistical correlation between being mentored and having a higher score on the New Life Scale of the CSPP. The Pearson Correlation for the Vision Scale was (r=-.122, N=1223, p=.000), demonstrating that there was a statistical

significant correlation between being mentored and their score on the Vision Scale of the CSPP.

## CONCLUSION

There are students who are choosing to use nontraditional educational delivery methods to complete their seminary training, this data shows over 1000 of whom that is the case. With this new reality, questions come about how students are properly trained. This research focused on two such concerns of seminary training, mentoring and a student's involvement in the spiritual formation process through spiritual formation practices. This research found that those students who were mentored reportedly were more involved in spiritual formation practices than those who were not mentored. The conclusion of this article will focus on the relationship between the two, which was addressed in RQ4, and how that impacts both the seminary and the local church.

### Research Application—Seminary

This is important as it gives further evidence to the importance of having seminary students engaged in a mentor relationship. From this research, it can be seen that among these students, having a mentor did aid in promoting spiritual formation practices, yet, less than half of students were involved in a mentorship.

As nontraditional education becomes more prevalent in the future, seminaries must strive to aid in connecting their off-campus students to mentor opportunities. The best place to find these opportunities is in and through the local church. Nontraditional education may help to further connect and strengthen the relationships between seminaries and local churches, as there will be greater dependence as some students move away from the brick and mortar choice for their seminary training. The local churches will give the seminaries greater reach to connect their students to pastors for purposeful mentorships that will aid in the spiritual growth of their students.

### Research Application—Local Church

This research also has potential application to local church members and pastors as well. The field of Christian higher education carries with it an "underlying goal" of "Christian transformation and spiritual growth." [83] The goal of spiritual growth is also applicable and necessary to the local church. In fact, Lawson argues that one of the goals of that which is learned in the field of Christian Education is to use the information for "positive transformative growth in the church."[84] Given the importance of the local

church, this research has at least two potential applications for the local church based on its findings with regard to spiritual practices and spiritual formation.

The first application for the local church is based upon the findings of RQ4, which found that there was a positive relationship between mentoring and involvement in spiritual formation practices as measured in the CSPP. Mentoring, is biblically important and can be seen in examples that range from Moses and Joshua to Paul and Timothy. A local church could embrace a mentoring program that in turn has the potential to aid in the spiritual formation of its members. Paul, in Titus 2, gives instruction regarding this:

> But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. (Titus 2:1-8, ESV)

Scripture and research both indicate the importance of quality mentoring for spiritual growth. A church could have a program, either formal or informal, where those who are mature in the faith can meet regularly with those who are immature or new in the faith, and have them walk the younger believer through the basics of the Christian life: such as how to read the Bible, prayer, and evangelism training. As the research also indicates, even those who are more mature in their faith can benefit from a mentor. A culture of mentoring would be valuable in any local church.

A second application of the research for local churches is in regards to the focus of spiritual formation practices. Seminary students, both those who were mentored and those who were not, had scores that were in the Strong category in the Transcendent and Reflection scales, which had disciplines like prayer and worship. Yet students who were mentored and those who were not both scored in the Weak category in the New Life Scale, which primarily emphasized disciplines of evangelism and fellowship. While many factors could influence these findings, the application for local churches would center on a diligence to teach and to encourage participation in many spiritual disciplines.

Also, for the pastor of the local church, it is helpful to constantly examine one's spiritual discipline practices in order to ensure well-roundedness and faithfulness to " the God-given means we are to use in the Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness."[85]

This conclusion gives a summary of how seminaries and local churches can benefit from this research, and there are no doubt other applications that could be found. Applications that could focus on accountability for students in their spiritual growth, increased emphasis on student's seeking out mature believers by which to be mentored, and the need for local churches to take a more active role in aiding the spiritual growth of seminarians.

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