STUDENTS’ SPIRITUAL INTEGRATION INTO BIBLE COLLEGES:

A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

by

Brett Alan Blount

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States and discern the role spiritual integration plays in persistence. Spiritual integration of Bible college undergraduate students occurs when they perceive that their spirituality, whether possessed by them upon their enrollment and/or formed during their attendance, has aligned with the spiritual environment of their college and therefore have accepted their place in that environment. A total of 35 participants, 28 students and seven faculty members, were interviewed to obtain their perceptions of how students experience the process of spiritual integration within the unique environments found in Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States. The analysis of data collected in the study produced The Spiritual Integration Model which shows how students undergo the process of seeking God and a spiritual education, discovering a college family within an appealing college environment, developing relationally and spiritually, applying their knowledge and skills through participating in their college and contributing to God and their community, and finally accepting their place in the college’s spiritual environment. The alignment of students’ spirituality with a Bible college’s spiritual environment as well as their acceptance, or refusal, of their place in the college was found to influence decisions to persist.

*Keywords:* Spiritual integration, spiritual environment, Bible college, process, spirituality, college fit, persistence.
Dedication

I dedicate this research to my Heavenly Father who was always faithful. Paul told us that “if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (2 Tim. 2:13, NIV). May I never fail to remember how truly He has blessed me with faith, family and friends.

I also dedicate this effort to my wife, Kathy. She always knew what to say when my chosen path created difficulties for us both. Kathy’s selfless personality always brought peace when I, or our entire family, needed it most. As Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Mat. 5:9, NIV)
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No long journey reaches a successful conclusion without the assistance of indispensable people. These are only a few of many who gave me a piece of mind during this undertaking.

For each of my student participants who set aside their time for family, study or friends to talk to a total stranger – thank you for lending me your invaluable insights for inclusion in this study of spiritual integration.

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List of Abbreviations

Associate of Arts (AA)
Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE)
Conditional Relationship Guide (CRG)
Council for Christian Colleges and Universities’ (CCCU)
Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE)
Integration of Faith and Learning (IFL)
Grade Point Average (GPA)
Intelligence Quotient (IQ)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1 (D-1)
Reflective Coding Matrix (RCM)
Resident Assistant (RA)
Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)
Three Dimensional Worldview Survey – Form C (3DWS-Form C)
United States (US)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) reported that the undergraduate retention rate for 2014 was 60% for those students who began their efforts to secure a bachelor’s degree at four-year colleges or universities in 2008. Tinto (1975, 1993) tied student departure to their failure to integrate into institutions’ academic and social systems. The concepts of academic and social integration were joined by a spiritual dimension of student integration (Morris, Beck, & Smith, 2004; Morris, Smith, & Cejda, 2003; Schreiner, 2000). Spiritual integration and its impact on Christian students who attend Bible colleges has received little attention in extant literature regarding student persistence.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students integrated spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States. Chapter One contains the background related to the problem, how I was situated within the study, a problem statement, and the significance of the study. This chapter also provides the research questions as well as definitions of terms used in the study.

Background

The background section includes a discussion of Bible colleges, an environment conducive to the examination of student spiritual integration due to the nature of the Bible college mission. Since the study touched on student persistence, defined as “the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 7), this section also includes a brief discussion of student persistence in higher education.

Bible Colleges
Christians with a zeal for Bible-centered curriculum were on the forefront of higher education in North America beginning with the founding of Harvard, the first college in the British Colonies, as well as many other high profile institutions such as Yale and Dartmouth (Nieli, 2007). This early devotion to providing students with the means to pursue a religious vocation gave way to a more secular mindset which, during the last 20 years of the 1800s, created a need for the Bible college movement that alleviated the incursion of secular thought in universities that were initially Christian in nature, developed colleges whose primary purpose was education founded in biblical precepts (Sutherland, 2010), and provided training for pastors and evangelists as well as education for people who desired Bible-centered training for lay ministries (McKinney, 1997). These institutions were not immune to the challenge of retaining students. For example, the average retention rate for the 200 Bible colleges that are member institutions of the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE), an accrediting agency, was 72% according to the ABHE’s website (abhe.org).

Bible college mission. Bible colleges are unique in that they require students to complete a core of theological and biblical courses of study, mandate student participation in ministry or Christian service activities, and offer curriculum specializations that prepare students for church-related and general societal services that benefit all humanity (McKinney, 1997). In other words, Bible colleges “equip students with a deeper knowledge of the Bible” and prepare students “to take on ministry responsibilities” (Lawson, 2009, p. S6). Indeed, it is the in-depth instruction in theology that many students, even some who transferred from universities with national reputations, felt tested them to their intellectual limits (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006). The ABHE offered a description of what a Bible college is and what these institutions do:

Bible colleges offer programs of study in preparation for many vocations,
including ministry and other professions. These include strong core academic and professional courses along with hands-on experiences in ministry that help students live out their calling from God. They typically require 21 – 30 credit hours of Bible/theology classes, promote Christian discipleship and require students and faculty to abide by a covenant of belief and conduct consistent with biblical faith. (Barna Group, 2017, p. 26)

Although Bible colleges are institutions of higher education, they do differ from other Christian institutions such as liberal arts universities and theological seminaries (McKinney, 1997). For example, Bible institutes are similar to Bible colleges but without a major focus on liberal arts or general education, while Christian liberal arts colleges and universities emphasize a “Christocentric” philosophy but with an emphasis on “general education in the humanities and sciences” (McKinney, 1997, p. 18). McKinney (1997) went on to describe theological seminaries as institutions with missions similar to Bible colleges but with graduate degree programs. However, Bible colleges continue to evolve where there are now ABHE Bible colleges that do offer degrees at the graduate level (“Statistical Highlights,” 2015).

**Bible college challenges.** Bible colleges face many challenges regarding curriculum, program standardization, ministry skill evaluation, and identity. Bible colleges continue to evolve in regards to the needs of churches they serve by altering the focus and purpose of their programs; however, these colleges have not standardized their programs with each other in order to develop consistency (Starr, 2009). This situation, according to Starr (2009), forced church leaders to examine college transcripts to ensure proficiency in a given field. Also, while programs changed, there were no corresponding
updates in curricula to support the “more specialized areas of study” (Starr, 2009, p. S55).

The area of Christian service, which is a hallmark of the Bible college experience and is also known as internship, suffer when colleges lack the ability to evaluate the development of ministry skills or supervise students when they take part in this type of field training (Starr, 2009). Bible colleges struggle with identity as they endeavor to serve both the needs of their churches while also maintaining a sensitivity to the “theological music of Scripture” (Bussmann, 2009, p. S60). This was described as Bible college administrators and faculty honoring the “head, heart, [and] hands orientation of spiritual formation” (Bussmann, 2009, p. S59) that today’s church leaders need while ensuring the instruction reflects curriculum changes based in sound foundational theology.

Bible colleges have had critics, such as Adrian (2003), who referred to them as not being “generally accepted as part of the higher education establishment” (p. 27), but even Adrian acknowledged the emergence of Christian liberal arts institutions from these theological schools. Indeed, Bible colleges boast undergraduate theological and biblical curriculum accompanied by liberal arts and professional studies programs (Enlow, 2015) that most certainly qualify them as institutions of higher learning. One estimate places the number of Bible colleges and Bible institutes in the United States and Canada at 1000 with perhaps 100,000 students in attendance (Enlow, 2015).

**History of Student Persistence**

The retention and persistence of undergraduate students has been a concern within higher education in the United States for the past several decades (Davidson & Wilson, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In the 1930s, the first study that resembled what would later become student
retention focused on “student mortality” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 14) and was concerned with identifying institutional and student characteristics that impacted student attrition. This effort to retain students in institutions of higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon. This phenomenon sparked a rather intense field of study that began in earnest in the 1960s with researchers examining departure as an issue predicated on personality traits (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Spady (1970) was the first researcher to develop a widely-accepted, sociological model that explained why students dropped out of college (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). The theory was partially based on Durkheim’s (1951) theory of suicide where a person’s integration into an organization or environment can influence their decision to continue or consider suicide. Later, Tinto (1975) incorporated Durkheim’s (1951) theoretical work in suicide to explain a student’s decision to drop out of college but elaborated further on the concept of integration in his interactional model of student persistence. In this model, Tinto (1993) incorporated Van Gennep’s (1960) process whereby an individual departs from one group and joins another through three stages. These stages are (a) separation from the original group, (b) transition into the new group, and (c) incorporation of the new group’s expectations and norms (Van Gennep, 1960). Tinto (1993) argued that college and university systems are similar to other communities where “student departure, like departures from human communities generally, necessarily reflects both the attributes and actions of the individual and those of the other members of the community in which that person resides” (p. 5).

Student Persistence in a Bible College Context

The Bible College institutional environment, which may be a major attraction for Christian students (Morris et al., 2004), offers unique opportunities for student persistence
Thirty-one administrators of ABHE-affiliated Bible colleges with African American student enrollment of 20% or more completed surveys focusing on student retention (Wilson, 2015). Wilson’s (2015) study, which appeared in a non-peer reviewed journal of the ABHE, reported that the administrators whose colleges enjoyed an average retention rate above 81% over a three-year period “perceived academic preparedness and personal financial resources as the most important contributors to retention” (p. 21).

Other studies suggested that minority students attending Bible colleges persist due to the unique environment fostered by faculty and staff, the influence of family, and faith. Phillips (2016), in his recently published dissertation, conducted a qualitative inquiry into nontraditional, African American male persistence at Bible colleges and found that “by far the strongest connection to persistence was the Bible college experience” (p. 137). The factors that formed this experience included faculty dedicated to their students and an accessible administrative staff devoted to the Bible college mission (Phillips, 2016). Faculty can contribute to a student’s decision to persist by being personable, sharing their experiences, making themselves available to their students inside and outside of class, and sharing their own pastoral experiences (Phillips, 2016). Administrative personnel also contribute to persistence by being “accessible and relational as opposed to being aloof and uninvolved” (Phillips, 2016, p. 145).

In their qualitative study of Native Indian and Alaska Native students enrolled in a Bible college, Saggio and Rendon (2004) examined how experiences in spirituality, academics, and the social arena influenced student persistence. Their findings indicated persistence, at least for these students, was influenced by family, spirituality and faculty/staff validation (Saggio & Rendon, 2004). Families provided students with support, spiritual encouragement and, when family were graduates of Bible colleges, set examples of academic success. These minority
students found their ability to persist was strengthened by their faith in God and encouragement from their fellow church goers (Saggio & Rendon, 2004). Faculty and staff, especially those who were experienced pastors, validated students both “academically and interpersonally” (Saggio & Rendon, 2004, p. 232).

**Student Persistence Theory**

Tinto’s (1975) interactionist theory of student persistence considered student familial background, their individual characteristics, and educational performance prior to college and how their integration into the institution’s collateral academic and social systems, known as academic and social integration, affected their educational goal and institutional commitments. The wide acceptance of academic and social integration as components that influenced students’ retention has been studied within institutional contexts such as two-year colleges (Strayhorn, 2012; Wirt & Jaeger, 2014; Wood, 2014) and were considerations regarding the effect of student, peer, and faculty interactions on integration (Melnick, Kaur, & Yu, 2011; Wagner, 2015). Although these concepts were assessed in private Christian institutions (Jones, 2010; Kranzow, 2013) and religiously-affiliated colleges and universities (Burks & Barrett, 2009). This study attempted to study these constructs within a Bible college context.

Academic and social integration have also been studied using student characteristics such as first generations students (Torres, 2006; Wilkins, 2014), commuting students (Deil-Amen, 2011; Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013) and gender (Ewert, 2012). The concept of institutional fit, where students experienced a congruence between their needs and the institution’s ability to meet them (Tinto, 1993), evolved to include a student’s perceptions of values and norms (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009) and may have been a precursor to social and academic integration (Bowman & Denson, 2014).
Schreiner (2000) examined student persistence at Christian universities and found that students who perceived themselves as being spiritually integrated into their institutions felt this was due to the indicators of (a) their Christian worldview development, (b) the formation of their identities as well as their spiritual growth, (c) their ability to interact with their faculty about their faith while successfully integrating faith and learning, and (d) their satisfaction with available ministry opportunities. Schreiner’s (2000) multi-institutional examination of spiritual integration, while not published in a peer-reviewed journal, has been cited in studies where this concept was deemed important when studying the persistence of students enrolled in religiously-affiliated colleges and universities (Burks & Barrett, 2009) as well as private Christian institutions (Jones, 2010; Kranzow, 2013) but not, until now, in Bible colleges.

The concept of worldview has been described as a framework to help people understand life (Kim, McCalman, & Fisher, 2012), as a life philosophy (Bryant, 2011a), or even a lens made up of values and beliefs through which individuals evaluate their surroundings (Rhea, 2011). Naugle (2002) noted that a Christian worldview was adopted by theologians to interpret God’s revelation as to how believers approach creation, humanity’s fall, and ultimate redemption through Jesus Christ. Later, Wolf (2011) referred to a Christian worldview as a set of assumptions that guide understanding but is not always predicated on biblical precepts. More recently, Schultz and Swezey (2013) offered a Christian worldview that includes a dimension of behavior and heart-orientation to the dimensions of knowledge and propositions to assist faculty in Christian worldview instruction while Valk (2012) championed faculty who share their Christian worldviews through illumination of the spiritual rather than the materialistic. Thomson (2012), however, argued that Christian academia may have been too quick to adopt the worldview paradigm by overlooking criticisms of this complicated concept.
Erik Erikson (1956) developed a staged theory of psychological development that described identity formation throughout a person’s lifespan. Marcia (1966) incorporated social precepts into Erikson’s theory, created identity statuses that take a person into adulthood, and promoted the importance of crisis and commitment as mandatory elements of an established adult identity. Doubt was examined as a possible contributor to a positive religious identity as it may lead a person to explore their beliefs (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011) while Rhea (2011) speculated that it is instruction in God’s enduring significance that leads students toward a Christian identity. Faculty were found to be more effective in promulgating a student’s Christian identity when they were authentic in their Christian beliefs (Booker, 2016) and were able to model their Christian faith (Glanzer & Ream, 2005).

Student interactions with peers and faculty were found in the past to significantly influence student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). More recently, these interactions, based in Christian values, assisted students with their relationship building (Sriram & McLevain, 2016). These interactions also fostered learning, connectedness, and self-regulation (Sidelinger, Frisby, & Heisler, 2016) and were important factors in student outcomes (Chan & Wang, 2016; D’Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine, & Ginn, 2014).

Badley (1994) stated that the integration of faith and learning was a concept adopted by evangelical institutions to foster conservative theology and incorporate faith into all fields of study. This integration is a process (Harris, 2004) that may be an effective defense against Western culture’s dissonance between the sacred and the secular (Esqueda, 2014; Kim et al., 2012) and faculty who may have been taught to separate the two (Moroney, 2014). Effective classroom instruction was enhanced by the integration of faith and learning through faculty educated in these values (Alleman, 2015) and incorporation of this concept into the curriculum.
College students who attend Bible colleges may experience growth in their spirituality (Otto & Harrington, 2016) as well as an increased understanding of their life’s purpose and their connections with the world (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011b). Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith, which explore a person’s growth in this area in six stages from preschool to adulthood, sheds light on a college student’s experience with faith. Christian ministry activities within the context of higher education can expose students to the application of theory in the real world and allow them to acquire skills and knowledge they may need in their future professions (Atkinson, 2009). Student involvement in these types of activities, sometimes referred to as service learning or Christian service, may engender an empathy for people in lower socioeconomic circumstances (Firmin, Tse, Johnson, Vorobyov, & McKeon, 2014) while satisfying their need to serve God (Atkinson, 2009).

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States and discern the role spiritual integration plays in persistence. The results of this research should benefit college administrators at small, Christian colleges who labor to attract Christian students. The findings could offer spiritual-centric data that, when incorporated into the institution or identified as already extant, may be suitable as attractive factors for potential students and therefore useful in recruiting efforts. The research effort focused on students’ spiritual integration (Morris et al., 2003; Morris et al., 2004; Schriener, 2000) and ultimately their decisions to persist in their studies soon following their arrival at their college (Alleman, Robinson, Leslie, & Glanzer, 2016). Also, this study centered on students who persisted beyond their crucial first year (Tinto, 1993; Wardley, Belanger, & Leonard, 2013) in a Christian,
collegiate environment (Morris et al., 2003; Schreiner, 2000) represented in this study by the unique settings found in Bible colleges.

**Situation to Self**

As an adjunct, associate professor, I have had the privilege of teaching undergraduate students and have always marveled at their persistence in their studies. My adjunct experience was with a secular university whose administrators were not keen on instructors openly integrating their Christian beliefs and values into the curriculum. While conducting this study, I was able to gain a greater insight into the role that spirituality plays in the process that allows undergraduate students to integrate into their Bible colleges and persist in their studies.

I embarked upon this study with the understanding that the student participants could possibly demonstrate reluctance when discussing the very personal issues of their spirituality, Christianity or worldviews with someone unfamiliar to them. I was also prepared for participants as well as staff members to consider my research-oriented intentions to delve into the day-to-day matters associated with Bible colleges as perhaps less than professional. It was incumbent upon me to be aware of these assumptions and work diligently, with as much transparency as possible, to assuage any misconceptions regarding this enterprise.

My guiding paradigms for this study were constructivism and pragmatism. Constructivism provided me with an understanding of how to develop a theoretical process from people’s experiences. Constructivism influenced my development of theory because “concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and lives” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 26). My pragmatism stemmed, in an epistemological sense, from my belief that people acquire knowledge through experience gained from their interactions with their
environment (Knight, 2006) as well as my inclination to see the product of my research have practical applications. I am not a true pragmatist or constructivist, in that both tend to not agree with the concept of absolute truth, which goes against my Christian beliefs. Corbin and Strauss (2015) contended that the theoretical foundations of grounded theory included the philosophy of pragmatism as well as the interactionist tradition, which both contributed to their 13 ontological assumptions about the world. These assumptions “about the inevitability of contingencies, the significance of process, and the complexity of phenomena direct us to locate action in context, to look at action and interaction over time (process)” in order to better understand how these are all related (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 22). Therefore, I was comfortable using the systematic and pragmatic approach based on the writings of Corbin and Strauss (2015). This approach allowed me to conduct this grounded theory study that produced a process-generated model that explained how undergraduate students integrated spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States and depicted the role of spiritual integration in their persistence.

**Problem Statement**

Bible colleges, institutions that deliver Christian training and education to Christian church leaders and laymen alike (McKinney, 1997), provided this research effort with the environments conducive to explaining how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Christian institutions and the role that spiritual integration plays in their decisions to continue their studies. Before this study there was no accepted definition of spiritual integration in a Bible college environment nor was there a process that explained the role of spiritual integration into these institutions.
Spiritual integration was recently studied in the health field (Rogers, Skidmore, Montgomery, & Reidhead, 2012), in faith-based organizations (Ridings, 2015), and in higher education (Lucas, 2015; Schreiner, 2000). Rogers et al. (2012) referred to mental health oriented spiritual integration as “a way of understanding, behaving, and being that operates on a principle of integrated wholeness, in which the parts of one’s life are unified into a common field of spiritual understanding and practice” (p. 3) while another researcher studying social workers defined spiritual integration as “the extent to which spiritual aspects are applied to the helping or service delivery process” (Ridings, 2015, p. 333). Lucas (2015) published a study in a non-peer reviewed journal that examined African American spiritual integration into Bible colleges and how their integration may have provided them with a connection to the campus that increased both the purpose and meaning of their academic efforts and thus their persistence (Lucas, 2015). Alleman et al. (2016) examined the concept of religious fit, a concept found in this study to be related to spiritual integration, which they described as a student’s perception of his or her fit in the religious culture that normally occurs during their initial foray into their college or university.

This research into student integration at a specific type of institution, in this case Bible colleges, focused on persistent students (Davidson & Wilson, 2013), provided information regarding the role of spiritual integration in their persistence and also examined the intersection of the institution’s and student’s expectations and identities – specifically those that were spiritual in nature (Alleman et al., 2016). The problem mitigated by this study was the need for a theory explaining how undergraduate students integrated spiritually and persisted at Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States and discern the role spiritual integration plays in persistence. This research effort not only produced a process and model of students’ spiritual integration but also definitions of spiritual integration, the spiritual environment, and spirituality within the context of a Bible college. This study considered Tinto’s (1975, 1993) concepts of social and academic integration and Schreiner’s (2000) concept of spiritual integration to establish how students spiritually integrated into their Bible colleges. This included their initial impressions of their religious fit (Alleman et al., 2016) into their institution of learning soon after their arrival.

Significance of the Study

This grounded theory study explained how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States and discerned the role spiritual integration plays in persistence providing much needed insight to professionals and practitioners in the field. The results added deeper understanding of the concept of spiritual integration (Morris et al., 2003; Morris et al., 2004; Schreiner, 2000) by offering a process and model of spiritual integration that could guide future inquiries into this important area. This study developed a definition of spiritual integration that fits Christian-oriented colleges and provided a process of student integration including the role that spiritual integration played in their persistence. Knowledge of this integrative process may assist administrators and faculty in ensuring their students have every opportunity to integrate into their institutions. The participants’ perceptions of their religious fit (Alleman et al., 2016) enhanced the understanding of that concept within the context of a Bible college.
This study also added to Tinto’s (1993) interactionist theory in that the concept of spiritual integration is now part of a holistic framework that includes social and academic integration. Participant interview data added more to the understanding of the relatively new concepts of economic integration (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011) and familial integration (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey, & Wicks, 2014).

This study’s findings may potentially assist administrators, staff, and faculty at Christian-oriented postsecondary institutions of any size or mission. These individuals are now able to use the study’s results to improve their marketing strategies, eliminate any barriers to spiritual integration, or capitalize on data that will increase their overall understanding of student integration and fit into their institutions – all with the goal of improving persistence.

Research Questions

The objective of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students spiritually integrate into their Bible colleges as well as explain the role of spiritual integration in their persistence. The following are the research questions that guided this study.

Research Question One

How do undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States United States? This question explored the influence that spiritual integration descriptors had on undergraduate Bible college students’ institutional integration. These descriptors included students’ personal identities (Erikson, 1956; Marcia, 1966), their development of a Christian identity (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007; Rhea, 2011; Wilkins, 2014) as well as the role of faculty regarding this construct (Bauman, Marchal, McLain, O’Connell, & Patterson, 2014; Booker, 2016; Riswold, 2015). This question also took into account how worldviews informed students’ spirituality (Rockenbach, Mayhew, Davidson,
Ofstein, & Bush, 2015), students’ formulation of a Christian worldview (Naugle, 2002; Van Brummelen, 2009; Wolf, 2011), and how faculty influenced this construct (Esqueda, 2014; Iselin & Metevard, 2010; Schultz & Swezey, 2013). These students’ spiritual growth, evidenced by their movement through Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith or the expansion of their spirituality regarding their life’s purpose (Astin et al., 2011b), was also a factor in their spiritual integration. Also, this question explored the institutional aspects of student interactions within the institution (Chan & Wang, 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sidelinger et al., 2016; Sriram & McLevain, 2016) as well as the integration of faith and learning (Alleman, 2015; Esqueda, 2014; Harris, 2004; Kim et al., 2012; McCoy, 2014) that occurred within the classroom. This question also allowed me to consider the influence of ministry opportunities offered to students by a Bible college in the form of service learning (Astin & Astin, 2015) or Christian service (Atkinson, 2009) on undergraduate Bible college students.

Ultimately, this questions led to the development of a process of undergraduate student spiritual integration into Bible colleges in the United States. This occurred through the exploration of “the inner experiences of participants” and taking a “holistic and comprehensive approach to the study” of an academic, social, familial, economic, and spiritual phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 5).

Research Question Two

What is the role of spiritual integration in the persistence of undergraduate Bible college students in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States? Question two related to Tinto’s (1993) concept that the learning institution consists of an academic and social system into which the student must successfully integrate before making the decision to persist. Also, this question related to the concept of spiritual integration (Morris et al., 2004; Schreiner, 2000), which
Tinto’s (1993) theory did not address as an influencer of student integration. Regarding this question, the research showed how the institution’s spiritual environment influenced the students’ spiritual integration into their Bible college while finding the unique role that spiritual integration played in their persistence.

**Definitions**

1. *Attrition* - Attrition is defined as “students who fail to reenroll at an institution in consecutive semesters” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 7)

2. *Commuter* - Commuter students are postsecondary students who do not reside on campus and must commute to take classes (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Tinto, 1993, 1997).

3. *Identity (or Ego identity)* - Identity is defined as an individual’s “sense of sameness, a unity of personality now felt by the individual and recognized by others as having a consistency in time – of being, as it were, an irreversible historical fact” (Erikson, 1988, pp. 11-12).

4. *Integration* - Regarding students in higher education, integration is defined as “extent to which students come to share the attitudes and beliefs of their peers and faculty and the extent to which students adhere to the structural rules and requirements of the institution” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 414). There are five types of integration discussed in this study:

   (a) *Academic integration* - Academic integration refers to the student’s ability to perform academically and interact successfully with faculty and staff (Tinto, 1993).
(b) *Economic integration* - Economic integration is described as “the degree to which students’ financial needs are met while pursuing” their degree (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011, p. 117).

(c) *Familial integration* – Familial integration is defined as the degree to which a student’s perception of family member connectedness was met during their pursuit of a degree (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014).

(d) *Social integration* - Social integration refers to the student’s ability to interact informally with peers and with the institution’s extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1993).

(e) *Spiritual integration* - Spiritual integration has been defined in at least two contexts: (a) Rogers et al. (2012) referred to mental health-oriented spiritual integration as “a way of understanding, behaving, and being that operates on a principle of integrated wholeness, in which the parts of one’s life are unified into a common field of spiritual understanding and practice” (p. 3), and (b) Ridings (2015) studied social workers in faith-based organizations and developed a definition of spiritual integration as “the extent to which spiritual aspects are applied to the helping or service delivery process (i.e., the number, frequency, and strength of spiritual indicators applied in the helping relationship)” (p. 333).

5. *Institutional fit* - Institutional fit is defined as “a state of being; it is based on perceptions of student fit with their campus and, by extension, perceptions of interactions that reflect the values and norms of the institution and its culture” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 416)
6. **Nontraditional student** - Nontraditional students meet one or more of the following criteria of (a) being 25 years-old or older (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Scott & Lewis, 2012), (b) not residing on campus (Braxton et al., 2004), (c) attending college part-time (Wyatt, 2011), and (d) working full or part-time (Markle, 2015).

7. **Persistence** - Persistence is defined as “the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 7).

8. **Religion** —Religion is defined as “an organized community of faith, with an official creed, and codes of regulatory behavior” (Tisdell, 2008, p. 28) and may concern a student’s beliefs regarding the origin of life as well as who, or what, controls the world (Astin et al., 2011b).

9. **Retention** - Retention is defined as “the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to the university through graduation” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 7).

10. **Spirituality** - Spirituality is a construct experienced on an individual basis in regards to something sacred – an experience that can occur anywhere at any time (Tisdell, 2008).

11. **Theory** - A theory is defined, as it relates to qualitative research in general, as an overarching structure “that explains why things happen” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 12).

12. **Traditional student** - Traditional students are learners below the age of 24 who depend on someone else for financial support (Ford & Vignare, 2015) and reside on campus (Tinto, 1993).

13. **Worldview** - A worldview is defined as a concept that “represents the framework from which we base our understanding of reality as well as life’s meaning and purpose” (Kim et al., 2012, p. 206).
Summary

This study produced a model explaining how students integrate spiritually into their Bible colleges and how this type of integration contributed to their decisions to persist. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students integrated spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States as well as discern the role that spiritual integration played in their persistence.

Tinto’s (1975, 1993) interactionist theory of student persistence provided a means to explore students’ academic and social integration within their Bible colleges. Indicators of spiritual integration (Schreiner, 2000) informed my effort to uncover the process of spiritual integration and its role in undergraduate Bible college student persistence. For example, a Christian identity allowed undergraduate students to understand who they were while a Christian worldview provided them a means to understand their surroundings. This effort also included an exploration of the concept of religious fit (Alleman et al., 2016) and its place within the spiritual integration process.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This grounded theory study sought to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States as well as discern the role that spiritual integration plays in their persistence. Chapter Two provides a conceptual framework of spiritual integration that combines academic, social, and spiritual integration as well as religious fit to possibly see how undergraduate students persist beyond the first year in Bible colleges. Academic integration refers to the student’s ability to perform academically and interact successfully with faculty and staff (Tinto, 1993). Social integration refers to the student’s ability to interact informally with peers and the institution’s extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1993).

The concept of institutional fit describes a student’s perception of the college’s ability to meet their needs, preferences, and interests (Tinto, 1993) through their experiences of academically and socially integrating into the institution (Reid, 2013). Although the initial concept of institutional fit adequately assessed a student’s fit into the secular social and academic systems of a given college, it did not incorporate a spiritual dimension that would undoubtedly exist in, and attract students to, a Christian institution of higher learning (Morris et al., 2004; Schreiner, 2000) or, more specifically for the purpose of this study, the unique environment of a Bible college. Alleman et al. (2016) developed the concept of religious fit to describe the perception of fit into the existing religious-cultural environment at a religiously-affiliated institution of higher learning, which normally occurs upon a student’s arrival at their college or university. While the concept of spiritual integration, as espoused in the past (Morris et al., 2004; Schreiner, 2000), acknowledged the spiritual aspect of a small Bible college, it did not
include a viable definition of this type of integration or adequately contribute to the overall understanding of how students’ spirituality or the Bible college’s spiritual environment contributed to their integration or persistence.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study, which resulted in a theoretical process to extend the understanding of existing theories, required a discussion of the basic building blocks of theory. Jaccard and Jacoby (2010) stated that concepts are necessary for human thinking in that they provide a means to arrange and sort particular experiences stored in memory. These remembered experiences begin as abstractions and become generalized as ideas that individuals can apply uniformly across numerous situations (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010). Concepts are constructed by individuals (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and shared socially among people who then use these concepts to improve their communication (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010). While concepts are important to communication, they are also important to theory structure (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) in that higher order concepts become constructs (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010). In other words, constructs are concepts that are similar enough to form groups that can encompass a broader spectrum of meaning. An example used by Jaccard and Jacoby (2010) adopted the concept of a shirt that when grouped with other concepts such as pants and coats, creates the construct of clothing. Constructs enable humans to communicate with a greater level of efficiency and economy because they provide a more orderly way to communicate without relying on lower orders of abstraction or concepts. This way when people communicate they can avoid a laborious discussion of numerous concepts, such as shirts, pants, and socks and use just use the construct of clothing (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010). Corbin and Strauss (2015) referred to constructs as categories in their systematic grounded theory design.
The term theory has many definitions. It has been described as “a consistent and soundly based set of assumptions about a specific aspect of the world, predicting or explaining a phenomenon” (Malterud, 2016, p. 121). Jaccard and Jacoby (2010) saw theory as statements that describe relationships between constructs or concepts. Theory, as it relates to qualitative research in general and this study in particular, was defined by Straus and Corbin (2015) as an overarching structure “that explains why things happen” (p. 12). Development of theory begins with identifying concepts, then categories or themes, culminating in the important process of describing the connections, or linkages, between the categories to ascertain why a phenomenon occurs (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010).

I employed Tinto’s (1993) substantive interactionist theory as well as concepts related to students’ religious (Alleman et al., 2016) and spiritual (Schreiner, 2000) interactions with and within a Bible college to develop a conceptual framework. This framework provided “insight, direction, and an initial set of concepts” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 52) and created a starting point for the development of new concepts and expanded the meaning behind already established concepts. In order to fully understand a phenomenon, such as students’ spiritual integration into their Bible college, I first developed a conceptual framework derived from existing research that identified “the concepts included in a complex phenomenon and show[ed] their relationships” (Joyner, Rouse, & Glatthorn, 2013, p. 144).

Jaccard and Jacoby (2010) considered the careful perusal of extant literature before data collection as a useful method to gain a greater understanding of the past research and theoretical underpinnings of the area targeted for new research. Some researchers, however, have suggested that literature should not inform the research process in grounded theory but only provide material with which to compare analytical results (Jones & Alony, 2011). Others advised
researchers avoid invalidating their results by conducting a detailed review of the concepts that inform their proposed study – such as a conceptual framework (Tan, 2010). However, this study included a conceptual framework simply to instill a greater understanding of student integration, rather than an explanation, and endeavored to be “indeterminist” in nature rather than predictive (Jabareen, 2009, p. 51). Also, delving into the extant literature from research articles works based on theory and philosophy, also called “technical literature” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 49), assisted me in making comparisons with concepts that emerged from the data, enhanced my sensitivity to subtle nuances in the data, stimulated the formulation of questions in the analytic stages of the study, and confirmed my findings. Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) referred to this as “interweaving the literature throughout the process of evolved grounded theory as another voice contributing to the researcher’s theoretical reconstruction” (p. 5).

Theories of Student Persistence

Since this study included academic and social integration as part of a conceptual framework, it was appropriate to begin with Tinto’s (1975, 1993) interactionist theory of student persistence. The other theories, or models, sprung from criticisms and alterations of Tinto’s (1975, 1993) initial theory to explain differences in residential and commuter students (Braxton et al., 2004; Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1983), traditional and nontraditional students (Bean & Metzner, 1985), and race (Mason, 1998; Tierney, 1999).

Tinto’s (1975, 1993) interactionist theory of student persistence. One theoretical model developed to understand student persistence was longitudinal in nature and followed the process students would undergo as they approached their decision to either persist or drop out of college (Tinto, 1975). A student’s failure to fully integrate into either the social or academic systems will influence their decisions to dropout. Tinto (1975) posited that students’ perception
of their level of interactions with peers, faculty, and staff associated with the institution will determine whether they have successfully integrated into either system.

Tinto’s (1975) theory distinguished between the collateral academic and social systems found in learning institutions by assessing student familial background, their individual characteristics, and educational performance prior to college and how these may affect their educational goal and institutional commitments. Tinto (1975) stated, “It is these goal and institutional commitments that are both important predictors of and reflections of the person’s experiences, his disappointments and satisfactions, in that collegiate environment” (p. 96). The academic system portion of the model will consider how these commitments influence both grade performance and intellectual development and their effects on a student’s perception of their overall academic integration. Along the social system part of the model, the observer assesses a student’s educational goal and institutional commitments’ influences upon their peer-group and faculty interactions that, in turn, inform students’ perceptions of their overall social integration into the institution’s milieu. Lastly, the student will undergo another evaluation of their educational goal and institutional commitments. It is this constant reevaluation of a student’s commitments that may influence their decision to drop out or persist, depending on the strength of those commitments.

In 1993, Tinto updated his initial theory (Tinto, 1975) by incorporating changes and additions taken from numerous studies in the area of student persistence. In this update, the author offered information that was pertinent to the current study and included: (a) information regarding commuter-type institutions where there are no student residences and, therefore, no accompanying institutional obligation to provide student-oriented social activities and programs; (b) factors of individual departure that focus on people of color and adult learners who enter
academia; (c) the incorporation of external commitments and communities into the Tinto longitudinal model of student persistence; (d) the genesis of Tinto’s acknowledgement of the classroom’s central importance in commuter institutions; and (e) the concept of congruence, or institutional fit. Tinto’s (1993) theory offered a viable explanation of a student’s integration, both academic and social, into the institution which may account for persistence – especially for traditional students who reside on campus.

In 1997, Tinto elaborated further on the classroom when he published the results of a study that took place in a community college located in Seattle, Washington. This study examined a pedagogical approach to classroom communities where a cohort of students attended the same classes, with a unifying theme, over the course of a quarter. During this period, the students participated in cooperative learning activities, studied together, and in the process established relationships that increased the perceived quality of learning (Tinto, 1997). Although the study highlighted a particular methodology, it was the alteration to Tinto’s interactionist model of student persistence that contributes to the current study. In the altered model it is the classroom, along with other similar environments such as labs, that connects the academic and social systems. Tinto (1997) stated the interweaving nature of the two systems show how “social communities emerge out of the academic activities that take place within the more limited academic sphere of the classroom, a sphere of activities that is necessarily also social in character” (p. 619). Tinto (1997) also asserted the importance of faculty contact inside and outside of the classroom and how this interaction, along with acceptable pedagogical practices, works together to create a classroom community that can enhance the quality of student involvement with the institution and, subsequently, contribute to student persistence.
**Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson.** Studies focusing on students who attended commuter, or nonresidential, college settings suggested that Tinto’s (1975) reliance on social integration may be less critical in this environment. These findings were based on the lack of formal social activities and the increased importance of the influence of student pre-postsecondary characteristics on persistence (Pascarella et al., 1983).

**Bean and Metzner.** Nontraditional students depart college mostly due to external factors as opposed to any issues with successfully integrating into an institution’s social system (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The model developed to fully understand nontraditional departure, according to Bean and Metzner (1985), must take into consideration a student’s background information and their effects on both academic and environmental variables. These academic and environmental variables can influence the academic outcome, in the form of GPA, or psychological outcomes, including satisfaction, goal commitment or stress. Interestingly, the environmental factors of finances, hours of employment, family, outside encouragement and opportunity to transfer are “factors over which the institution has little control” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 502), effectively removing the college as a means to provide an environment conducive to persistence.

**Mason’s model.** Mason (1998) developed a model of persistence for African American males who attended urban community colleges. This model differed from Tinto’s (1975, 1993) model and agreed with Bean and Metzner’s (1985) in that the concept of social integration was not applicable to nontraditional students who reside off campus. Mason’s (1998) model altered the academic, environmental, and psychological variables while retaining only the variable of educational goals in Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model following the results of a survey and in-depth interviews of African American males attending an urban community college. The
variables that exerted the most influence on the model’s development were educational goals, outside encouragement, utility, and the helplessness/hopelessness factor.

Wood (2012) adopted Mason’s (1998) model of African American male departure from two-year colleges that was informed by Bean and Metzner’s (1985) conceptual model. Wood’s (2012) study assessed environmental variables among the two groups to see if they contributed to persistence to include academic problems, dissatisfaction with programs, family responsibilities, finances, personal reasons, other reasons, scheduling problems, and being called to military service. The findings from the study suggested that African American male participants departed college at higher rates due to personal reasons, other reasons not specific to any of the variables, and for family reasons within their first year of college (Wood, 2012). This lend support to Bean and Metzner’s (1985) and Mason’s (1998) contentions regarding the importance of environmental factors when considering persistence among nontraditional students (Wood, 2012).

**Tierney.** While Tierney (1999) did not develop an actual theory or model of student persistence, he did offer a persuasive criticism of Tinto’s (1993) premise that students must dissociate themselves from their home culture in order to successfully assimilate into an institution’s social and academic systems. Minority students whose culture embraces the family as a central aspect of their wellbeing may very well suffer emotional turmoil if they separate from their home environments (Tierney, 1999). It would most certainly be inappropriate for African American students who attend mostly Caucasian colleges or universities to abandon their home culture to assimilate into, or commit a form of cultural suicide to fully integrate into, the predominate culture (Tierney, 1999).
**Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon.** Braxton et al. (2004) focused their efforts on the persistence of commuter students in higher education. After a thorough review of the literature pertaining to commuter persistence, Braxton et al. (2004) found that academic integration was more relevant to commuter students than social integration due to the “lack of well-defined and -structured social communities for students to establish membership” (p. 46) which “also characterizes the campus environments of commuter colleges and universities” (p. 46). In their model of commuter persistence, Braxton et al. (2004) emphasized the importance of academic integration, represented by their concept of internal campus environment and the significance of the external environment’s components of finances, support, work, family and community.

Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 1997) longitudinal theories of student persistence offered researchers sophisticated structures amenable to “investigating influences on student persistence” and providing “a theoretical foundation” (Metz, 2004, p. 193) for further research into various student and institutional types. Researchers found fault with Tinto’s (1975) focus on traditional students who reside on campus (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton et al., 2004; Mason, 1998; Pascarella et al., 1983; Tierney, 1999) which motivated Tinto (1993) to update his model. Although the model offered by Bean and Metzner (1985) may appear to better fit nontraditional Bible college students, the absence, or very small consideration, given to social integration raises concerns since this type of integration has been found to be a persistence factor for nontraditional students (Deil-Amen, 2011; Flowers, 2006; Kubala & Borglum, 2000; Sorey & Duggan, 2008). Tinto (1993) offered an explanation of how students make their decisions regarding persistence but fell short of providing a concept that adequately assesses students’ spiritual integration into a Bible college. One of the problems with student persistence models in higher education is that true elegance has given way to the inclusion of so many factors that it became nearly impossible
to “decipher the findings at a practical level” (Wardley et al., 2013, p. 96). This provided me with the motivation to develop a model of students’ spiritual integration that enhanced understanding and avoided unnecessary complexity.

It was necessary to develop a model that included enough factors to adequately explain how undergraduate students integrated spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States as well as discern the role that spiritual integration played in their persistence. There are models that competently assess traditional students who reside on campus but fall short of examining nontraditional students who reside off campus (Tinto, 1993). Other models of persistence assess nontraditional students but fail to see the importance of student-to-faculty or even student-to-student interactions in commuter institutions due to the perceived lack of student culture (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Mason (1998) proposed a model that focused on African Americans in a two-year college but did not see any worth in the social integration concept. Some persistence conceptual frameworks see the classroom as important to commuter student persistence (Braxton et al., 2004; Tinto, 1993, 1997) where the adult learner develops the connections with their instructors and fellow students to socially construct what it means for them to be college students (Donaldson & Graham, 1999) while others fail to acknowledge this seemingly important consideration (Bean & Metzner, 1985). A finding from a study of nontraditional learners’ perceptions of their ability to graduate from a system geared toward traditional students indicated the classroom was more important to them as the fulcrum of interaction while social integration was not deemed to be important (Samuels, Beach, & Palmer, 2012). None of the widely-accepted models of student persistence included a spiritual dimension nor a spiritual integration process model appropriate for students who attend a Bible college.

**Student Integration**
Developing an understanding of student integration must include recent literature that examined academic, social, economic and familial integration and how this information may relate to undergraduate students. Since this study examined undergraduate students attending Bible colleges, it was necessary to begin with an understanding of the influence the concept of spiritual integration may have had on their persistence.

**Academic and social integration.** A college’s academic system concerns mostly the formal education of students and is comprised of the academic performance of the students and their informal interactions with faculty and staff (Tinto, 1993). Academic integration consists of structural and normative components (Tinto, 1975). The structural component alludes to a student’s ability to meet institutional academic standards while the normative component touches on the student’s identification with the values, norms, and beliefs encountered in the institution’s academic system (Braxton et al., 2004; Jones, 2010; Tinto, 1975). This concept was also more broadly defined as “a range of individual academic experiences that occur in the formal and informal domains of the academic systems of the college” (Mertes, 2015b, p. 1059) and more narrowly described as a student’s interactions with faculty (Reid, 2013). Severiens and Wolff (2008) separated this type of integration into formal and informal components. Formal academic integration is student contacts within the institutional context with faculty while informal academic integration refers to contacts between faculty and students that occur outside of the normal learning environment.

Tinto (1975, 1993) offered descriptions of the social system and social integration into that system for traditionally-aged students attending residential institutions of higher learning. The social system is described by the components of informal peer interactions and formal extracurricular activities offered by the learning institution (Tinto, 1993). The concept of social
integration refers to the student’s ability to interact informally with peers and the institution’s extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1993). Formal social integration involves those contacts students make with their peers that focus on learning and include collaborative efforts on tasks required by the curriculum. Informal social integration describes students’ frequent contacts with their peers within a social context as well as participation in social activities developed primarily for students (Severiens & Wolff, 2008).

**Problems with academic and social integration.** Researchers have found many concerns associated with the concepts of academic and social integration. Attendance at two-year colleges may affect a student’s social integration (Pascarella et al., 1983) and both social and academic integration (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014), which sheds some light on the challenges to persistence nontraditional students face at this type of institution. Martin et al. (2014) examined the shared characteristics of persistent students at a large community college and found that students with strong motivation and clearly defined goals will overcome academic unpreparedness. The students in the study were largely uninterested in extracurricular activities provided by the school and, subsequently, lacked any measure of social integration as per Tinto’s (1993) longitudinal model. However, Martin et al. (2014) were unable to uncover any measure of academic integration that led these students to persist, which supported Braxton et al.’s (2004) contention that social and academic integration concepts were not appropriate lenses for examination of persistence in community college students and other commuters.

Studies focusing on students who attend commuter, or nonresidential, college settings produced findings that suggested that Tinto’s (1975) reliance on social integration may be less critical in this environment. The lack of formal social activities on these campuses (Pascarella et al., 1983) created an opportunity to expand and embrace a wider definition of the social and even
academic integration constructs for commuter students (Mertes, 2015b). Indeed, the dynamics of student interactions with their peers and faculty appear to change when they attend two-year educational venues (Deil-Amen, 2011).

**Relevance of social integration for commuter students.** Bible college students who do not reside on campus must commute to class but may still enjoy the benefits of social integration. While past studies have casted doubts on the relevancy of social integration for commuter and nontraditional students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Pascarella et al., 1983; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986), recent studies have found this type of integration may be a factor in their persistence (Deil-Amen, 2011; Karp, Hughes, & O’Gara, 2011; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Tian, Yu, Vogel, & Chi-Wai, 2011). The phenomenon of both academic and social integration occurring simultaneously, or overlapping, was explored at the two-year level and may be interconnected to a degree that was never before realized (Deil-Amen, 2011; Karp et al., 2011). Deil-Amen (2011) developed the concept of the *socio-academic integrative moment* where both social and academic interactions blend together to form a simultaneous integration of the two constructs (p. 72). This includes interactions that occur within the classroom among peers and faculty and outside of the classroom in academically related pursuits. Students who experience academic impact and social integration simultaneously may experience enhanced “feelings of college belonging, college identity, and college competence” (Deil-Amen, 2011, p. 73). Other studies supported the supposition that while the concepts of social and academic integration are analytically distinct, they can interact to the point where they may actually form an integrative relationship on campus (Mamiseishvili, 2012) within a social networking environment (Tian et al., 2011). However, the concept of socio-academic integration was found, after being measured
as two primary variables, to be statistically nonsignificant in a study of early integration and other outcomes among community college students (D’Amico et al., 2014).

Mertes (2015b) conducted a study to determine whether social integration as offered by Deil-Amen (2011) and Maxwell (2000) was related to the construct of social integration as offered by Tinto (1975, 1993) within the context of a community college. Tinto (1993) defined this construct as interactions that occur mostly outside of the classroom between students and other campus-centric student or faculty groups as well as off-campus groups. The other construct, as offered by Deil-Amen (2011) and Maxwell (2000), was defined as the interactions that occur within the classroom among peers and faculty and outside of the classroom in academically-related pursuits. The results of the quantitative analyses of 308 community college student survey responses suggested that both constructs were highly related to each other as evidenced by the correlation of .691 (Mertes, 2015b). These findings challenged attempts to explain the variations in social integration found in past studies by relying on the differences between the constructs offered by Deil-Amen and Maxwell as well as Tinto’s earlier definition (Mertes, 2015b).

Two-year students reported their social integration experiences as classroom interactions, study groups outside of the classroom, and other venues that were once considered more academic than social in nature (Deil-Amen, 2011; Mertes, 2015a). Faculty in two-year colleges and universities may be able to devote more time to instruction without the distraction of research responsibilities (Wirt & Jaeger, 2014), contributing to circumstances that may “counteract the lack of opportunities for students to get involved in academic and social activities” (Marra, Tsai, Bogue, & Pytel, 2015, p. 71) that are normally found in residential colleges and universities.
Problems with defining academic and social integration. While it is true that the concepts of academic and social integration have enjoyed almost universal acceptance as being unqualified predictors, or drivers, of student persistence (Davidson & Wilson, 2013), it appears that Tinto (1993) failed to “provide clear operational definitions of integration” (Severiens & Wolf, 2008, p. 255), which may hamper any efforts to develop a clear synthesis of extent literature with any overarching agreement among researchers’ results (Severiens & Wolf, 2008). Davidson and Wilson (2013) reviewed literature focusing on Tinto’s (1975, 1993) concepts of academic and social integration and found that many of the published studies were not in agreement in the definition and measurement of these concepts. More recent examples of disparate components of academic integration included “engagement with studies, academic involvement and initiative, time spent on academic activities, or time employed” (Soria, Stebleton, & Huesman, 2013, p. 221); study habits and relationship with faculty (Wagner, 2015); teacher’s clarity of instruction (Wolniak, Mayhew, & Engberg, 2012); academic interactions and academic advisor relationships (Hammond & Shoemaker, 2014b); faculty discussions outside of class, meetings with advisors and attendance at study groups (Hongwei, 2015); and faculty concern (Kord & Wolf-Wendel, 2009; Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012).

Past studies have also used disparate measures to assess academic integration (Wood, Newman, & Harris, 2015). Academic integration may be objective when measured using GPA or credit hours earned but subjective when considering faculty contact with students (Beekhoven, De Jong, & Van Hout, 2002), causing potential issues when measuring variables. In one example, researchers examining nursing students’ perceptions of social integration included variables such as participation in professional events and membership in professional organizations (Jeffreys, 2007), which may have stretched Tinto’s (1993) definition of the
construct. This lack of consistency creates difficulties for practitioners and researchers who need to draw valid conclusions upon which to base their work. While development of variables is certainly within the purview of the researcher, especially when their unique variables are thoroughly described, it can exacerbate an already confusing situation.

**Multicollinearity.** Beil, Reisen, Zea, and Caplan (1999) analyzed the variables of social and academic integration separately due to their contention that inconsistent results of past research efforts dealing with these concepts could be attributed to issues with multicollinearity. Researchers may have experienced problems with multicollinearity when variables with a high correlation, as was the case for the relationship between social and academic integration ($r = .38$) for Biel et al.’s (1999) study, were analyzed together complicating “any efforts to isolate the net impact of a single variable on the dependent variable” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 368). In fact, Biel et al. (1999) indicated that researchers who found a relationship between retention and academic integration but none with social integration may have experienced problems with multicollinearity. Researchers who focused on integration have begun to include collinearity statistical testing in their studies (D’Amico et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2012).

**Institutional characteristics.** This section overviews institutional characteristics, defined as those characteristics exhibited by an institution of higher learning that may influence student integration. Information in this section includes recent literature that focused on two-year colleges, African Americans at predominately White institutions, early integration into an institution, Christian institutions, and interactions that occur within and outside of institutions of higher learning.

**Two-year colleges.** Studies at two-year colleges offered new insights into academic and social integration regarding African American students as well as the influences of smaller
institutions and information networks on these concepts. Recent studies in two-year colleges and commuter institutions that focused on African American males (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 369; Wood et al., 2015) supported the contention that these colleges may not be amenable to social integration as stipulated in past theoretical treatments (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton et al., 2004; Pascarella et al., 1983), while other studies found that smaller colleges and student information networks were more conducive to academic and social integration (Hongwei, 2005; Karp et al., 2011).

Academic integration, however, was viable for African American males in community colleges who were self-efficacious (Wood et al., 2015) or participated in informal contact with faculty and peers (Wood, 2014) but not in studies of persistence where race was not a factor (Martin et al., 2014; Nakajima et al., 2012). Data for a study of African American male first-year students in two-year colleges was gleaned from the Educational Longitudinal Study that followed students from high school into their college years (Wood et al., 2015). The purpose of Wood et al.’s (2015) study was to assess any differences in self-efficacy scores for different measures of academic integration and to see if self-efficacy was a predictor of academic integration. The results of the study indicated that students who scored higher measures of self-efficacy were associated with a greater measure of academic integration. In other words, there were differences in self-efficacy for math in regards to two measures of academic integration – student-faculty interactions outside of class that dealt with academic matters and meetings with advisors regarding their academic plans. Additionally, “students with high levels of faculty interaction also had greater scores for English self-efficacy” (Wood et al., 2015, p. 14).

*African Americans at predominately White institutions.* Tierney’s (1999) argument that African Americans should avoid the abandonment of their cultures to conform to an institution’s
predominate culture was supported when African American men enjoyed greater academic integration when they attended Black, independent boarding schools (Alexander-Snow, 2010) or reported stable racial identities (Reid, 2013) but less social integration when they refused to live by peer and faculty negative identity expectations (Wilkins, 2014). African American males who attended four-year institutions experienced a greater level of academic and social integration than their two-year counterparts perhaps due to the greater number and variety of integrative programs offered by larger institutions (Flowers, 2006). While the same may have been true if these students attended Bible colleges with small class sizes (Beattie & Thiele, 2016), it did add to the contention that social and academic integrative “experiences influence retention for college students at two-year and four-year institutions” (Flowers, 2006, p. 282).

**Early integration.** Researchers found that the environment on campus and involvement experiences predicted social integration for first generation and disabled students who integrated early into their institutions (Shepler & Woolsey, 2012; Woosley & Shepler, 2011), while academic fit was the best predictor of positive academic outcomes but not social integration for transfer students who integrated early (D’Amico et al., 2014). Transfer students’ perception of academic fit, an operationalized component of academic integration, into their institution was the most consistent predictor of positive outcomes such as student GPA, while social integration was not a predictor of positive outcomes and, actually, a negative indicator of GPA (D’Amico et al., 2014).

**Christian institutions.** Christian college and university students reported enhanced social integration when they developed peer relationships and were socially active (Burks & Barrett, 2009), showed commitment to their institutions (Jones, 2010) and were homeschooled (Kranzow, 2013). Homeschooled children who later attended Christian institutions of higher
learning were better able to build relationships with their faculty, and thus experienced enhanced social integration, according to Kranzow (2013). However, Saunders (2009) found that there were no significant differences in Christian college students’ social integration or persistence regarding the type of schools they attended prior to college – whether homeschooled or otherwise. These results pointed to the importance of further investigation into the social integration of Bible college students.

Academic and social integration and interactions. Research regarding the effect of student, peer, and faculty interactions on academic and social integration that mostly take place within the institutions of higher learning were also assessed: (a) minorities found it more difficult to interact in larger, more populated universities, which negatively affected their social integration (Morley, 2004; Wagner, 2015); (b) social integration significantly correlated with intellectual development while academic integration was correlated with personal development (Halawah, 2006); (c) international students who benefited from social activities experienced increased social integration while these activities negatively impacted their academic pursuits (Melnick et al., 2011); and (d) a study discovered a correlation between students’ social integration inside and outside of the classroom (Sidelinger et al., 2016). Social and academic integration were independent variables that did not significantly affect persistence in a quantitative study of 711 Latino students who attended selective colleges (Wagner, 2015). Interestingly, the most significant variables were family support during the high school years and attendance at a private or liberal arts college (Wagner, 2015), which are normally smaller than public universities, adding some credence to Morley’s (2004) contention that large universities, which offer little chance for frequent and meaningful interactions with faculty, may negatively impact student persistence.
Nontraditional students who commute to and from campus may care little about interacting in the social environment and perhaps find the classroom is where they experience the level of academic integration they need to persist in their studies (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Samuels et al., 2012). However, Phillips (2016) found that nontraditional African American male students persisted in their Bible colleges partly due to the mentorship and discipleship opportunities offered by faculty. This highlighted the emphasis in Christian circles on students building relationships with faculty (Mullen, 2012), which may be more important to older students who are preparing for ministry than the typical traditional student.

**Student characteristics.** Student characteristics were examined with social and academic integration in mind including class, student engagement, first-generation students, commuting students, and gender. Soria et al.’s (2013) study results may have indicated differences in working-class and middle/upper-class students regarding academic and social integration. In regards to social integration, working-class students reported significantly lower scores than their middle/upper class counterparts in areas such as sense of belonging and satisfaction. Academic integration variables that were significantly lower for working-class students included “time spent on academic activities, less time working collaboratively with peers or tutors, and greater time spent employed” (Soria et al., 2013, p. 228) while the variables of (a) academic involvement and initiative, and (b) engagement with studies were lower but not a statistical level of significance (Soria et al., 2013).

**Student engagement.** Guided by Tinto’s (1993) assertion that students’ integration into an institution’s academic and social systems can depend on their ability to engage successfully with these systems, it seems fitting to include recent research that focused on student academic and social engagement. A student’s ability to engage academically and socially may be a
predictor of their ability to graduate (Flynn, 2014), allow them to better develop faculty and peer relationships (Kranzow, 2013), and may occur mostly within the classroom environment (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). Students’ academic and social engagement behaviors have been found to be predictive of degree attainment, much like academic and social integration, and can positively affect academic outcomes beyond the first-year of college (Flynn, 2014). Students transferring from community college to four-year universities have been found to experience engagement mostly within the classroom - the more challenging the academics the more they were engaged, focused, and motivated (Lester et al., 2013).

First generation students. First-generation students, college students whose parents did not attend college, have been the center of research studies in the areas of identity (Wilkins, 2014) and race (Torres, 2006), all with special focus on academic and social integration. White, first-generation students were able to maintain their identities into college while African American students struggled to do so in the face of peer and faculty negative perceptions, which decreased their social integration (Wilkins, 2014). First-generation Latino commuter students attending urban colleges simply did not concern themselves with fitting into their institution due to their decisions to live at home and commute to classes (Torres, 2006). Attendance at urban colleges may have been attributed to lower costs associated with such an institution that precluded a move to a university where living on campus would detract from familial responsibilities and incur additional expenses. While compelling, this position did not adequately disprove Tinto’s (1993) argument that social and academic integration experienced by students, even if they elected to attend the urban college based on Torres’ (2006) reasons, led them to decisions to persist at that institution.
Commuting students. Commuting students’ experiences with both academic and social integration may differ from the way their traditional counterparts experience these constructs. Tinto (1993) asserted the importance of residential students separating from their home culture in order to fully integrate into their learning institution. This concept of assimilation may not be applicable to students who commute to and from their classes. These nontraditional students remain in their home communities and therefore would not experience separation from their communities (Deil-Amen, 2011). Commuter students attending community colleges are able to join clubs and fraternities that allow them to attend planned social activities but do not see any value in the social integration variables that focus on less formal, on-campus activities (Townsend & Wilson, 2009), which is different from traditional students whose participation in these activities allows them to build relationships with their peers (Dunn, Hains, & Epps, 2013).

Active duty soldiers, a nontraditional student group who attended college classes online or outside of their military duty hours, took part in a qualitative study to ascertain their perceptions of the military’s expectations of their collegiate pursuits and commitment to their persistence (Wilson et al., 2013). The study also examined their perceptions of the students’ academic and social integration into their respective institutions of higher learning. Soldiers indicated their academic integration was built through their commitments to their chosen areas of study, respectable GPAs, relationships with peers who were taking the same classes, and above all with most of the participants, positive interactions with faculty and staff (Wilson et al., 2013). However, none of the soldiers shared any perceptions of social integration within the college system they attended on the Army installation where the study took place. Apparently, any social needs were met outside of the installation’s college system while the soldiers’ commitment to their respective college was at least partly based on “the traditional indicators of
academic integration” (Wilson et al., 2013, p. 640). The findings of these studies appear to support Pascarella et al.’s (1983) contention that commuter students may not experience social integration at all or may experience social integration in different ways.

Gender. In Pascarella et al.’s (1986) study, knowing a faculty member, a social integration variable, was more conducive to persistence for men while social components such as leadership and holding a school office were more so for women. In Ewert’s (2012) study, a female student’s higher grades increased their academic integration but men’s participation in sports offered them greater likelihood of persistence. These results supported Tinto’s (1993) assertion that students who socially integrate into their institution through participation in athletics and clubs are more likely to persist. These results were applicable to residential Bible colleges with sports programs and student leadership opportunities at the non-residential Bible college.

Economic and familial integration. The concepts of economic and familial integration are fairly new and, so far, have only been applied to doctoral candidates. However, the definitions appear to be abstract enough to encompass other groups. Also, a discussion of economic integration and the influence of finances on students in general may touch on the economic influence of a student’s decision to persist.

Economic integration. Problems arising from a student’s financial status may affect their ability to continue their studies due to tuition costs, which the student’s family may not be able to afford, or the necessity to work while attending college. Indeed, students of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to attain any postsecondary education than those students from higher socioeconomic levels (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Financial aid, be it in the form of student loans or work-study programs, may either go unused or take
students away from campus where they will miss out on integrative activities but is also an effective short-term answer to students experiencing acute financial difficulty (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) went on to state that financial stress impacts students individually dependent upon the “interactive character of student experiences on campus” (p. 180), which means that students who have positive integrative experiences will be more likely to withstand greater financial pressures. Adams, Meyers, and Beidas (2016) found no statistically significant direct effect of financial strain on academic and social integration or psychological symptoms indicating “the influence of perceived stress serves to increase the negative effects of financial strain on psychological symptomology and on academic and social integration” (p. 366). Kerkvliet and Nowell (2005) argued that financial aid may affect retention either positively or negatively depending on the university type. Students attending a research university reported that work-study financial aid may increase retention while receiving grants may not. Smaller commuter-type university study results offered “weak evidence that grants increase retention, but Veterans Administration assistance does not” (Kerkvliet & Nowell, 2005, p. 94).

Another approach to finances and persistence that may provide insight to undergraduate students in Bible colleges is the relatively new term of economic integration found mostly in doctoral candidate persistence literature. Economic integration was introduced into a doctoral persistence model developed by Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) to better describe “the degree to which students’ financial needs are met while pursuing the doctorate” (p. 117). In their mixed study, the researchers found that economic integration, particularly the components of work and financial support, were factors moderately related to the time taken by candidates to complete their doctorate (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Spaulding (2016) examined data from 148 online doctoral students to explore how their integration and the
university’s institutional characteristics impacted their persistence. Academic, social, and familial integration were found to significantly support student persistence, but economic integration and financial support did not contribute significantly to explaining online doctoral persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016). Another consideration regarding this study, apart from the abstract nature of the definition of economic integration and its application toward Bible college students, was its application to nontraditional students, in this case students learning online, which may be transferrable to Bible college students who may be adults, commuters, or online learners. The financial aspects of attending college were factors in traditional and nontraditional students who enjoyed the low tuition at their Bible colleges.

**Familial integration.** The influence of family has been found to be an important aspect of student persistence to include family support (Tierney, 1999; Tinto, 1993; Wagner, 2015) and their expectations (Torres, 2006) but is also an environmental factor that institutions have little control over (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Familial integration is another term used recently in doctoral persistence research that may be useful in a study of Bible college undergraduate persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014) developed the construct of familial integration, defined as the degree to which a student’s perception of family member connectedness was met during their degree pursuit, in their grounded theory study explaining the effect of poverty on persistence doctoral students. They found that familial integration was an important factor in doctoral student persistence because it helped students to understand why they forfeited their own desires to ensure their family members felt “cared for and valued” (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014, p. 196) during the doctoral pursuit, postponed their degree when the family needs warranted this action, and pursued the degree to better meet economical needs of their children and spouses.
Later in their quantitative study of online doctoral candidates, Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) found that family integration was a significant predictor of the candidates’ persistence to the extent that those with good familial integration were twice as likely to persist in their programs as those who exhibited poor family integration.

**Spiritual Integration**

Spiritual integration, or spiritual fit, was found to be an important factor for students who decided to persist in Christian institutions (Schreiner, 2000). The formulation of the spiritual fit concept occurred during the development of a report that interpreted the data collected by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities’ (CCCU) longitudinal study entitled Taking Values Seriously: Assessing the Mission of Church-Related Higher Education which was supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) (Schreiner, 2000). The study’s results were synthesized with the results of another CCCU effort called the Quality/Retention Project. Retention information was analyzed using the lens provided by Tinto’s (1993) theory of student departure. Specifically, the concept of fit was used to assess a student’s academic and social integration, or fit, into the institution. Apparently, assessing only institutional fit will not adequately address the spiritual aspect of enrolling as a student in Christian colleges and universities.

In order to better understand student persistence in a Christian college, Schreiner (2000) developed the following statements from students who self-reported as having a high level of spiritual fit:

(a) they feel comfortable with the level of spirituality on campus; (b) they are growing spiritually, and attribute that growth to being on campus; (c) they are satisfied with the opportunities for ministry available to them; (d) they find the
support they need on campus when they are struggling with doubts and questions; (e) they are challenged to critically examine their faith and values, within a context of supportive relationships; (f) they feel comfortable talking to faculty and staff about faith issues; (g) their understanding of God is being strengthened by experiences they are having in the classroom and elsewhere on; and (h) they are learning ways of connecting “knowing” with “doing” – connecting their knowledge of God with living a lifestyle that is congruent with that knowledge. (Schreiner, 2000, p. 10)

Additionally, the FIPSE and CCCU Quality/Retention projects indicated three student perceptions regarding their spiritual integration (Morris et al., 2003; Schreiner, 2000). The first indicator was a student’s development of a Christian worldview. The second indicator concerned a student’s perception of their identity formation as well as their level of faith. The third indicator dealt with a student’s perception of their ability to interact with their faculty about faith, their spiritual growth, opportunities to participate in ministries, and the classroom integration of faith and learning (Schreiner, 2000). Although Schreiner (2000) provided invaluable insight into spiritual integration, she did not provide a definition of this concept nor was she able to develop a process that describes the student’s understandings, behaviors, or senses of being that led to their perception of spiritual integration into their institution. It is also important to note that a definition of spiritual integration does not describe a process that explains how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the United States. Nor, for that matter, does a definition explain the role of spiritual integration specifically in this process in regards to persistence. Lastly, although the information from the report was from a multiple institutional study and provided crucial data for the continued development of spiritual
integration as a concept, the study only provided data that was descriptive in nature and was not vetted by a peer review process.

**Spiritual Integration Indicators**

Schreiner’s (2000) indicators of spiritual integration, when discussed with Bible college students in mind, provided a sound foundation for understanding factors that may have contributed to their persistence. Interactions between students and faculty as well as students and their peers were important factors in students’ understanding of their institutions’ goals and values. This review offers a foundation of identity development literature that builds toward an explanation of Christian identity. The integration of faith and learning allows faculty and students alike to relate their spiritual values with their curriculum and may be an important aspect of introducing students to the importance of a Christian worldview. The section of the review that covers worldview offers the reader a brief history of the concept and its importance to students’ ability to evaluate their environment. Lastly, studies and articles that focused on students’ spiritual growth and ministry within an educational context were included in the review.

**Student, faculty and peer interactions.** One of Schreiner’s (2000) indicators of student spiritual integration was their ability to interact with faculty in order to learn more about their faith, grow spiritually, and serve in ministries. The Barna Group (2017) recently conducted a non-peer reviewed study for the ABHE. The overall study assessed prospective Christian students’ \( N = 1,202 \) responses to a survey, of which a subset were students inclined to attend a Bible college \( n = 293 \). Regarding the responses by the students who were inclined to attend a Bible college, (a) 40% wanted to discern God’s plan for their lives, (b) 33% wanted to grow spiritually during their time at college, and (c) 30% wanted to learn more about the Bible. In
fact, the current study found that interactions with faculty and peers was an important consideration for Bible college students who wished to learn more about their faith and grow spiritually.

Student interactions with faculty and peers can impact how students view their institution, their persistence, and how they learn to live Christian values. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated that student interactions with faculty socialize students to the values and norms of their learning institution and bonds students to the institution when these interactions, and also interactions with peers, are positive. They also mentioned how interactions with peers were consistently statistically significant in studies touting its effect on student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Only a little later, researchers studying the interaction effects of postsecondary intervention programs on student retention found that students involved in an institution’s social and intellectual life are more likely to persist and that students who are prepared for college would benefit from programs that encourage interactions with peers, staff and faculty (Bai & Pan, 2009). Student-faculty and peer interactions that occur within a residential community can foster a greater understanding of how to live Christian values and enhance the ability of students to build relationships, a concept that Sriram and McLevain (2016) said sets a Christian institution of learning apart from more secular universities.

It is important to consider how students perceive their instructors and how class size can influence the frequency of faculty interactions. Sidelinger et al. (2016) relied heavily on Tinto’s (1975) interactional theory, and Tinto’s (1997) assertion that the classroom acts as the gateway to the overall college experience, when their study’s findings indicated a student’s positive perception of their rapport with the instructor predicted peer learning, student-to-student connectedness, and self-regulation (Sidelinger et al., 2016). This correlation between the
variables of instructor rapport and student-to-student connectedness may indicate the importance of positive interactions within the classroom as well as student social integration activities outside of the classroom. Conversely, poor interactions within the classroom might have negative ramifications for social integration outside of the classroom (Sidelinger et al., 2016). In the same vein, faculty whom students perceived to have exhibited nonverbal immediacy behaviors such as eye contact, variation in voice, smiling, and open body positions tend to have considered these instructors as credible sources of course related content, which enhanced their level of commitment to the course and their pursuit of a college degree (Wheeless, Witt, Maresh, Bryand, & Schrodt, 2011). Large class sizes may result in a reduction of students’ interactions with both their faculty and fellow students, a phenomenon more keenly felt by Latino and first-generation students (Beattie & Thiele, 2016).

Student-to-faculty interactions were examined to determine their effects on student outcomes (Chan & Wang, 2016; D’Amico et al., 2014). Chan and Wang (2016) sorted student and faculty interactions into three categories, taking into consideration the student’s motivation, to include interactions based on (a) demands of the curriculum, (b) broader purposes in regards to education, and (c) reasons that were diversity-related. The only interaction category that was positively associated with an educational outcome, in this case GPA, was interaction based on broader purposes in regards to education while the diversity-related interaction tended to moderate the “negative relationship between college readiness and the likelihood of retention/graduation” (Chan & Wang, 2016, p. 41). Meeting with an advisor, a form of student interactions, was found to be a significant predictor of GPA while meeting with faculty was found to be without statistical significance for academic outcomes for students transferring from community college to a four-year university (D’Amico et al., 2014).
The construct of race and the influence of interracial interactions within the campus environment are important considerations given their prominence in persistence literature. African American undergraduate women experience classroom dynamics differently than other demographics (Booker, 2016). These women experience challenges in the form of microaggressions, a subtle form of rejection, from both faculty and peers and feel a need to be the classroom’s representative of the African American race when only a few of their race were in the class (Booker, 2016). The results of the qualitative study of six African American female participants illustrated how these women were more likely to persist when faculty displayed authenticity in their instruction and were both approachable and accessible (Booker, 2016). Professors may be less able than students to perceive the presence of bias, such as the aforementioned microaggressions, in the classroom and may be more likely than their students to perceive their mitigation efforts as successful (Boysen, Vogel, Cope, & Hubbard, 2009). Student interactions across racial lines as well as participation in diversity-promoting activities had positive effects on student-faculty contact (Cole, 2007). In fact, a college’s multicultural context, where a high number of minorities increase the likelihood of interracial contact, can influence the intellectual development of students. This is especially so when college administrators ensure that both nonminority and minority students are encouraged to act as academic tutors (Cole, 2007).

**Christian identity.** People who attend college may do so in order to better understand and develop their identity. In a study commissioned by the ABHE to capture trends in the Bible college landscape, individuals representative of the American population ($N = 1,011$) were asked the purpose of going to college; 27% stated that they wanted to discover who they were (Barna Group, 2017). This may illustrate a general desire for prospective college students to become
better acquainted with their inner selves. The construct of identity was mentioned by Schreiner (2000) as an indicator of spiritual integration and appeared to be an overall important student characteristic in the Barna study and was certainly determined in the current study of Bible college students. In order to understand Christian identity, it is prudent to look briefly at identity development.

Erikson began to examine the area of psychological development by taking into consideration “the vast influence of society on development” (Miller, 2011, p. 144). Erikson’s (1956) theory focused on how identity develops in a sequential manner and covered the human lifespan in eight stages. Each of these stages includes a crisis that individuals must successfully confront before they can move on to the next stage or, when unsuccessful, remain moribund or even regress (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The first four stages take the human lifespan from infancy to the school age years. The fifth stage occurs during adolescence, from 12 to 19 years, where the crisis faced is whether individuals have decided upon their identity or must contend with identity diffusion (Erikson, 1956). Erikson (1988) remarked that defining ego identity is difficult due to its complicated nature; however, the overriding meaning of it all, then, is the creation of a sense of sameness, a unity of personality now felt by the individual and recognized by others as having a consistency in time – of being, as it were, an irreversible historical fact. (pp. 11-12)

Put another way, *Webster’s New College Dictionary* (2008) defined identity as “the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a continuing entity” (p. 562). In adolescence, the individual has either settled on a distinct individuality or has fallen into identity diffusion where they are unable to “integrate their identities, roles, or selves” (Miller, 2011, p. 154).
Identity crisis and commitment. Marcia (1966) developed his theory of ego identity, building on Erikson’s (1956) psychosocial theory with its focus on crisis and commitment, where individuals begin to settle on an occupation and adopt their personal ideologies. As individuals progress toward societal citizenship, they must incorporate their childhood identities, most often taken from their parents, into the identities they develop as they continue into adulthood (Marcia, 1966). This movement toward a person’s established identity from a more inchoate one should occur “in such a way that he can both establish a reciprocal relationship with his society and maintain a feeling of continuity within himself” (Marcia, 1966, p. 551).

A person must experience a crisis and exhibit commitment in order to achieve a well-established, or mature, identity (Marcia, 1966). The crisis occurs when the individual must make a choice between meaningful “ideological and role options and involves expending energy trying out a variety of ideologies and roles” (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011, p. 183). People show commitment when they invest a significant amount of energy and time toward a specific ideology, which is a combination of religion and politics, or role (Marcia, 1966).

Identity statuses. A person must navigate among four identity statuses as they progress toward the ultimate status of identity achievement. People can engage with these statuses in any order. The first is identity diffusion where the person failed to commit to any ideology or role while experience with a crisis may or may not have occurred. Characteristics of this status include an ambivalent attitude toward choosing an occupation, lack of interest in embracing any ideology, or a tendency to pick and choose from several ideological options. Individuals in the moratorium status experience a crisis period as they struggle with occupational and ideological options with only a vague notion to commit (Marcia, 1966). The struggle with commitment differentiates moratorium from diffusion. Indeed, individuals in the moratorium status
experience a high level of anxiety arising from conflict from their election to choose values different from their parents (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011). In the third status, *identity foreclosure*, the individual has yet to experience a crisis while exhibiting a desire for commitment. Individuals in identity foreclosure may have difficulty in determining whether their espoused goals come from within or were given to them by their parents (Marcia, 1966). This status may also include inflexibility, tendencies toward superiority complexes, and a reliance on authorities to affirm life choices (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011). The final status of *identity achievement* describes people who have experienced crisis and were able to commit to roles and ideologies of their own choosing. Characteristics of identity achievement, where individuals “exhibit lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of self-esteem” (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011, p. 184), include the ability to successfully support interpersonal relationships, reach decisions based in logic, be contemplative, and engage in self-examination.

*Doubt and identity.* Building on Marcia’s (1966) statuses of ego identity achievement, Baltazar and Coffen (2011) examined the element of doubt as a factor that contributes to positive religious identity development. They contended that although religion does tend to exhibit an aversion to doubt it does, as a concept in regard to identity development, deserve more attention as one of the “fundamental elements necessary for attaining religious identity achievement” (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011, p. 188). A study did show a positive correlation of doubt with moratorium but a negative correlation with the status of identity foreclosure (Hunsberger, Pratt & Pancer, 2001) prompting Baltazar and Coffen (2011) to view doubt as an important component of a crisis event leading to a healthy identity status. In an earlier study of 336 college students who were first surveyed as high school students, doubt was seen as the student’s belief that reliance on religion does not always make a person better, that pressuring young students to
accept religious beliefs was concerning, and that biblical precepts are infallible (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2002). The presence of doubt in a collegiate context was related to a decrease in students’ religiousness, caused those experiencing doubt to consult non-religious sources for assistance, and was positively but weakly related to depression (Hunsberger et al., 2002).

Baltazar and Coffen (2011) posited that doubt leads to exploration. This exploration, especially when exercised by identity achieved individuals, can lead to knowledge that results from a consideration of belief-affirming and belief-refuting information – thus encompassing both sides of an issue (Hunsberger et al., 2001). The following is an explanation of how doubt leads to new knowledge:

While known information would be automatically assimilated and organized in harmony with past knowledge, the presence of doubt forces the individual to question past knowledge, and to develop new ways to integrate previous and newly acquired knowledge into a harmonious and consistent new discovery.

(Baltazar & Coffen, 2011, p. 189)

It may be healthier for faculty to engage students in discussions regarding their doubts as opposed to thwarting their efforts to explore all avenues of information – even if that discussion includes knowledge that may be considered anathema to an institution’s worldview (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011).

**Christian student identity.** Formation of a student’s identity is a complicated construct as their time in college is one of rapid development (Rhea, 2011). Indeed, it appears that students’ high school identities can transform as they enter college and that the transformation, or continued identity development, may be heavily influenced by external expectations of faculty and peers (Wilkins, 2014). Students measure their success as individuals through whom they...
date, the level of their academic grades, and feats of athletic prowess for those who partake in collegiate sports (Rhea, 2011). The Christian student’s identity, however, is unique in that it must take precedence over all other personal identity characteristics:

What makes a Christian understanding of identity unique, we believe, is that it posits a normative ideal for how one should understand and order one’s identities . . . we argue that an essential claim of the Christian tradition is that one’s Christian identity is one’s most important and fundamental identity over and above one’s other identities (e.g., national, ethnic, familial, vocational, etc.). In fact, one can only properly understand oneself and these other identities in light of one’s Christian identity and the Christian story that gives meaning to that identity. (Glanzer & Ream, 2005, pp. 16-17)

It is imperative for Christian students to receive instruction that compels them to embrace “the knowledge that enduring significance only comes from God” so that they can find their “identity in Christ” (Rhea, 2011, p. 6). Scripture provides the knowledge that compels these students to seek out this identification with Christ (Rhea, 2011) and take the necessary steps to align their identities accordingly. In light of this, Christian colleges and universities should provide support to students as they determine their identity’s components and prioritize them. This would occur within formal campus activities that expose students to Christian practices, such as chapel services, and within the curriculum. Assistance within the curriculum would enhance their comprehension of their identities and the ordering of their loves, those things that are held dear by an individual that also inform their moral lives, relative to their identities. Glanzer and Ream (2005) posited that “such an understanding and ordering involves helping the student live and think about their own stories, first and foremost, in light of Christianity’s story and the community – the Church – that embodies it” (p. 19).
Authenticity is also important to a student’s Christian identity. Evangelical students who participated in a phenomenological study that examined their experiences in two public universities most often used the word authentic when describing their religious identity (Moran et al., 2007). This term was used to determine the difference between people who were actively involved in the Christian faith from those who merely identified themselves as Christian but did not exhibit the commensurate lifestyle. These same students remarked that a Christian identity includes a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, encompasses the person’s whole life not just a compartment within that life, and ensures that a student’s studies are done to the best of their ability for the glory of Christ (Moran, 2007). Students who construct and publicly express, through authentic actions and behavior, a Christian identity may place themselves at odds with faculty and assistants who express negative statements about Christianity, students who respectfully discuss religious identities other than Christian but are antagonistic of Christianity, and instructors who assume that all students engage in behavior averse to Christian values (Moran, 2007; Moran, et al., 2007). Christian students today are less likely to make their denomination a part of their Christian identity but, when choosing their college, will base their selection on a college’s Christian identity (Glanzer, Rine, & Davignon, 2013).

A Christian student’s identity, even when mature and healthy, can actually become a detractor for them in the classroom (Bryant, 2005). Self-reported evangelical Christian students residing on the campus of a large, research university remarked on how they felt compelled to set their beliefs and values aside in order to be successful academically, especially in the area of science (Bryant, 2005). These evangelical students “ascribed to an absolutist perspective on truth” and were very aware of how other students stereotyped Christians as “forceful, unintelligent fundamentalists” (Bryant, 2005, p. 24). In the academe, evangelical Christians
have been perceived as shunning any intellectual foray that could possibly uncover a truth different from their beliefs (Bryant, 2008). This is in stark contrast to the notion of Christian privilege described by Riswold (2015) as the unearned and invisible benefits afforded Christians. Christians are members of the religious group who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and have adopted, in whole or in part, the precepts found in the Bible. Specifically, Riswold (2015) asserted that Christianity is the “cultural and spiritual norm in the undergraduate classroom” creating an environment that provided Christian students with “unearned tools and special provisions that individuals can count on using, and about which they are never meant to be aware” (p. 136).

However, it is apparent that evangelical students who reside on secular university campuses do encounter challenges to their Christian beliefs in the classroom, respect the belief systems of others, and adhere to their Christian values in the face of peer behavior that is in opposition to biblical precepts (Bryant, 2005). In fact, these students may have experienced cultural incongruity (Moran et al., 2007). Cultural incongruity occurs when students who belong to two cultures experience differences with the beliefs, values, and behavioral expectations between the two cultures (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996), which is similar to Tinto’s (1993) use of the term incongruence to describe “the mismatch or lack of fit between the needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution” (p. 50). Additionally, while evangelical students voiced their uneasiness with the non-evangelical student cultures’ proclivity for alcohol consumption and sexual relationships, they were very open to learning and discussing the religious beliefs and practices of non-Christians (Bryant, 2005) and evaluating religious perspectives of others in a critical manner (Bryant, 2008).
Christian identity and faculty. Warning faculty of the potential harm of tacit assumptions, presumably those arising from Christian privilege, to stifle the free and open sharing of values and beliefs that encourage learning and promote critical thinking is both responsible and reasonable (Riswold, 2015). Indeed, when students learn in the college classroom how the unintentional focus on their traditions can become a detriment to those who are not part of that tradition, they begin to “realize the ways in which power and authority are related to the construction of knowledge and values” (Bauman et al., 2014, p. 307). However, it is unfair, and perhaps even harmful, to imply that undergraduate students who are open about their Christian identities do not face outright challenges to their beliefs in the classroom or are unconcerned about any potential harm to non-Christian students when Christianity is the predominate faith. Presumably, this will not be the case in a Bible college where students are most likely encouraged to discuss their Christian identity, non-Christian students attending a Bible college are prepared to hear about the Christian faith, and faculty are eager to strengthen the religious aspects of their students’ identities.

Faculty can use several methods in the classroom to enhance students’ understanding of identity. They can model to students the value and knowledge gained from stories of how God has worked with the world through people of faith (Glazner & Ream, 2005). These stories encourage students to place their Christian identity above all others and to include their identities of gender, class, and nationality (Glazner & Ream, 2005). Faculty, especially those adept at authentically expressing themselves within the student-faculty context (Booker, 2016), can act as mentors by modeling their self-expression in a manner that encourages students to respond with their own authentic self-expression. This would assist the Christian students who may not have a
safe environment or a specific person such as a mentor to discuss questions they may have regarding their identities, faith and doubts (Bryant, 2008).

Faculty may face some challenges in the classroom arising from their students’ generation (Bauman et al., 2014). Millennial students, those born between 1980 and 2000, may embrace a specific religion but engage in practices outside of that religion, such as Christians that practice meditation (Bauman et al., 2014). There are also many students from this generation who have not adopted their parents’ religious beliefs and are thus more comfortable not identifying with any religion at all in the collegiate environment (Bauman et al., 2014; Riswold, 2015). This situation may be exacerbated by the technological advances that have allowed millennials access to unprecedented amounts of information, some of it spurious, without any corresponding increase in their ability to think critically about religion or their place in the global milieu (Bauman et al., 2014).

Integration of faith and learning. Bible college students are eager to learn how they can integrate faith into learning and their lives. The Barna Group (2016) conducted a study for the ABHE that sheds light on prospective Bible college students and the integration of faith and learning (IFL). Data for the study, which has not yet been peer reviewed, was gathered from over 6,000 individuals, including current Bible college students, prospective students, parents, and leaders in faith enterprises (Barna Group, 2016). Prospective Christian students who were likely to apply to a Bible college ($n = 171$) were asked to provide their main reasons they would consider enrolling in a Bible college. More than half, or 54%, responded that they were applying to Bible colleges to learn how to integrate their faith into every part of their lives and 44% reported a desire to integrate their Christian faith into their academics (Barna Group, 2016).
The importance of integrating faith and learning has been the subject of many discussions that focus on clarifying the meaning of this type of integration (Badley, 1994), the importance of this concept to higher education faculty (Esqueda, 2014) as well how adopting a Christian worldview may be a way to successfully introduce this integration into the classroom (Harris, 2004). The concept of worldview becomes a part of this discussion in that researchers recommend that a person’s worldview can assist them in IFL (Badley, 1994; Harris, 2004).

Evangelical institutions of learning, part of the Christian college movement, adopted IFL as a means to establish their two goals of embracing “their conservative theological convictions while fostering a relationship with academia, to view all the fields of knowledge as proper for study” (Badley, 1994, p. 16). What exactly is integration, which appears to be very important to Christian education, when applied to faith and learning? Five integration paradigms provided more structure to this term (Badley, 1994). The first is fusion integration, which refers to two elements flowing together so well that they become a new entity. Incorporation integration means that one element flows into, and eventually disappears into, another element. The third paradigm, correlation integration, is where two elements are shown to share common intersect points but do not join together. Dialogical integration denotes a high correlation between elements without an ability to identify the intersections where “one of the two elements is usually an activity or discipline and the other is usually an ethical, political, religious, or procedural view or framework” where it is possible to “claim that a conversation has begun between the two areas” (Badley, 1994, p. 25). The final paradigm is perspectival integration, which adopts a student’s worldview to provide the lens, or perspective, that allows disparate issues, constructs, and concepts to coalesce into an overarching framework (Badley, 1994). This final paradigm, which may take the concept of integration to its limits (Badley, 1994), leverages
the worldview concept in much the same way as other researchers have recommended the use of a student’s worldview to promote IFL (Esqueda, 2014; Harris, 2004).

When individuals learn something new, they integrate that knowledge with existing knowledge. This is actually a process where people connect new experiences, or learning, with knowledge constructed in the past (Harris, 2004). To bring order to learning, there must be both consistency and coherence. Consistency refers to our attempts to either place new things with similar knowledge or adjust the new through interpretation or outright rejection, so that learning sustains order and avoids chaos. Coherence provides the learner with unity of knowledge that addresses new experiences and finds harmony with those constructed over time (Harris, 2004).

Integrating new things into one’s intellect consistently and coherently must occur within a framework of one’s values, beliefs, and constructed knowledge (Harris, 2004). This is where a person’s Christian faith, derived from a reliance on biblical precepts as truth, can become that lens through which individuals can discern what new information fits with their existing knowledge. Harris (2004) further stated that the integration of learning and faith must be intentional in order to avoid the separation of Christian knowledge from other knowledge.

**Issues that hinder IFL.** Christians may experience subtle but serious ramifications when they separate their knowledge gained from their beliefs from other knowledge. Researchers have commented on cultural dissonance among Christian believers as a result of the dualisms, or the separation of Christian knowledge from all other knowledge, prevalent in Western cultures (Esqueda, 2014; Iselin & Meteyard, 2010). In fact, there exists a split between the sacred and the secular that permeates the metaphysical cultural practices of the West (Kim et al., 2012) as is evident in the separation of church and state that embodies the American ideal for political governance (Esqueda, 2014). This dualism may be mostly responsible for the problem within
the academe where Christian educators who practice their faith in a church environment fail to acknowledge the spiritual when delivering instruction. Educators may avoid discussing the big questions, such as “the meaning of life, our purpose in the universe, responsibilities and obligations to ourselves, others and the earth, discerning right from wrong, and questions regarding the existence and nature of a higher power, being or force in the universe” (Valk, 2012, p. 162) in the classroom due to a fear of appearing injunctive or of failing to live up to biblical standards. Faculty who practice the concept of dualism, whether knowingly or unknowingly, may have adopted an ideology or philosophy that interferes with their efforts to integrate their faith with learning.

Faculty who separate their faith from the curriculum or who espouse ideologies contradicting biblical beliefs may find it difficult to integrate faith and learning. Educators who teach at Christian-affiliated institutions may have earned their academic degrees in more secular colleges or universities where they were taught to keep their faith out of the classroom (Moroney, 2014). It may be possible for Christians to hold a postmodern ideology that refuses to acknowledge the existence of absolute biblical truth (Harris, 2004) and, while not understanding the contradictions of their faith and ideology, believe in Christ but see Him as one of many approaches to their faith (Kanitz, 2005). Postmodern Christians may hold a post-foundationalism epistemology that deconstructs previously held truths – they may believe that God is an eternal being who is perfect but may not agree with the traditionally held truth that the Bible was divinely inspired and is, therefore, open to doubt (McMahone, Locke, & Roller, 2015). These circumstances may produce Christian educators who teach in the same way instructors do at secular institutions (Esqueda, 2014). Since “faculty is the key element and the greatest influence for authentic Christian education” (Esqueda, 2014, p. 98), it becomes more apparent
that they should be the vanguard of any effort to successfully integrate faith and learning in the classroom – perhaps an impossible task when faculty struggle with dualism or hold ideologies that may make the connection between faith and learning even more difficult for the believing student.

Even when faculty do their part, true integration does not occur unless students are able to make the connections themselves (Badley, 1994). A disconnect may occur when Christian-postmodern students are taught by faculty with more traditional ideologies (Watson, 2007). For example, students may admonish traditional instructors as being judgmental when they question the ethics of Christians who find employment in the pornography industry (McMahone et al., 2015). It is the responsibility of faculty to examine their personal philosophies and teaching practices to ensure their students can integrate their faith with new knowledge even when it is the student who espouses a philosophy that may impede the integration.

The practice of integrating faith in learning. Bible college students benefit from faculty who learned to practice IFL during their postsecondary education or from curriculum where IFL was built-in. Sites, Garzon, Milacci, and Boothe (2009) examined how eight student-nominated college instructors understood and practiced IFL. In this phenomenological study, the researchers discovered that each participant described their faith in ontological terms, where faith was a part of their very being, making the separation of faith from their instruction impossible. In fact, one participant stated that “I don’t separate out my ‘secular life’ from my ‘faith life’” (Sites et al., 2009, p. 32). These faculty participants were able to infuse their instruction with their faith, a type of faith-praxis integration that describes a person’s ability to authentically live out their faith in everyday activities, including their vocations (Bouma-Prediger, 1990), and were able to demonstrate their faith with their students and within several other relational contexts.
(Sites et al., 2009). The “natural out flowing of one’s faith and being into the pedagogical, relational and community contexts of academic life,” (Sites et al., 2009, p. 36), which the researchers called ontological foundation, described a quality of the adept faculty that students thought was “the most helpful in their learning of integration” (Sites et al., 2009, p. 36).

Developing a curriculum that integrates faith with learning by illustrating a relationship between the Christian faith and science may assist students in developing “their identity as scientists without abandoning their Christian identity” (McCoy, 2014, p. 341). McCoy (2014), along with faculty from a Christian university, created a process to integrate faith into physics courses – a process that can work in any discipline. The faculty selected two program learning outcomes before they set about developing a faith integration curriculum to include (a) ensuring course graduates are able to settle any reasonable internal dissonance between a scientific and biblical worldview, and (b) ensuring course graduates are able to evaluate the role of the scientist’s provision of information to the public regarding the use of scientific knowledge as well as technology (McCoy, 2014). They then adopted themes to guide the integration of faith into the curriculum to include “characteristics of scientists, nature of science and scientific worldview, the role of science and technology in society, and theological implications” of the course content (McCoy, 2014, p. 343). After this they developed topics related to the curriculum’s subject matter that were compatible with the themes. Topics were selected that would illuminate any faith-related aspects of the discipline and were appropriately broad enough to allow faculty adequate leeway when presenting the information to their students. The object of the enterprise was to find connections between the discipline and students’ goals and values, develop professionals who are effective in their vocations as well as faithful to their discipline, and continually build upon students’ understanding of their discipline (McCoy, 2014). Quinn,
Foote, & Williams (2012) approached this in the online environment with nontraditional students by adopting a series of lenses when developing online curriculum: (a) the learner lens that focuses on those qualities unique to the student; (b) the process lens that emphasizes how to integrate faith into the learning process; (c) the educator lens where the instructor reflects deeply on their own philosophy, roles, and assumptions to ensure they are teaching within a biblical worldview; and (d) the context lens that “creates a positive and effective context for adult learning and the facilitation of the biblical context of fellowship and community as well” (p. 172).

An institution’s religious identity and its reputed ability to integrate faith in learning may attract students who hold a literal interpretation of Scripture (Davignon, 2016). In order to examine the reasons why students decided to attend Christian universities, researchers queried 6,318 undergraduate students from 31 institutions affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). Overall, students who attend CCCU colleges and universities tended to make their decisions to attend a college based on financial as well as academic reputation. Students who espouse a belief in Scripture’s literal interpretation were more likely to choose their college due to its Christian identity and academic reputation. Additionally, students whose choice of college was influenced by its Christian identity were more likely to find great satisfaction with the institution’s IFL (Davignon, 2016). This echoed Wolf’s (2011) contention that universities that wish to maintain their identity as Christian must continue to uphold the qualities and characteristics that set them apart from more secular institutions, such as the influence that faith, based in biblical precepts, exerts on the institution’s students and faculty. Additionally, Alleman (2015) found that faculty who were educated in
Christian institutions tended to believe that there was a connection between the curriculum and their faith – more so than faculty educated in secular colleges.

**Worldview.** This review has already mentioned the Christian worldview as an indicator of student spiritual integration (Schreiner, 2000), as something students desire in their faculty (Morris et al., 2004), as an important component of IFL (Esqueda, 2014; Harris, 2004), and as an important aspect of Christian curriculum development (McCoy, 2014). This section of the review describes worldview as a concept and its importance as a possible means to gauge a Bible college student’s faith development.

The worldview concept, *Weltanschauung* in the original German, was coined by Immanuel Kant in 1790 to describe how humans sense the world around them. Later, European philosophers, theologians and poets employed the term to help them explain how human beings perceive reality, even the universe, in a more intellectual and contemplative fashion (Naugle, 2002). It was not until the early twentieth century that American and English academicians adopted worldview as a concept, not unlike philosophy, that was useful in their attempts to develop their views of life (Naugle, 2002).

More recently, Kim et al. (2012) offered, “a worldview represents the framework from which we base our understanding of reality as well as life’s meaning and purpose” (p. 206). It has also been described as an “individual’s frame of reference or life philosophy” with a religious or spiritual quality or in a non-religious context (Bryant, 2011a). Rhea (2011) stated that a worldview acted as a lens, consisting of individuals’ values and beliefs, through which they evaluated their environment, or according to Kim et al. (2012), assessed cultural expressions from the arts, media, political discourse, and education. An individual’s personal worldview is not static but continues to mature throughout life as is most likely the case with students whose
worldviews continue to develop as they undergo the spiritual and secular experiences found in college (Wolf, 2011).

Rockenbach et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study of written survey responses from 1,071 college students to examine their views on spirituality. This was accomplished using the students’ worldviews as a means to allow them to express their distinctive views on spirituality. The researchers found that religions/worldviews, whether based in mainline religions, minority religions such as Buddhism, or non-religious worldviews, view spirituality in different ways but do share common elements. Common traits among students of diverse religion/worldviews included transcendent (rising above one’s own locus of centricity) and immanent connectivity (seeking authenticity and wholeness) involved an orientation toward a higher power and included an internal strength along with a high level of self-understanding (Rockenbach et al., 2015).

**Christian worldview.** Christian theologians adopted the worldview concept and gave it their own interpretation of how God’s revelation, as learned through the Holy Bible, should inform believers’ approach to their existence in God’s creation, the fall of humankind due to sin, and the plan of ultimate human redemption through Jesus Christ (Naugle, 2002). When Christians establish their worldview, it provides them a means to discern the unreal from the real, recognize the wrong from the right, and differentiate between the unimportant and important (Kim et al., 2012). Similarly, Wolf (2011) posited that individuals’ Christian worldviews are not exclusively assessed by agreement with biblical doctrine but are in fact a “set of overarching assumptions one holds about the sense of self, how the world works, one’s place in the world, what is important, what is to be valued, and what is to be devalued” (pp. 329-330). The factors of culture, friends, childhood denomination, education, and personal spiritual and religious experiences may heavily influence the worldviews of Christian postsecondary students (Kanitz,
Christian worldviews are diverse and may encompass an ecumenical ideal, may be multidimensional, and even have a racial facet. An ecumenical worldview describes a life philosophy that appreciates the multitude of worldviews an individual may encounter throughout life, espouses a connectedness among all human beings, and accepts everyone’s differences (Bryant, 2011a). It has been described as a feeling of being one with the cosmos and as part of the very fabric of life with an accompanying sense of responsibility to care for others (Astin et al., 2011b). While more spiritual in nature, although it can have religious overtones, the ecumenical worldview in higher education has been a means to achieve a measure of pluralism, which entails active efforts to engage with and understand differences in others, since it has been perceived as more accepting of the many worldviews students will find on campus (Bryant, 2011a).

Encounters with other types of spirituality, religions, and diverse beliefs during curricular and co-curricular activities that are vastly different from their own may trigger a personal crisis within the student, called a religious/spiritual struggle, that can facilitate the adoption of an ecumenical worldview and spur spiritual growth (Bryant, 2011b). Interestingly, a campus context that is open to students’ expressions of spirituality can decrease opportunities for religious/spiritual struggle, which can indirectly diminish ecumenical worldview, uncovering a paradox because this same environment can “directly increase students’ capacity to understand and accept others of diverse perspectives” (Bryant, 2011b, p. 454). In one study, researchers used ecumenical worldview to operationalize the construct of campus religious/worldview
climate to explore its link with student engagement and found that a positive campus religious/worldview climate “is associated with service-learning, study abroad, engaged learning, and interracial interactions” (Bowman, Rockenbach, & Mayhew, 2015, p. 31). The postmodern concept of pluralism that defines ecumenical worldview raised concerns among traditional evangelicals in that it may have promoted exclusivism by discouraging spirited debate among students and faculty with diverse worldviews while also abrogating the Bible as a source of truth (Thiessen, 2007).

Schultz and Swezey (2013) advocated the adoption of a three-dimensional Christian worldview because it includes the propositional dimension of earlier renderings of the concept while also encompassing dimensions of behavior and heart-orientation. Propositional conceptions of worldview were limited by including only a very narrow declaration of Christian doctrine, such as embracing a personal relationship with Christ, or were broader in scope by extending the worldview’s purview to education, law, science, and other disciplines (Schultz & Swezey, 2013). Later, the concept would incorporate a behavioral dimension that considered a person’s actions to better understand their inner allegiance to a Christian worldview. The heart-orientation dimension concerned an individual’s reason, taking into account those qualities attributed to a person’s heart, for adopting the beliefs and behaviors that led them to embrace a Christian worldview.

Schultz (2013) developed a survey instrument to assess K-12 students’ biblical worldviews that incorporated the three dimensions. Morales (2013) altered the survey to fit postsecondary students and subjected the Three Dimensional Worldview Survey – Form C (3DWS-Form C) to a principal components analysis in order to ascertain its underlying structure and construct validity. Using 429 responses to the 3DWS-Form C of first-year students who
resided at a large Christian university, the author confirmed its validity using Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity \((p < 0.05)\), which was significant, and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic of .94. The internal reliability was established using the Cronbach's alpha of .785 \((\alpha = .785)\) and the Spearman-Brown coefficient of .694. The dimensions of behavior and heart-orientation added to the earlier propositional, or informational, belief and knowledge-oriented concepts, created one that is more appropriate for “any age group that is able to receive instruction and therefore applicable to any ministry that purports to develop a Christian worldview” (Schultz & Swezey, 2013, p. 240). Indeed, if the object of a learning institution’s instruction in a Christian worldview is a transformation of the student’s life relying on the “liberating power of biblical truth . . . and the relentless work of the Spirit” (Mittwede, 2013, p. 318), then including the dimension of heart-orientation seems most apropos.

Edgell (2007) delved into African American student spiritual development within the context of an Afrocentric Christian worldview. The Afrocentric worldview places an emphasis on how Christian belief permeates every facet of the individual’s life, which stands in contrast to the Western reliance on a separation of the religious and secular spheres (Edgell, 2007). African students studying in the United States benefited from their Afrocentric worldview through their “involvement with family, involvement with community, and faith” (Edgell, 2007, p. 53). Students with worldviews that are in the minority in a given institution, as may be the case with students who hold the aforementioned Afrocentric Christian worldview and attend a Christian university unaffiliated with their particular faith, may experience a reduced “worldview fit” with their institution (Morris, Beck, & Mattis, 2007, p. 84). Worldview fit, or the degree to which students believe their ideology is compatible with their institution, was operationalized to assess students’ fit with their college in a study consisting of 615 first-semester participants. The study
found that students who persisted to the next calendar year reported higher levels of worldview fit than did students who did not persist (Morris et al., 2007).

**Worldview and faculty.** Bible college faculty with biblical worldviews may benefit Christian students when they avoid the compartmentalization of faith and learning, focus on spiritual as opposed to secular matters, and minister to their students through their worldview. Faculty can espouse a biblical worldview by referring to the Bible as a “worldview story” as well as a narrative that answers questions regarding human origins and the solutions to life’s most vexing problems (Esqueda, 2014, p. 93). Faculty can also enhance their ability in this regard by making the choice to avoid distinguishing “between so-called head-knowledge and heart-knowledge” (Iselin & Meteyard, 2010, p. 32), a hallmark of dualism, by adopting the biblical perspective of the “essential unity of the entire person” (Iselin & Meteyard, 2010, p. 32). Likewise, educators can share the Christian worldview with their students that illuminates the spiritual as opposed to the more materialistic and secular perspectives that predominate in higher education (Valk, 2012). In order for this approach to be effective, Christian educators must embody their worldview and be desirous of connecting themselves, their students, and the curriculum within their own personal ministry (Iselin & Meteyard, 2010) and, as suggested by Wolf (2011), shepherd students through this process through incorporation of biblical concepts, values, and ethics into the instruction in a purposeful manner.

Faculty efforts to know and understand their students’ worldviews can assist them in predicting student outcomes, enhance IFL, and even increase students’ understanding of their own worldviews. Asking students to report their religious/worldview upon entry into college may provide administrators with useful information to predict student outcomes (Bowman, Felix, & Ortis, 2014). Student participants ($N = 1,958$) from the religious/worldview groups of
Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhists from 28 academically-selective colleges and universities were involved in a study to examine the relationship between religious/worldview and student success. The researchers found that students’ religious/worldview were significant predictors of academic achievement, persistence to graduation, satisfaction, and their perceived growth (Bowman et al., 2014).

Students attending Christian institutions, even Bible colleges affiliated with a specific denomination, may interpret Scripture differently than their faculty and their peers. The disparities in student histories, coupled with the instructor’s own hermeneutical background, can create circumstances where a student’s unique interpretation of Scripture or lack of Bible knowledge may impact their development of a biblically-based, Christian worldview (Kanitz, 2005). It is incumbent upon faculty to develop assignments that uncover how students read Scripture and exhort them to engage in critical reflection regarding the influencers of their worldviews. This process of assisting students in developing their Christian worldview, referred to as “evangelizing the mind,” will allow students to approach their learning with a newly-formed, or more fully-articulated, view of their faith (Kanitz, 2005, p. 107). Comparing and contrasting the beliefs and values of different worldviews in an academic setting may allow students to better understand their own worldview (Valk, 2012). One researcher had recent Christian converts compare their biblical-Christian worldview interpretation of sin to the worldview they grew up with in Turkey. This exercise resulted in a remarkably clear explanation of the Christian worldview’s perspective on sin, which may not have been possible if the students were only studying one worldview (Mittwede, 2013).

Bible college administrators have recognized the importance of worldview instruction in general curriculum (Parker & Pettegrew, 2009) and teacher education courses in Bible colleges
(Watson, 2007). However, Christian academe’s embrace of the Christian worldview as a means to integrate IFL may have lacked proper vetting (Thomson, 2012). Failure to properly address past criticisms of worldview as an educational approach, for example an apparent lack of a convincing ontology, have resulted in the worldview concept’s lack of a satisfactory description of the relational dynamics among world environments, human beings, and God (Thomson, 2012).

**Spiritual growth.** Spiritual development is a life-long process. Fowler (1981) approached this development through the lens of human faith where he described a six-stage process that begins during the preschool years and continues through adulthood. Whereas the writer of Hebrews referred to faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” Heb. 11:1 (King James Version), Fowler (1981) described faith as:

> a dynamic existential stance, a way of leaning into and finding or giving meaning to the conditions of our lives . . . a way of knowing and seeing the conditions of our lives in relation to more or less conscious images of an ultimate environment.

(p. 92)

Fowler’s (1981) first two stages of faith, referred to as the *intuitive-projective* and the *mythic-literal*, occur during the preschool years and into the school years, where children begin to acknowledge the existence of God mostly as a product of parental observation, eventually begin to understand God in a more logical sense, and begin to acknowledge the perspectives of others (Fowler, 1981). Stage three, the *synthetic-conventional*, takes place in adolescence where people begin to see themselves as individuals, experience cognitive development, and may consider God as one “who knows, accepts and confirms the self deeply, and who serves as an infinite guarantor of the self with its forming myth of personal identity and faith” (Fowler, 1981, p. 153).
Individuals who inhabit the fourth stage, the *individuative-reflective*, begin to analyze their environments and prior perceptions, depart from their earlier social groups to explore and identify with other groups, and allow their deference to external authority to give way to an inner authority and identity (Fowler, 1981). The fifth stage of *conjunctive faith* is when the individual begins to see the “pattern of interrelatedness in things” (Fowler, 1981, p. 185) where logic gives way to a more abstract way of knowing (Fowler, 1981). People at this stage become more open to other truths but remain confident in their own beliefs. The final stage, the *universalizing faith*, finds a person who radically commits to a sense of all-inclusive justice, love, and selflessness that places all people before themselves (Fowler, 1981).

**College students and spiritual growth.** College students, in a developmental sense, may be moving from Fowler’s (1981) third stage, where they were comfortable in their beliefs inherited from their parents, into the fourth stage where they begin to depart from their parents and begin to realize the need to find a faith that fits their developing identity (Hartley, 2004). Otto and Harrington (2016) agreed that the fourth stage is critical in that students are beginning to think for themselves, are more critical, and are beginning to form religious perspectives.

Astin et al. (2011b) examined how students change in a spiritual and religious sense during their college years. They posited that college students’ spirituality encompassed a sense of their origins and of who they were, the meaning and purpose of their existence, how they connected to their fellow students and the world around them, and included their most cherished values. Their definition of spirituality was very broad as it covered data from their seven-year study of over 15,000 college students from diverse types of institutions to include religious, secular, public, and private (Astin et al., 2011b).
The college environment. The collegiate environment is conducive to student spiritual development. A Christian college, such as a Bible college, must create “a distinct and purposeful atmosphere where spiritual formation is promoted and fostered” (Otto & Harrington, 2016, p. 256). Faculty can contribute to this through frequent interactions with their students by employing instructional practices that center on the students and encourage students to openly share their questions regarding spirituality and religion during class (Astin et al., 2011b).

Many factors contribute to college student spiritual development or growth. College students’ spiritual growth increased when they experienced multiple cultures and perspectives, took part in service learning activities, interacted with races different than their own, joined various student organizations, and when they were able to take advantage of studying in other countries (Astin et al., 2011b). Christian institutions where students find challenges that are both philosophical and emotional in nature create an environment that gives relevance to their faith in their daily lives (Schaffer, 2004). According to Astin et al. (2011b), college students exhibit spirituality when they: (a) actively searched for the answers to life’s meaning and purpose, which the authors referred to as spiritual quest; (b) adopted a worldview that transcended themselves and their own culture; (c) cared and had compassion for others which included a lifestyle of serving; and (d) were able to maintain a sense of calm even when exposed to stressful situations.

Ministry in a Christian higher education context. Field education is a term used in Christian higher education to refer to “non-classroom educational experiences” that may include “internships, practicums, field studies, and work studies” (Atkinson, 2009, p. 9) that exposes students to real-life ministry activities (Atkinson, 2009). This type of educational praxis allows students to experience theory in practice, acquire knowledge and skills within their profession, and grow both personally and professionally (Atkinson, 2009). The ABHE’s Institutional
Accreditation Standards (2014) mandates that Bible college undergraduate curriculum consist of “ministry-oriented and professionally-oriented programs that include practical experiences and applied knowledge through practicums, internships, or other appropriate means” (p.12). Also, any ministry formation programs that include a field education component must promote the development of effective Christian servants and witnesses (Barnett, 2010).

Service learning is the practice of students, as part of their course work, taking part in community-based learning experiences that occur outside of the classroom in a field environment (Astin et al., 2011b). This practice has also been referred to in Christian higher education as a form of field education (Atkinson, 2009) or simply service and learning (Mullen, 2010). Astin and Astin (2015) discussed the power of service learning as a form of civic engagement. Students with service learning experience were more likely to vote, donate to charity, and engage with others in community service projects as well as promote racial understanding and positive political change (Astin & Astin, 2015). Participants also realize pedagogical benefits in the areas of enhanced development and critical thinking (Mullen, 2010).

Service learning can have a biblically-oriented, cross-cultural component that may impact the spirituality of participating students. Detractors of service learning may see this concept as an administrator’s attempt to “promote a communitarian, anti-individualistic social agenda” upon students in order to instill in them a sense of civility or a greater appreciation for social justice (Egger, 2008, p. 183). Marmon (2010) argued against a political agenda when orienting service learning toward minorities or social justice issues. Indeed, according to Marmon (2010), Jesus focused on multiple cultures when he identified the Samaritan, a member of a culture despised by the Hebrews, as a worthy neighbor due to his humanitarian actions (KJV, Luke 10:25-37) and
God made a worldwide covenant with Abraham that ensured “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (New International Version, Gen. 12:3).

Researchers conducted a qualitative inquiry of 23 undergraduate students attending a Christian university in the Midwestern United States to find if involvement in a service learning program impacted students’ spirituality (Firmin et al., 2014). This particular program, an experiential learning exercise that immersed students in an impoverished setting over the course of a weekend, was different from more traditional service learning programs in that students’ participation did not benefit other individuals. Students’ spiritual impact from this program was exhibited through their reevaluation of their Christian preconceptions regarding the homeless, their humility when they realized God’s grace in their lives as opposed to the plight of others, and that all people regardless of circumstances “are meant to be, and can be, included into the Christian family as they too were created in the image of God” (Firmin et al., 2014, p. 141).

Christian service, a type of field education employed mostly within Bible colleges, is where:

Students are required to put in a minimum number of hours a week or semester doing ministry in a local church or faith-based organization approved by the division of Christian service or student ministry. Generally, there is no academic credit given for Christian ministry, but in order to graduate the student must successfully complete the number of ministries required by the college.

(Atkinson, 2009, p. 11)

This paradigm allowed Bible college leaders to incorporate a practical method of learning into the scholastic tradition’s reliance on classroom and instructor-centric instruction (Atkinson, 2009). Students’ total development mandated taking them beyond the
classroom environment into ministry activities in order to change their inner life (Barnett, 2010). This type of learning allowed students to “learn by doing” (Atkinson, 2009, p. 18), engendered a sympathy for the working class while learning effective ministry skills, and satisfied the desire in Bible college students to get out into the world and “win souls” to Christ (Atkinson, 2009, p. 18).

**Spiritual Integration and Traditional Students at a Christian Institution**

Morris et al. (2003) applied three core constructs of Tinto’s (1993) integration model of student persistence to the examination of traditional student attrition and retention in an institution of Christian higher education. In order to better describe the reasons students decided to remain enrolled in a Christian university, the researchers included in their study the variable of spiritual integration, as described by Schreiner (2000), in addition to Tinto’s (1993) constructs of institutional and goal commitment, academic integration, and social integration. The researchers administered to 430 students from a Christian university two surveys, the 2000 Student Information Form and the Institutional Integration Scales, to examine persistence in first year students “because the highest dropout rate, for all students, tends to occur between the first and second years of study in Christian colleges” (Morris et al., 2003, p. 350). The researchers developed five additional questions from Schreiner’s (2000) three student perceptions of spiritual integration to add to the survey effort:

1. Being at this school is contributing to my spiritual growth.
2. My understanding of God is being strengthened by classroom and/or campus experiences.
3. Faculty, administrators, and/or staff are helpful to me in processing issues related to my faith.
4. This school provides adequate opportunities for involvement in ministry.
(5) Given where I am spiritually right now, this school is a good fit for me (Morris et al., 2003, p. 344).

The results of the study indicated that the construct of spiritual integration is a useful variable to determine persistence in first year students at Christian universities and colleges (Morris et al., 2003).

Morris et al. (2004) suggested a direct correlational relationship between Tinto’s (1993) three constructs of social and academic integration as well as institutional and goal commitment with Schreiner’s (2000) concept of spiritual fit, or integration. Using the same data collected from the Morris et al. (2003) study, the researchers obtained the zero-order correlation values of fit measures, or variables, developed from Tinto’s (1993) and Schreiner’s (2000) constructs and found the “various fit indices were significantly intercorrelated” (Morris et al., 2004, p. 97).

Next, they applied a factor analysis to better understand the redundancy among the variables by applying a principal components analysis of the zero-correlation values. The best fit for the data, determined after a scree test, was a factor they called Institutional Fit. The variables with their corresponding factor loadings using the factor of Institutional Fit included (a) spiritual integration (.81), (b) faculty concern for student (.71), (c) peer group interaction (.70), (d) academic and intellectual development (.70), (e) interaction with faculty (.66), and (f) institutional and goal commitment (.42). The results of the factor analytic process, a factor eigenvalue and percentage of variance of 2.76 and 45.98%, suggested that there was a redundancy among the fit indices where satisfaction in a given domain may indicate satisfaction across every domain and that the indicator of spiritual integration was the best predictor of what the researchers termed “the global Institutional Fit factor” (Morris et al., 2004, p. 98).
Students who reported global satisfaction, described as the dimension of fit that underlies both institutional and spiritual fit, experienced higher ratings across all indicators used to assess fit. The researchers conducted a final analysis to assess persistence status among the indices using a hierarchical logistic regression. This analysis incorporated data from students who persisted beyond the first year as well as students who departed. The result of this analysis suggested that spiritual integration was redundant among “traditional fit indices but also functioned in isolation as a significant and robust predictor of retention” (Morris et al., 2004, p. 98). These results were obtained through survey data collected from traditional students.

Spiritual integration lacks a standard definition that one could apply toward undergraduate students at Bible colleges. Rogers et al. (2012) offered a definition of spiritual integration that covered only the integration of Catholic Benedictine nuns and monks into their monastic lives as “a way of understanding, behaving, and being that operates on a principle of integrated wholeness, in which the parts of one’s life are unified into a common field of spiritual understanding and practice” (p. 3). Their study developed the psychometric properties of a spiritual integration scale used to predict a patient’s perceived physical and mental health (Rogers et al., 2012).

Ridings (2015) studied social workers in faith-based organizations and developed a definition of spiritual integration as “the extent to which spiritual aspects are applied to the helping or service delivery process (i.e., the number, frequency, and strength of spiritual indicators applied in the helping relationship)” (p. 333). Ridings (2015) created a concept map of spiritual integration to develop and model faith-based indicators to “help the Salvation Army better understand, articulate, and measure how they integrate spirituality across their social service provision” (p. 351). The researcher conducted 11 brainstorming sessions which
generated 472 statements from participants \((N = 112)\) who were asked “Please describe a short sentence or statement that describes how you can integrate spirituality into your area of work” (Ridings, 2015, p. 339). Participants then sorted through the statements and agreed upon 117 that were unique. Next, participants rated the statements regarding their comparative importance to each other resulting in nine major groups, or clusters. In the final step of the process Ridings (2015) generated the concept map using a proprietary data analysis program. The final product is a concept map that provides a graphical representation of how the nine clusters compare, and were related to, each other in matters of relative importance. The map was useful for “driving organizational learning” (Ridings, 2015, p. 334) and illustrating data relationships among faith indicators for service providers at a Salvation Army site (Ridings, 2015). However, the concept map was not capable of providing a process of spiritual integration when providing Salvation Army services or the actual role of spiritual integration in this effort. Also, while this research did provide a helpful definition of spiritual integration, albeit for Salvation Army service providers, it did not provide a viable role, or a process for, the spiritual integration of undergraduate students within a Bible college context.

African American student spiritual integration into a Bible college was found to be factor that contributed to their persistence (Lucas, 2015). This successful spiritual integration may provide these students with a connection to the campus that increases both the purpose and meaning of their academic efforts (Lucas, 2015). This study, which was not recognized as a peer-reviewed article but certainly deserves mention in this review, included a conceptual framework that added spiritual integration as a concept that connects students to an institution’s social, academic, and financial integration milieu. This framework, while certainly useful, did not describe the process of spiritual integration that a student would experience as they continue
their studies at a Bible college. A process model would show how the concepts, or categories in a grounded theory study, were linked and provide an explanation of why a phenomenon occurs (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

**Institutional Fit**

Students who attend Bible colleges may experience incongruence between themselves and their institution arising from problems associated with social and/or academic integration. Incongruence is described as a lack of institutional fit, where an individual “perceives him[her]self as being substantially at odds with the institution” (Tinto, 1993, p. 50) or when an individual’s “needs, interests, and preferences” (Tinto, 1993, p. 50) and those of the institution did not match. It stands to reason that institutional fit occurred when individuals felt their needs, interests and preferences were met by the institution. Institutional fit must include the concepts of academic and social integration to better describe students’ successful interaction with faculty, a measure of academic integration, and with their fellow students, a measure of social integration (Reid, 2013). Student-institutional fit, a term coined by Bowman and Denson (2014), may even be a precursor to academic and social integration furthering the notion that the construct of fit may be more of an event than a process. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) described it as “a state of being; it is based on perceptions of student fit with their campus and, by extension, perceptions of interactions that reflect the values and norms of the institution and its culture” (p. 416). The most profound institutional perceptions occur as students interact with faculty and staff since they personally represent the intellectual element of the college or university (Tinto, 1993). But it is also the interactions with peers, the social realm of the institution, upon which students will form their perceptions of personal congruity with their surroundings (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) established an important difference within this phenomenon between adult students in a
nonresidential environment and traditional students in a residential campus (Tinto, 1993). Namely, adults were more inclined to establish their sense of fit through their interactions with other adults as well as students, staff and, of course, faculty (Tinto, 1993).

The concept of institutional fit is anything but monolithic. Wardley et al. (2013) did not include the concept of social integration in their definition of institutional fit, Tinto (1993) saw a student’s academic and social integration as the major components of their perception of institutional fit, and Bean (1985) considered institutional fit to be one of the socialization/selection factors in his dropout syndrome model. Specifically, Bean (1985) described his view of this concept as including a measure of a student’s perception of academic integration, an academic variable, to assess a student’s sense of fit while the social-psychological variables of “perceived utility of one’s education, faculty contacts, and social life all should increase one's sense of fit” (p. 39).

Researchers exemplified the importance of students’ institutional fit and its positive relationship with decisions to persist, when they discovered the association of enhanced college satisfaction and decreased social isolation (Bowman & Denson, 2014). However, it was argued that Latino and Latina students at a commuter urban institution, which aligns their situation with that of commuting Bible college students, were less concerned about institutional fit because of their choice to attend a particular college due to low tuition as well as the expectations of family for them to live at home (Torres, 2006). While Torres’ (2006) findings may have explained why students chose to attend a particular institution, the findings did not explain their persistence. Another study of Latino and Latina students within the context of a Hispanic serving institution indicated the importance of student fit into the institutional environment and its influence on persistence (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016). One of the nontraditional students spoke of the
life challenges immigrants face that require them to “fit into the environment with the culture, you have language deficiencies, you are older, you have obligations” (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016, p. 30), creating a reliance on factors that promote persistence. The factors that promoted a persistent attitude included “family context, aspirations, campus environment, life challenges, and English language learning” (p. 32) that were “interlinked to affect academic persistence within important social systems” (p. 32) such as their communities and learning institutions (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016).

The consideration of institutional fit as a concept involves many complicated factors including socio-economic class. Bowman and Denson (2014) identified a divergence between institutional fit and integration by describing decisions that lead to departure. For example, even though a student develops relationships with peers that include frequent interactions, an indicator of social integration, this same student may not encounter adequate interactions with students from higher or lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Bowman & Denson, 2014).

Christian institutions of higher learning, such as Bible colleges, attract students who are looking for a collegiate environment that includes curriculum infused with religious values delivered by instructors who share their worldview (Morris et al., 2004). Indeed, Christian institutions have unique characteristics that separate them from more secularly-oriented colleges. These characteristics, used in advertising to recruit Christian students, can include: (a) the integration of faith into the learning environment; (b) a focus across the curriculum on character development, ministry and service; (c) a community committed to providing caring support to students; and (d) a faculty who all hold a Christian worldview (Morris et al., 2004). Christian students may decide to persist in institutions that not only uphold biblical precepts and practices,
which is how Christian students would incorporate religion into their lives but also ensure they receive the attention necessary to encourage their own spiritual growth.

**Religious Fit**

Alleman et al. (2016) developed the concept of student fit into a faith-based university when they endeavored to understand, through the qualitative inquiry of 21 traditional, first-year students, (a) how and when students perceived their deficiency of religious fit, (b) how they amended their incongruity with their institution’s religious milieu, and (c) how they finally chose to persist after attaining an acceptable level of religious fit. The researchers found that soon after arrival, the students were able to perceive whether they fit into the religious culture of the institution. It is important to note here that religious fit, as described by the researchers, was more of an event than a process. Once students affirmed their perception of incongruity, they used several techniques to fit into the cultural environment:

(a) finding social support, (b) understanding the religious environment in a moral manner, (c) becoming familiar with the religious environment, and (d) searching for a deeper or more universal meaning within the environment. These four strategies helped students to achieve a “threshold” or line of minimum acceptability for themselves within the institution’s religious environment.

(Alleman et al., 2016, p. 176)

The conscious effort to fit into the environment to attain a measure of congruity with the religious culture does show some promise as a process. The authors described this process more cogently when they stated, “Finding fit . . . became less a matter of placing a round peg in a round hole, and more a matter of reshaping the peg and redefining the hole to achieve an acceptable degree of fit” (Alleman et al., 2016, p. 181). Each student who experienced a lack of
fit would decide to persist once they perceived they reached their own fit threshold – described as their minimum acceptable degree of fit. This concept takes into account the student’s ability to gain and maintain peer relationships, perceive their academic experiences as challenging and meaningful, and find solace and empathy with staff and fellow students who either share or provide validation of their experiences with cultural incongruity (Alleman et al., 2016).

Although the researchers discussed processes in their study, they did not provide a definitive process, or model, of how students perceived or pursued a sense of fit.

Institutional fit and religious fit certainly can explain to some degree the persistence of Bible college students. However, they do lack the ability to provide process-related aspects that explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States as well as discern the role that spiritual integration plays in their persistence.
Figure 1. Conceptual framework of spiritual integration
Spiritual Integration Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of Bible college students’ integration provided me with a starting point before I embarked on my study. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the conceptual framework that I created to help me visualize how the different parts would inform my research. The segmented arrow portion that represented the Bible college student was made up of (a) the dashed line around social and academic integration that represented institutional fit (Reid, 2013; Tinto, 1993), (b) the boxes below that represented familial integration (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014) as well as economic integration (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), and (c) religious fit, which was a student’s perception of their fit into a Bible college’s religious environment soon after their arrival (Alleman et al., 2016). Finally, the large dashed line surrounding the conceptual framework was my concept of the Bible college’s religious/cultural environment. This framework was incomplete due to the missing element of spiritual integration (Morris et al., 2003; Morris et al., 2004; Schreiner, 2000). The box outside of the Bible college’s religious/cultural environment represented spiritual integration, which included Schreiner’s (2000) spiritual indicators. The arrow that pointed from the spiritual integration box toward the segmented arrow represented how the study would incorporate this important spiritual and integrative component into the investigation of students’ integration into their Bible colleges.

Integration, regarding students in higher education, has been used to “explain the extent to which students come to share the attitudes and beliefs of their peers and faculty and the extent to which students adhere to the structural rules and requirements of the institution” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 414). Tinto (1993) adopted Van Gennep’s (1960) three-stage process of how prospective members move from membership in one group into another group to explain the process of integration. This process consists of three phases, or stages, of: “(a) separation from
the past; (b) transition, in which the individual begins to interact with a new setting and people; and (c) incorporation in which the individual adopts the norms and expectations of the new group” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 414). Tinto (1975, 1993) introduced the concepts of academic and social integration as components of his theory of student integration. To illustrate this, one can imagine a person’s failure to integrate into a social system when they perceive a divergence in their own values and the new group’s social system leading to their decision to depart from the new group. The prevalence of these concepts in persistence literature created the situation where agreeing on standardized definitions among researchers has proven elusive (Davidson & Wilson, 2013).

A very simplified definition of institutional fit is a student’s perception of their academic and social integration into a college or university. While institutional fit encompasses more than just academic and social integration, it could not adequately address the spiritual element that would undoubtedly motivate students to persist at Bible colleges. Schreiner’s (2000) concept of spiritual integration was suggested by Morris et al. (2004) to be a good predictor of a student’s fit into a Christian college or university. In the same vein, Alleman et al. (2016) offered an examination of students’ religious fit, which students realized upon their arrival at their college as well as their efforts to attain a measure of congruity with the institution’s cultural environment. Finally, familial integration concerns the effects of family relationships on persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014) while economic integration may impact a student’s ability to continue their studies in regards to their financial situation (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). I employed all of these concepts within the conceptual framework in the current study of undergraduate students’ spiritual integration as well as their persistence within a Bible college context.
Spirituality and Religion

Research focused on students attending a Bible college required literature touching on spirituality and religion. Spirituality and religion have become synonymous in today’s literature (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011a) but the constructs may differ. As for spirituality, people experience this construct individually in regards to something sacred – an experience that can occur anywhere at any time (Tisdell, 2008). These experiences at times defy definition and may include a student’s perception of connectedness, creativity, or their sense of intuition (Astin et al., 2011a). “Religion, on the other hand, is about an organized community of faith, with an official creed, and codes of regulatory behavior” (Tisdell, 2008, p. 28) and may concern a student’s beliefs regarding the origin of life as well as who, or what, controls the world (Astin et al., 2011a). Confusion between the two arise due to people having experienced spirituality within a religious context, the fact that religions offer practitioners opportunities to develop personal experiences of a sacred nature, and the inevitable exposure to literature that uses both terms interchangeably (Tisdell, 2008). Traditional college students remarked how their deeper understanding of spirituality and religion changed their attitudes and led them to an acceptance of practices and beliefs different from their own, provided them with joy, informed their identity, and added purpose to their lives (Lindholm, 2007).

There may be a danger to both instructors and students when educators take the differences between spirituality and religion to an extreme. While it is advisable to know the difference between spirituality and religion, Milacci (2006) warned adult educators of the hazards of divorcing the two. This may be asking instructors who are people of faith “to find some way to extricate their foundational beliefs and close off who they are at the very core of
their being” (Milacci, 2006, p. 229) and may force instructors to avoid these discussions altogether.

Cragun, Henry, Mann, and Krebs (2014) highlighted the difference between spirituality and religion in their study of chapel usage by students ($N = 1043$) attending secular, private universities in the Southeastern United States. The researchers’ findings suggested that less than 6\% of the students visited their university’s chapel for the religious purpose of worship. However, almost 50\% of the students reported visiting their chapels but for secular purposes such as concerts, meetings, and other reasons such as personal study or curiosity (Cragun et al., 2014). The primary spiritual purpose for visiting the chapels was, according to the researchers, personal meditation (Cragun et al., 2014).

**Spirituality.** Recent literature attempted to connect spirituality and religion to academic and life achievement among college students. Astin et al. (2011b) found that spirituality does have a positive effect on academic outcomes in the areas of grade point average during the first three years of college, personal drive to continue educational pursuits, and intellectual self-esteem. Students of color may fare better in this respect than Caucasian students (Owens, 2014; Walker & Dixon, 2002). African American students reported higher levels of spirituality than their European American counterparts with an accompanying positive relationship, albeit a modest one, with academic performance (Walker & Dixon, 2002). Hispanic and African American students who continued their participation in religious activities during their college years through joining a religious group on campus enjoyed a statistically significant improvement in their academic grades as opposed to students who did not continue their religious practices in college (Owens, 2014).
Religion. College students’ practice of religion can differ depending on religious affiliation, race, and institutional type. Stoppa and Lefkowitz (2010) conducted a longitudinal study to examine changes in religiosity among emerging nontraditional college students across gender and affiliation domains. Their findings indicated a decrease in attendance at religious services and activities over the first three college semesters. Evangelicals and African American Protestant students attended these activities most often and placed greater importance on their beliefs in comparison to other religious affiliations (Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010). At predominately White evangelical colleges, White students scored higher in religious commitment than non-White students but scored lower in ethic of caring than non-Whites (Paredes-Collins & Collins, 2011) while African American students at public research universities were more engaged with spiritual/religious activities than non-White students (Rennick, Smedley, Fisher, Wallace, & Kim, 2013). The findings from a study of undergraduate students reported students of religious minority had the highest levels of ecumenical orientation, which is a measurement of a student’s interest in learning about unfamiliar religious perspectives (Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013).

Spirituality and faculty. Researchers who studied whether faculty who self-report as spiritual are more likely to exhibit instructional behavior beneficial to undergraduate students contended that the more spiritual instructor will employ student-centered, as opposed to instructor-centered, pedagogical approaches in the classroom (Astin et al., 2011b). Faculty who engage their students in this way and aspire to realize a high level of congruence with their institution’s faith and values may be “reflecting their desire to express themselves authentically” (Lindholm & Astin, 2008, p. 200). This increase in student-centered attention, both inside and outside of the classroom, may increase a student’s comfort regarding their academic pursuits
(Scott & Lewis, 2012) and may exert a positive influence on student development (Lindholm & Astin, 2008).

**Persistence.** Spirituality and religiosity may also influence persistence. African American male college students credited the role of spirituality, rather than practicing religion, as being more relevant to their persistence (Dancy, 2010) while engagement in on-campus religious activities or participation in religious courses were found to be factors in retention for all students, according to Butterfield and Pemberton (2011).

**Nontraditional Learners**

The ABHE provides accreditation for over 200 Bible colleges, most of which are residential institutions; however, approximately one-third of these institutions are nonresidential and require their students to commute to and from campus (“Statistical Highlights,” 2015). This study will not limit participation to nontraditional students but must acknowledge the characteristics of this demographic to ensure their voices are not only heard but also understood within their unique context. Characteristics that identify students as nontraditional learners include age, attendance at college full or part-time, employment status, or whether they have children (Markle, 2015). Researchers in one study adopted the age criterion of 25 years or older as a definition of an adult learner and subsequently as nontraditional students (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Scott & Lewis, 2012), while others used the two characteristics of age and enrollment (Wyatt, 2011) or whether the student commutes to and from campus (Braxton et al., 2004). The nontraditional student as a standard, defined term is very difficult to ascertain and is therefore a “fluid concept within the literature and its meaning is likely to vary depending on the societal, geographical and systemic context in which the research is conducted” (Chung, Turnbull, & Chur-Hansen, 2014, p. 1234). For the purposes of this study, the nontraditional
student referred to college or university students who have one of the following characteristics, (a) 25 years old or older, (b) employed, (c) living independently, or (d) do not reside on campus. This age group will become even more salient to the discussion of persistence as college enrollments for 25 to 34 year-old adult students will increase by 20% while those students beyond the age of 35 will increase by 25% as the year 2021 approaches (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

**Adult learners.** Older students, those at least 25 years-old with responsibilities outside of the classroom, tend to learn differently than traditional students. These learners direct their own learning, have life experiences that become a resource for their learning, are ready to learn, tend to focus on finding solutions that orients them toward immediate applications of any new knowledge, find their motivation internally and require a reason to expend the effort to learn something (Knowles, 1980). Recent studies supported these assumptions as adult learners continue to bring life experiences into the classroom; are able to focus better on their educational plans; can fully appreciate the worth of the educational experience (Wardley et al., 2013), have fully realized values, educational objectives, and goals; and are more mature than their younger counterparts (Wyatt, 2011). Adult learners enhance the classroom by applying their accumulated life experiences to the curriculum while sharing insights with their peers (Scott & Lewis, 2012). Although adult learners may not attain an emotional tie to their institution (Wardley et al., 2013), they may tend to see the classroom differently than their traditional counterparts, become more serious about learning activities, readily take on leadership positions, and focus more intensely on tasks (Samuels et al., 2012).

Adult students, like minority students, may experience a sense of marginalization, hold significantly different values than their younger counterparts, and may find that external
demands adversely affect their interactions on campus. Adults students tend to retain their membership in external communities consisting of family, their places of work (Tinto, 1993), and their church/faith communities. This results in changes in how adults relate to these communities as opposed to a physical separation from external communities that traditional students experience. Adults are able to withstand the academic and social demands of college through the support they enjoy from family members (Tinto, 1993). Although adult students do not necessarily rely on campus programs that would aid traditional students in their assimilation into the social life of the institution, they still experience a positive influence from on-campus supportive faculty as well as peer groups.

Traditionally-aged minority students, especially regarding African Americans, may find their support from family indispensable to their persistence in college. Although assimilation may only be possible through the separation of young students from their former lives (Tinto, 1993), African American students may experience enhanced persistence through support from family and may suffer harm from programs which encourage total separation from their support back home (Tierney, 1999).

Mixing nontraditional students with traditional students. Problems can arise as traditional and nontraditional students share the same educational real estate. The traditional student, aged 18 to 24, just recently departed high school to enter higher education and may not have an adequate amount of life experience to motivate them to attain a degree. This deficit of experience may result in the younger student’s inability to see a true need for postsecondary educational attainment (Wardley et al., 2013). It is not unusual for nontraditional students to experience dismay at the attitudes of typical college students and may expect greater rigor in their educational activities (Samuels et al., 2012). Any lack of cordiality between nontraditional
and traditional students may be exacerbated by the predominance of traditionally-aged students on large campuses and their perception of enhanced interactions between nontraditional students and their instructors due to the proximity in their ages (Scott & Lewis, 2012).

The stress realized by nontraditional students can increase tensions in the classroom. Nontraditional students experience greater stress due to employment, families, and responsibilities outside of academia as opposed to traditional students who enter the postsecondary system immediately after graduation from high school (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015). Perhaps the greatest challenge facing nontraditional students is their ability to successfully balance academic commitments along with their external responsibilities (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Undoubtedly, Bible college students can fall within the adult age bracket, and therefore be nontraditional, since Christian laity attend these institutions (McKinney, 1997; Sutherland, 2010).

The increase in nontraditional participation in traditionally-oriented campuses creates a need, not always fulfilled, for instructors to acknowledge the differences between nontraditional and traditional students. Nontraditional students may not receive instruction that incorporates the principles of adult learning (Chen, 2015; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011) or may find themselves in a classroom where instructors are reluctant to regard the difference between traditional-aged students and nontraditional students as necessitating different instructional styles (Donavant, Daniel, & MacKewn, 2013).

**Nontraditional students and persistence.** Nontraditional students tend to persist when they are academically successful, attend college online, and may place an emphasis on a classroom environment that is conducive to their unique attributes. A study regarding academic behavior as a predictor to student persistence (Davidson & Holbrook, 2014) was different from
studies that focused on environmental factors (Chen, 2015; Samuels et al., 2012) and theories that placed an emphasis on student characteristics (Tinto, 1993) as predictors of persistence. Davidson and Holbrook (2014) used data from first-time students ($N = 285$) enrolled in four-year learning institutions in Kentucky to conduct their quantitative study that employed logistic regression analyses. These students were adult in age where 49% were between the ages of 21 to 24 and 51% were between 25 and 52. Their findings indicated that student first-term academic behavior and outcome variables were better persistence predictors than environmental factors and student characteristics. Interestingly, students enrolled in online courses tended to be more persistent at least in the short run (Davidson & Holbrook, 2014). Also, first-time students who completed their fall credit hours may tend to be degree completers. Sadly, those first-time students who enroll in mathematics or English classes, and subsequently earned poor grades, may stand a greater chance of not earning their degrees (Davidson & Holbrook, 2014).

Nontraditional students’ perceptions of an institution’s classroom environment and faculty play a part in their decisions to persist (Samuels et al., 2011). This study’s subject matter and findings are more in line with Tinto’s (1993) assertion that the classroom is the focal point of student-faculty interaction for the nontraditional students who reside off-campus and must commute to attend classes. They faced barriers on a traditional campus to include sharing classrooms with younger students who were not as serious about learning and conducting long commutes for only one hour of instruction (Samuels et al., 2012).

**The Classroom Versus Online Learning**

Although researchers identified the classroom as being important to nontraditional students (Donaldson & Graham, 2009), colleges have experienced an increase in the importance of online learning as a viable alternative to the more traditional classroom paradigm (McEwen,
Herman, & Himes, 2016). The online environment offers adult students with more flexibility when jobs and family interfere with campus course offerings (McEwen et al., 2016)

**The importance of the classroom.** Nontraditional students who commute to campus use the classroom to engage their peers and leverage the environment in unique ways (Donaldson & Graham, 1999). Their limited time on campus establishes the classroom as their center of learning (Donaldson & Graham, 2009) and may require them to make a connection between what they are learning in class, their experience, and their life outside of the classroom (Samuels et al., 2012). In fact, the classroom must be a place where adults find relevancy, rigor, and academic interactions that promote their interests. For nontraditional students who commute to and from the campus and care little about interacting in the social environment, the classroom may well be the one place where they experience the level of academic integration they need to persist in their studies (Samuels et al., 2012). The classroom is where the adult learner develops the connections with their instructors and fellow students to socially construct what it means to be college students (Donaldson & Graham, 2009).

It has also been suggested that adult learners in a nonresidential setting do not treat the classroom as the sole focus of their integration into their institutions (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Although other models of adult persistence (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Tinto, 1997) identify the classroom as an environment conducive to mature students’ integration, Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) found that relationships formed in the institutional setting “develop outside the classroom, but it still revolves around the teaching/learning process” (p. 47). However, Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) studied classrooms that contained 150 to 200 students where nontraditional students, especially commuters, may have found difficulty in forming any meaningful social interactions with either fellow students or instructors.
Online learning in Christian institutions. The online environment may improve or facilitate relationships that enhance student persistence, such as faculty-to-student mentoring, that have traditionally occurred face-to-face. Mentoring, where experienced individuals take on an active role in passing their skills and knowledge onto a person of lesser experience, has been proven to be beneficial to students in a Christian higher education context but very often ends upon graduation (Mullen, 2012). Mentoring that occurs online asynchronously, referred to hear as e-mentoring, allows this relationship between faculty and students to flourish despite geographical distance and competing schedules (Knapczyk, Khe Foon, Frey, & Wall-Marencik, 2005). Interestingly, Mullen (2012) offered that the most effective e-mentoring may occur after graduates begin their work in Christian education and could take place “through social media, electronic mail, texting, and other means of digital communication” (p. 393), which may not occur when faculty and students limit mentoring to the more traditional, face-to-face paradigm (Knapczyk et al., 2005).

Online Christian education benefits from the development of strong learning communities. However, the challenge resides in creating a virtual environment where a student can engage their faculty and peers “without the personal relationship[s] often formed in fact-to-face meetings” (Stevenson, 2013, p. 24). Faculty can foster online learning communities by ensuring: (a) participants engage in quality dialogue; (b) faculty, students, and peers communicate frequently; and (c) participants make their social presence a reality in their online discussions (Maddix, 2010). These communities provide geographically-dispersed students with a sense of belonging and a mechanism to share their ideas and “struggles without fear of rejection or disloyalty” (Maddix, 2010, p. 12). Theological school administrators consider their schools to be communities of faith and learning, a concept that combines both a community of
faith and academic excellence, where faculty expect students to experience spiritual growth and “incorporate expectations of ministry to enhance the study of theology” (Hines, McGee, Waller, & Waller, 2009, p. 35). In this case, successful online learning is only possible when a symbiotic relationship between community of faith and academic excellence results in a community of faith and learning – not necessarily how closely the online course resembles a traditional campus offering (Hines et al., 2009).

**Online persistence.** Adult students who decide to persist in their online studies, and those who decide to drop out, may have different perceptions of the factors that influenced their decisions. Adult learners’ perceptions of the online environment may not differ regarding their individual characteristics but may show differences in how they perceive external factors and internal factors. Nontraditional adult learners (N = 147) who either persisted in (n = 98) or dropped out of (n = 49) online courses at a Midwestern university were surveyed to assess whether there were any differences in their individual characteristics (age, education and gender), external factors (family support and organizational support), and internal factors (satisfaction and relevance of online courses) (Park & Choi, 2009). There were no significant differences in age, level of education, or gender between the groups ($\chi^2 = 1.35 \sim 3.84, p = .147 \sim .501$). However, there were significant differences among the dropout and persistent learner groups’ perceptions of the levels of family support services, $F(1, 147) = 11.82, p < .001$ and organizational support services, $F(1, 147) = 87.70, p < .001$ (Park & Choi, 2009). Also, there were significant differences between the groups’ levels of motivation regarding their online course satisfaction, $F(1, 147) = 54.77, p < .001$ and course relevance, $F(1, 147) = 58.70, p < .001$, indicating that these nontraditional learners “are less likely to drop out when they are
satisfied with the course, and when the courses are relevant to their own lives” (Park & Choi, 2009, p. 215).

Researchers have examined how taking online courses in the past, or mixing online courses with more traditional, face-to-face courses, have impacted student persistence. Students who take classes both online and onground, or face-to-face courses conducted on campus, “were more likely to be retained than students taking only onground courses” (James, Swan, & Daston, 2016, p. 92). According to James, Swan, and Daston (2016), taking all courses online may only moderately decrease students’ retention. Hachey, Wladis, and Conway (2012) examined whether students’ participation in past online courses could predict their success in future online courses. Their study, which took place at a large metropolitan community college, involved 962 participants of which 232 had prior online experience and 648 did not. The researchers’ findings indicated that successful experience in past online courses, assessed as having earned a grade of “C” or above, was highly statistically significant for predicting future online success using an alpha of 0.01 ($\alpha = 0.01$) and a $p$-value of < 0.0001 ($p < .0001$) (Hachey et al., 2012, p. 1).

The online environment as well as online social networks can influence students’ social and academic integration. There may be differences in academic and social integration depending on whether the student attends class on campus, online, or in a hybrid format that combines campus and online learning (Hammond & Shoemaker, 2014a). A sample of 42 graduate students from six different American university agricultural degree programs completed online surveys that measured their perceptions of academic integration, social integration and persistence. The results of the quantitative study indicated that students attending college via an online format scored significantly lower ($p < .008$) in peer group support ($M = 3.42$), a social integration component, than their campus based counterparts ($M = 4.36$). Campus ($M = 3.55$)
and hybrid students ($M = 3.66$) scored significantly higher ($p < .005$) in academic integration than online students ($M = 2.55$), while all program types did not display any appreciable differences in their intentions to persist ($p < .44$) (Hammond & Shoemaker, 2014a). Students participating in hybrid programs reported similar scores in the areas of “academic integration, social integration, peer-group support and social interactions as the campus based students” (Hammond & Shoemaker, 2014a, p. 185).

There were differences between junior and senior students regarding the academically integrative qualities of Facebook in a qualitative study of 14 undergraduate students. Senior students exhibited positive attitudes toward the mingling of academic and social learning, or integration, in the social networking environment while junior students were more apt to keep Facebook as a social tool – leaving the academic activities to a more formal endeavor online or on campus (Tian et al., 2011). It appears that social networking is a positive influence on student’s social learning and subsequent social integration, while any academic integrative qualities may be more indirect and longitudinal in nature (Tian et al., 2011). However, Kord and Wolf-Wendel (2009) found that time spent by students engaging with online social networks, such as Facebook, may not enhance their perceived levels of both social and academic integration (Kord & Wolf-Wendel, 2009). In a study of 354 first-year undergraduate students researchers assessed through surveys, their perceptions of involvement with online social networks and their perceptions of their academic and social integration. While students find these social networks to be useful tools for maintaining contact with family and high school friends, it was not as useful as a means to enhance interactions with faculty or staff (Kord & Wolf-Wendel, 2009).
The time students spent engaging in online social networks was also found to be a significant negative predictor of the academic integration variables of both the level of faculty concern with students’ development and instruction as well as the students’ perceived intellectual and academic development. Apparently, the more time students devoted to maintaining contact with their family and friends via online social networks the less they were likely to be both socially and academically integrated into their institutions of higher education (Kord & Wolf-Wendel, 2009). Peer engagement online, however, can also enhance academic performance. Findings from a study where researchers measured online peer interactive behavior using data based on posting frequency and length as well as the students’ language content indicated that peers can impact their fellow students’ academic performance when they engage them frequently in online discussions (Bettinger, Liu, & Loeb, 2016). In fact, students who were less likely to engage in these discussions earned higher grades, accrued more course points, and enjoyed a higher probability of passing when exposed to peers who actively engaged them (Bettinger et al., 2016).

Summary

Tinto’s (1993) interactionist theory of student persistence did not adequately explain the integration and persistence of undergraduate students who attended learning institutions with a spiritual environment. That is why it was important to explain the role of spiritual integration in the persistence of undergraduate Bible college students. Doing so required an understanding of the components of student integration including the construct of spiritual integration and its indicators (Schreiner, 2000). I designed a conceptual framework that guided the development of a spiritual integration model.
This study’s conceptual framework of spiritual integration included social, academic, and spiritual integration (Schreiner, 2000; Morris et al., 2004), student fit into their institutions (Reid, 2013; Tinto, 1993) and religious fit (Alleman et al., 2016). This study considered a student’s fit into a Bible college’s spiritual dimension where they shared their perceptions of their religious fit (Alleman et al., 2016) that occurred soon after their arrival at their Bible college and their subsequent spiritual integration (Schreiner, 2000; Morris et al., 2004), which was found to occur as a process over time. This research of undergraduate Bible college students applied the components of spiritual integration and subsequently arrived at a process and model of students’ spiritual integration into their colleges. The results of this grounded theory study expanded what is known about Tinto’s (1993) theory focusing on the constructs of academic and social integration for a specific group of students while also enhancing the knowledge base for spiritual integration (Schreiner, 2000) and religious fit (Alleman et al., 2016). The findings from this research effort provided higher education faculty and administrators with student-centered information about their religious fit (Alleman et al., 2016), spiritual integration (Morris et al., 2004; Schreiner, 2000), and subsequent fit into (Reid, 2013; Tinto, 1993), or more specifically their acceptance of, a Bible college’s spiritual environment.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States and discern the role spiritual integration plays in persistence. I employed a grounded theory design, based on the writings of Corbin and Strauss (2015), where the perceptions of students’ integrative experiences provided the necessary information to ground the spiritual integration process in the collected data. Chapter Three includes the research design, an overview of the three Bible college sites for the study, a description of the participants, procedures I followed to conduct the study, my role in this process, a description of the data collection process, the data analysis process as well as the steps I took to ensure trustworthiness of the entire process.

Design

Qualitative research is appropriate when there exists a desire to explain a phenomenon in its natural setting and collect data from several sources that defy easy measurement and a determination to focus on participants’ perspectives and perceptions to gain an understanding of the meaning of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Patton (2015) suggested that “qualitative inquiry documents the stuff that happens among real people in the real world in their own words, from their own perspectives, and within their own contexts” allowing researchers the opportunity to “make sense of the stuff that happens” (p. 11). This was the most appropriate method given my interest in explaining a process based on participant experiences. My study design included (a) the selection of multiple sites, (b) the selection of up to 50 participants (Patton, 2015), (c) initially adopting the theoretical sampling technique (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), (d) data collection using five methods, (e) the adoption of several methods to establish trustworthiness, and (f)
assurance that my actions throughout the study were ethical.

I selected the grounded theory design for this study since my aim was to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States and discern the role that spiritual integration plays in their persistence. The grounded theory approach to qualitative inquiry was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 as a means to generate theory from data derived from participants who experienced a phenomenon as opposed to testing existing theory (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010; Tan, 2010). This entailed going into, and being close to, participants and other data sources in the real world to gather the appropriate empirical data (Patton, 2015). Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006) found a “discernable thread of constructivism” (p. 1) in the early writings of Glaser and Strauss who parted company regarding their approaches to grounded theory. Glaser remained closely aligned with their original, or traditional, methodology that “interpreted and stressed the emergence of theory by data conceptualization” (Tan, 2010, p. 95). Strauss gravitated toward what Mills et al. (2006) referred to as an “evolved grounded theory” (p. 3), which is more systematic in nature (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For instance, Glaser believed in maintaining an open mind, unencumbered by extant literature, allowing theory to emerge while Strauss championed a review of literature to form a general idea of the study and structuring questions to “lead a more forced emergence of theory” (Jones & Alony, 2011, p. 99). In 1990, Strauss and Corbin coauthored the book Basics of Qualitative Research as a guide to qualitative research for their own students (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

I adopted the systematic approach during the conduct of my grounded theory study using the methods and techniques as published by Corbin and Strauss (2015). The idea of “constructing a theory grounded in data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 6) using a system
consisting of iterative steps appealed to a novice researcher like myself who was more comfortable systematically constructing a process from the experiences and perceptions of participants (Creswell, 2013).

**Research Questions**

**Research Question One**

How do undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States?

**Research Question Two**

What is the role of spiritual integration in the persistence of undergraduate Bible college students in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States?

**Setting**

Sites for this grounded theory study were three Bible colleges located in the United States. These institutions provide training for Christian laity and pastoral staff, alleviate the incursion of secular thought into religiously oriented institutions and provide an education founded in biblical precepts (Sutherland, 2010). All of the Bible colleges selected for this study have received accreditation from the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE). The ABHE has over 200 member institutions that have met either institutional or programmatic accreditation standards. The standards for institutional accreditation include but are not limited to (a) authorization from an appropriate government agency to operate as an institution of higher education, (b) a clear and well publicized mission statement, (c) an external governing board, (d) a chief executive officer, (e) a comprehensive institutional catalog that is current, (f) learning resources available to students necessary to support all programs, (g) academic programs of at least two years duration consistent with the college’s mission, (h) meet the minimum for both
general studies as well as biblical/theological studies, and (i) have adequate finances to achieve the institutional mission (Institutional Accreditation Standards, 2014). Institutions accredited by ABHE also must subscribe annually to the following tenets of faith:

- We believe that there is one God, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.
- We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious death and atonement through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal and visible return in power and glory.
- We believe that man was created in the image of God, and that he was tempted by Satan and fell, and that, because of the exceeding sinfulness of human nature, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary for salvation.
- We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life, and by Whom the Church is empowered to carry out Christ's great commission.
- We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the saved and the lost; those who are saved unto the resurrection of life and those who are lost unto the resurrection of damnation. (Association of Biblical Higher Education Tenets of Faith, n.d.)

Faculty at ABHE-accredited institutions must meet education, experience, and spiritual standards. Faculty are expected to hold degrees recognized by the Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, have documentation to
prove their expertise in their field of teaching, and have earned a master’s degree if teaching undergraduates or a terminal degree if teaching graduate students. Faculty are also expected to be spiritually mature, capable of mentoring and modeling relationships with students, and be able to contribute to students’ biblical worldview development (Institutional Accreditation Standards, 2014). Ensuring each institution met the minimum standards necessary for ABHE accreditation helped ensure the student and faculty participants shared experiences in environments with similar attributes.

**Site One**

The College of the Bible, a pseudonym, is a small Bible college located in a medium-sized city in the Southeastern United States. This college was chosen for the study for convenience due to its close proximity to my home, the fact that it is nonresidential, and its ABHE accreditation. Interestingly, the student enrollment for the 2015 school year was 158 with over 60% of the students African American while the faculty and staff are predominately Caucasian. The College of the Bible’s lack of residential facilities creates a learning environment populated entirely by commuters. The leadership structure at the college includes a president, a vice president for strategic development, an academic dean and a dean of online studies. The college also has a Board of Directors with a chancellor who presides over the board.

Established in 1973, the College of the Bible offers programs on campus as well as online that focus on increasing individual Bible knowledge as well as preparing individuals for vocational ministry. The institution earned ABHE in accreditation 2013. The ABHE accredited the college’s Bachelor of Arts in Leadership and Ministry, Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies and Associate of Arts in both Biblical Studies and Leadership and Ministry. Although the
college is not a seminary with direct ties to an established Christian denomination, it has placed graduates within local churches, over 80% of their graduates in the last five years, and has seen 30% of their graduates continue their educational journeys at the graduate school level.

Site Two

The Christian College, a pseudonym, is a small Bible college located in a rural setting by a medium-sized city in the Southeastern United States. This college was chosen for the study for convenience due to its close proximity to my home, the fact that it is a residential institution, and its accreditation by the ABHE. The Christian College had 158 students enrolled during 2015 with 134 of those students enrolled full-time. The leadership team at the college consists of a president, an executive director of human resources, an executive director of student services and spiritual life, a chief financial officer, a dean of students, and an academic dean. There is also a Board of Trustees with a chairman who presides over the board.

The Christian College has been an inter-denominational, independent, and evangelical college with a Bible-centered curriculum since its inception in 1903. All graduates of the college receive a Bible minor along with a degree in their major field in the areas of Christian Ministry, Management, Theological Studies, Business Administration, or Christian Leadership. The Christian College offers degree programs that are in the traditional classroom settings, online or blended. The traditional campus degrees range from Associate of Arts (AA) to a Doctor of Ministry while students can pursue AA degrees or Masters of Arts in the online environment. Within the recent past, 79% of the graduates found employment in their degree fields while 25% moved on to pursue studies in a graduate-level setting.

Site Three

The third site is the Northern Bible College, a pseudonym, which is a small college
located near a medium-sized city in the northern portion of the Midwestern United States. This college was chosen because of its location outside of the Southeastern United States, is considerably larger than the other colleges selected for this study, and also holds accreditation by the ABHE. The college had 340 students enrolled on campus in 2015 with an additional 450 nontraditional students enrolling from 2010 to 2015. The leadership team at the Northern Bible College consists of a president, an executive vice president, a vice president of finance and business services, a provost, and associate vice presidents for community, talent management, marketing, and dean of students. The college also has a Board of Directors that sets tuition, grants professors with Professor Emeritus status, and hold deliberations that set college policies and provide direction and oversight.

Undergraduate students who reside on campus can pursue degrees to include Associate of Arts and Bachelor of Arts in Human Services, History, Pre-Professional Studies, Early Childhood Education, Worship Arts, Business, Interdisciplinary Studies, and Biblical Studies. Bachelor of Science degrees include Youth Ministry, Pastoral Ministry, Exercise Science, Intercultural Studies, and General Ministry Studies. The college offers degree programs on campus and online to adult students. These nontraditional student programs consist of leadership and ministry degrees, business and business management degrees, and human services degrees at the associate and bachelor levels. The Master of Arts in Ministry, an online graduate-level program offered by the Northern Bible College, takes at least 24 months to complete. The full-time freshmen cohort who entered the college in 2009 experienced a graduation rate of 61% as of April, 2015. Those students who earned bachelor’s degrees enjoyed an 82% rate of employment in their degree fields or were pursuing further studies at the graduate level.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students
integrated spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States as well as discern the role that spiritual integration played in their persistence. These colleges, by their very nature and purpose, attracted faculty, administration, and students who espoused a faith based in biblical precepts. Bible college students and faculty members provided the data necessary to develop the process of student integration at a Bible college and, thus, explained the role of spiritual integration in these students’ persistence.

**Participants**

I began with the theoretical sampling technique where student and faculty participant selections were “directed by the evolving theoretical constructs” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 63). Grounded theory, at least once the study was well underway, did not allow the selection of participants according to specified criteria because when developing a process “it is important that researchers have the flexibility to sample participants . . . based on concepts in need of development” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 135). However, as the study progressed, I soon realized that the pool of available prospective participants at each site was not large enough to employ the theoretical sampling technique. I instead relied on the gatekeeper at each site to put me in touch with the majority of prospective participants. I asked the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to approve 50 potential participants as the maximum number for the study. However, it was the concept of saturation, where I reached the “point in the research when all major categories [were] fully developed, [showed] variation, and [were] integrated” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 135) that ultimately determined the final number of 35 participants. According to grounded theory experts, “it is better to request a larger number of participants to begin with” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 135) than have to prepare another proposal to request more participants through the IRB. I chose undergraduate students who persisted beyond the first year
in a Bible College as participants from the site nearest to my home, dependent upon their gender, age, race, and student status in order to capture the widest range of experiences in the form of interview data. My intent was to maximize the variation of the sample as much as possible. I accomplished this by selecting students who were (a) male, (b) female, (c) from racial minority groups, (d) Caucasian, (e) traditional, and (f) nontraditional. I also attempted to interview former attendees who did not persist in their studies. However, procuring the contact information for this particular sample was not possible at any of the sites.

Additionally, I attempted to select faculty participants for the study using the theoretical sampling technique (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Due to the small population of faculty members at each Bible college and issues with availability, I resorted to allowing my gatekeeper at each site to assist me with garnering faculty member participants. These faculty members provided data based on their key knowledge regarding the spiritual integration process of students with whom they instructed (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Morris et al., 2004; Schreiner, 2000). I selected faculty based on their status as instructors at the college who worked at least part-time and had taught for at least one year. As the study progressed, and theoretical sampling was not feasible due to limited student availability, I employed the snowball technique. This involved asking student interviewees to recommend specific individuals who were thought to be “information-rich key informants” (Patton, 2015, p. 298) and amenable to participating in the study (Patton, 2015).

I asked my gatekeepers at each site to send the recruitment emails to their students (see Appendix A) and faculty (see Appendix B) who matched the criteria stated here. Both student and faculty participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix C) before they began the interview process. Students agreed to an informed consent section contained within the
questionnaire before they completed the Student Spiritual Integration Questionnaire (see Appendix D).

Forty-two students completed the questionnaire \((n = 42)\) and seven faculty participants \((n = 7)\) were interviewed totaling 49 participants \((N = 49)\) in the study. Table 1 contains a list of students’ demographic information who completed the questionnaire \((n = 42)\). In other words, this part of the list includes questionnaire completers – there were 14 students in this list that were not interviewed. Table 2 contains a demographic summary of the faculty participants \((n = 7)\). Faculty participants did not complete the questionnaire since I designed it for students.
Table 1

*Student Questionnaire Demographic Summary (n = 42)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>18-20: 36%</th>
<th>21-29: 21%</th>
<th>30-39: 12%</th>
<th>40-49: 12%</th>
<th>50-59: 14%</th>
<th>60-70: 5%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male: 52%</td>
<td>Female: 48%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Caucasian: 57%</td>
<td>African American: 24%</td>
<td>Hispanic Latino: 14%</td>
<td>Multiple Races: 5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Status</td>
<td>Second year: 33%</td>
<td>Third year: 19%</td>
<td>Fourth year: 41%</td>
<td>Graduate: 7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>Married: 33%</td>
<td>Divorced: 7%</td>
<td>Single: 60%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Full time: 14%</td>
<td>Part time: 55%</td>
<td>Not Employed: 12%</td>
<td>Retired: 17%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children in Household</td>
<td>None: 70%</td>
<td>One: 10%</td>
<td>Two: 10%</td>
<td>Three or more: 10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation College</td>
<td>Yes: 43%</td>
<td>No: 57%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuter</td>
<td>Yes: 36%</td>
<td>No: 64%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>Public: 71%</td>
<td>Private: 3%</td>
<td>Christian: 12%</td>
<td>Homeschool: 7%</td>
<td>Other: 7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Student</td>
<td>Yes: 90%</td>
<td>No: 10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Faculty Demographic Summary (n = 7)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>50-59</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male       6

Female     1

Caucasian  6

African-American 1

Table 3 provides a list of the full student participants’ demographic information, meaning those students who were interviewed for the study who completed the demographic portion of the questionnaire (n = 28). Faculty participants did not complete the questionnaire since I designed it for students.
Table 3

Full Participant Student Questionnaire Demographic Summary (n = 28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>18-20: 29%</th>
<th>21-29: 25%</th>
<th>30-39: 18%</th>
<th>40-49: 4%</th>
<th>50-59: 17%</th>
<th>60-70: 7%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male: 61%</td>
<td>Female: 39%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Caucasian: 54%</td>
<td>African American: 21%</td>
<td>Hispanic Latino: 18%</td>
<td>Multiple Races: 7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Status</td>
<td>Second year: 22%</td>
<td>Third year: 14%</td>
<td>Fourth year: 57%</td>
<td>Graduate: 7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>Married: 39%</td>
<td>Divorced 7%</td>
<td>Single: 54%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Full time: 7%</td>
<td>Part time: 64%</td>
<td>Not Employed: 4%</td>
<td>Retired: 25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children in Household</td>
<td>None: 61%</td>
<td>One: 11%</td>
<td>Two: 14%</td>
<td>Three or more: 14%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation College</td>
<td>Yes: 46%</td>
<td>No: 54%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuter</td>
<td>Yes: 25%</td>
<td>No: 75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>Public: 71%</td>
<td>Private: 4%</td>
<td>Christian: 7%</td>
<td>Homeschool: 7%</td>
<td>Other: 11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Student</td>
<td>Yes: 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures

Before conducting the proposal defense, I shared the interview questions with both my dissertation chair and first committee member since they both have experience conducting and supervising qualitative research studies in the field of education. Their review of the questions ensured clarity and proper wording. Before beginning data collection for the study, I obtained approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix E). Once approval from the IRB arrived, the data collection activities for the study began. I contacted the first site’s appropriate point of contact, in this case the college president, and informed him that the participant selection and document/archival record collection process was about to begin. The College of the Bible president assigned one of his faculty members to be my gatekeeper. I used a similar method to obtain gatekeepers from the other two sites. The first site’s data collection process included a pilot interview with one undergraduate Bible college student. I asked the gatekeeper at the site to recommend a participant for the pilot study. The pilot study participant’s input assisted me in evaluating the study’s procedures to select prospective student participants using the Bible college’s assigned gatekeeper. Also, the pilot study assisted me in assessing the clarity of (a) student emails, (c) consent forms, (d) questionnaire information, and (e) interview questions. I included data from the pilot study participant in the study.

Each qualified student, identified by the Bible college gatekeeper using my selection criteria, received an email (see Appendix A) describing the purpose of the study, the criteria for selection, information regarding the interview process, information regarding the focus group process, background information about me, and a link to a questionnaire (see Appendix D) asking questions regarding their demographics and spiritual integration into their Bible college. When responses were not forthcoming, I asked the college staff to send out the follow-up email
(see Appendix F). Emails to prospective students were sent through the gatekeepers to preclude any breach of privacy issues. All positive responses were followed-up by a text message if the students provided a phone number in the questionnaire or an email to schedule the interview.

I selected prospective faculty using the procedures similar to student selection. Each qualified faculty member, identified by the Bible college administration using my selection criteria, received an email (see Appendix B) describing the purpose of the study, the criteria for selection, information regarding the interview process, information regarding the focus group process, and background information about me. When responses were not forthcoming, I asked the college staff to send out the follow-up email (see Appendix G). All positive responses were followed-up by an email to schedule the interview.

Once the site’s gatekeeper delivered emails to the prospective participants, I began the document and archival record search at the site. I scanned and stored all documents and records deemed applicable to the study on my password-protected personal computer (Creswell, 2013) and kept it locked in my desk at my home.

Interviews using the face-to-face, semi-structured interview technique (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), occurred at the participant’s institution in locations that were as comfortable as possible for the participants (see Appendix H for a sample of a transcribed participant interview). Before beginning the interview, I ensured I had a copy of the participant’s informed consent form (see Appendix C). I recorded all interviews using my iPhone 6 recording application as well as a back-up digital recording device. The same process occurred when I conducted the three focus groups. I stored the audio files, including the focus group audio files, on my computer. I sent these files to a professional transcription service for verbatim transcription. I stored transcripts
returned from the transcription service in the computer folders with the corresponding pseudonyms.

**The Researcher's Role**

In this qualitative study, I acted as the human instrument in regards to data collection and analysis. I employed memoing as part of my effort to reflect upon and analyze the decisions I made throughout the data collection and analysis process. Memos were essentially notes I wrote regarding “the meaning and elaboration of codes, categories, and coding choices; methodological issues; ethical issues; reflections on readings; and emerging interpretations” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 197). Memoing provided me the link between the data collected during the study and the process of actually writing the theory (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010).

I have two advanced degrees in education, have taught at the undergraduate level, and have a great amount of respect for traditionally-aged students who pursue higher education that prepares them for pastoral or layman ministry. I also have a high degree of respect for nontraditional students who identify gaps in their knowledge or desire to change careers and make the decision to pursue a college degree relatively late in life. While this view of the nontraditional student could have caused me to view data collected and analyzed through an idealized lens, I took the precaution of reflecting throughout the interview process on the damage that could occur to the results of my study if my interpretation of the data was tainted. I had no relationship with any of the students who attended a Bible college before I conducted the study. However, the president and one of the instructors at the College of the Bible, the first site, were good acquaintances. Also, my second committee member was the academic dean at a Bible college.
I interviewed students of both genders, traditional and nontraditional students, and minorities along with students from the site’s majority group, where it was necessary to acknowledge the fact that as a Caucasian researcher I could have faced some difficulties speaking to minority students. Happily, that was never an issue during this study. As a Caucasian researcher planning to interview minority students, or any students for that matter, about issues touching on their spirituality, I assured them that they were free to end any discussion that made them experience discomfort (Mizock, Harkins, Ray, & Morant, 2011).

Also, I did my best to alter the discussions when it appeared that the participant may be experiencing trauma – especially if they touched on race (Mizock et al., 2011). It was appropriate to question how a Caucasian researcher could effectively collect data from minority participants due to the differences in race. However, the researcher of a different race may actually have advantages when occupying the researcher’s role. One African American researcher suggested that the data collected by an African American from others of the same race may result in information that is “less than candid” (Herndon, 2003, p. 83) and perhaps based in providing a reflection of what the participants “thought the researcher was seeking” (Herndon, 2003, p. 83). While I took these precautions, there were no race-related, or gender related, issues that arose during the conduct of interviews.

As a Christian who is above the age of 50, I set aside, to the best of my abilities, any presuppositions regarding age, or anything that may have led me to bias my objectivity. At best, while I engaged in qualitative analysis, I acknowledged my subjectivity and “critically reflect[ed] on it rather than den[jied] it with a false sense of objectivity” (West, 2009, p. 192). Interestingly, I had seven participants who were 20 years-old or younger and nine who were
older than me. There were no issues related to age that arose during the data collection phase of the study.

**Data Collection**

The data collection process began with document analysis and then moved into interview and focus group data collection in order to prompt the development of appropriate questions during the interview process (Patton, 2015) and better acquaint myself with the institutions prior to conducting interviews. Maintenance of the research journal was continuous beginning at the onset of the document retrieval process at the first site. It would have been impossible, due to the geographic locations of the sites, to have proceeded with each category of data collection in an iterative manner. However, I did follow the order in which the data collection process appears in this document for each Bible college site.

**Document Analysis**

Documents provided information that may not have been available through other means, such as when information was difficult to convey in an interview due to interviewee reluctance (Patton, 2015). The first site visited provided useful documents such as meeting minutes and student surveys for the study. Each site was not able to do this, but I was able to collect useful data from each of the Bible colleges’ websites. Each website provided material about the colleges such as academic catalogs and historical information. Appendix I includes a list of documents collected and analyzed for the study. All information pertinent to the study was incorporated in to the qualitative management program. Appendix J includes an example of an audit trail from the study.

**Survey/Questionnaire**
I developed a very simple questionnaire to gather demographic and spiritually-descriptive data of prospective participants (see Appendix D). I incorporated this questionnaire into SurveyMonkey®, an Internet-based survey program. The demographic portion of the questionnaire consisted of 12 questions regarding gender, age, marital status, employment, race, dependents, parental education, and place of residence. The next portion of the questionnaire consisted of five questions that provided insight into the prospective participants’ level of spiritual integration. These questions were taken from Morris et al.’s (2004) article that assessed the correlation between Tinto’s (1993) interactionist theory of student departure and Schreiner’s (2000) concept of spiritual integration. Ascertaining a demographic profile and descriptive information assisted me in the selection of participants. I used the questionnaire for descriptive purposes only. I was able to compare participants’ questionnaire answers to their interview and focus group data for triangulation purposes. Also, when responses to the Student Spiritual Integration Questionnaire (see Appendix D) were indicative of someone who may have been less integrated into their Bible colleges, I was able to review their interview data to ensure they experienced spiritual integration.

**Interviews**

I ensured interviews were semi-structured, fluid and consisted mostly of open-ended questions that related to the problem, purpose and literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In all cases I paid transcribers to transcribe the recorded interviews. I based interview questions in the literature and related them to the research questions. However, as the study progressed, I modified interview questions to ensure thorough exploration of concepts introduced by participants (Cooney, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).
There were 35 interviews conducted that were included in the study, 28 of which were student interviews and seven which were faculty member interviews. There were over 1100 pages of single-spaced transcription documents accumulated over the course of the study.

**Interview Questions (Students)**

*Opening Questions*

(1) Why did you decide to attend a Bible college?
   
   Probe: Describe your decision making process that led you to choose a Bible college rather than another type of college.

(2) What made you commit to this particular Bible college?
   
   Probe: What factors led you to this decision?

(3) Please tell me about your childhood and what role faith/Christianity played in it.
   
   Probe: How involved were your parents in the development of your faith?

*Academic System Integration*

(4) How would you describe your interactions with faculty?
   
   Probe: How do they exhibit friendliness, professionalism or disinterest? Describe how they show they genuinely care and have concern for students. Describe how interactions with faculty were important, or were not important, to you.

(5) How would you describe the classroom environment?
   
   Probe: Describe how classrooms in your college are either safe or unsafe environments for discussions. How have discussions of topics with which you struggle been comfortable or uncomfortable? Describe, if you have had them, your experiences with in-classroom conferences or one-on-one communication with instructors.
(6) How would you describe your academic abilities?

   Probe: How have you progressed, or not progressed, as a student?

(7) How would you describe your Bible college’s ability to meet your learning needs as a student?

   Probe: Please describe the factors about your college (faculty, staff, curriculum, activities) or yourself that helped you assess your ability to learn?

(8) Describe how external factors, such as employment, influenced your ability to perform academically.

   Probe: How do faculty react if you miss class due to work?

(9) If the academic system in your college was a good fit for you, please describe how you became convinced of that fact.

   Probe: At what point in your enrollment in your college did this occur? Explain.

*Social System Integration*

(10) How would you describe the social environment within the college?

   Probe: Describe how you made friends, if any, during your enrollment at your college. If you did not make any friends, please describe why.

(11) How would you describe your interactions your fellow students?

   Probe: Please explain how your peers added anything to your collegiate experience.

(12) Describe your peer relationships that occur outside of the campus.

   Probe: Describe how study groups, if you were a member of any, helped you. If you meet peers after classroom hours please describe how this affects your decision to remain at the college.
(13) How does the overall social environment influence your decision to continue your studies at the college?

Probe: Please tell me how your Bible college’s environment convinced you to remain enrolled. What does your college add to your life?

**Economic and Familial Integration**

(14) Could you describe how family influenced your decision to enroll and remain at this Bible college?

Probe: Explain how your family was supportive or unsupportive. How do the needs of your family, if you have a spouse and/or children, infringe on your college responsibilities?

(15) How have finances affected your decision to stay at the college?

Probe: Describe how tuition is either fair or unfair. Describe your access to tuition assistance, grants, etc.

**Spiritual Integration**

(16) Describe how this college has influenced your spiritual growth (Morris et al., 2004).

Probe: How has the curriculum and/or faculty/staff caused, or encouraged, you to grow spiritually?

(17) Describe how your understanding of God has been affected by classroom and/or campus experiences (Morris et al., 2004).

Probe: Who or what has been most responsible for any enhanced understanding of God experienced by you at this college. Explain.

(18) Describe how faculty, administrators, and/or staff have assisted you in processing issues related to your faith (Morris et al., 2004).
Probe: How do faculty and peers react to your questions regarding faith?

(19) Describe how the college’s overall integration and incorporation of faith into the curriculum and classroom activities has been a good, or bad, fit for you.

Probe: How did you realize you were integrating faith into your own life?

(20) How has your ability/technique/method of assessing your surroundings/environment changed since your arrival?

Probe: At what point during your enrollment here did this occur? How did the college help you to see your surroundings in a different way?

(21) Describe your participation in ministry activities, or service learning requirements, hosted by the college.

Probe: How did you participate? How did it help with your spiritual growth?

(22) How has your personal identity been affected by your attendance at the college?

Probe: What is the most important aspect of your personal identity? When did realize this? How did the college help you with this?

(23) Describe how the college has been a good spiritual fit, or has not been a good spiritual fit, for you (Morris et al., 2004).

Probe: Do you feel you have spiritually integrated into the Bible college? Note: Spiritual integration in this context means “your integration into an institution’s overall social, academic and spiritual orientations.”

Religious Fit

(24) When you first arrived, what factors did you see at your college that helped you assess it regarding the college’s religious doctrine and practices?
Probe: Do you agree with the college’s mission and goals as they relate to the Christian religion? Do you agree with the college’s religious practices regarding chapel services, etc.?

(25) Describe the college’s religious values that were similar and different from those you were accustomed to from childhood.

Probe: Do you agree that Christians should participate in worship services?

(26) What experiences at the college made you believe the religious environment was a good fit for you?

Probe: Describe your social support. How were full-time religious leaders helpful to you?

The first three questions, which were easy to answer, opened the interview in a noncontroversial manner while allowing the participants to be descriptive in their answers (Patton, 2015). The next six questions assisted me in determining the level of influence the participants’ perceptions of academic integration had on their spiritual integration into their Bible college. Questions four through nine referred to the academic system’s components of academic performance and faculty and student interactions (Tinto, 1993) inside and outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1997). Questions four and five focused on the interactions between students and faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), how these interactions impacted students when faculty showed interest and concern (Halawah, 2006), and whether faculty took the time to discuss issues with students inside and outside of the classroom (Sidelinger et al., 2016). The remaining questions, six through eight, referred to the impact of academic integration on student outcomes such as GPA (Chan & Wang, 2016; D’Amico et al., 2014; Woosley & Miller, 2009) and overall academic performance (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, &
Kommers, 2012). Questions related to employment, a factor that affects mostly nontraditional students, were asked to assess their impact on academics and overall persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1993). Question nine attempted to discover the indicators along with a possible timeframe of a student’s congruence with a college’s academic system (Tinto, 1993).

The social system within an institution of higher learning “centers about the daily life and personal needs of the various members of the institution, especially the students” (Tinto, 1993, p. 106) and is made up mostly of the “recurring sets of interactions among students, faculty and staff that take place largely outside of the formal academic domain of the college” (Tinto, 1993, p. 106). Questions 10 and 11 referred to the college’s social environment, which may have affected students in positive and negative ways (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), found in the dormitories, hallways, and eating areas where students interact informally with fellow students, faculty, and staff (Tinto, 1993). Peer relationships, important to social integration (Tinto, 1993), were the subject of questions 12 and 13.

In question 14, I attempted to find out if family influenced students’ integration into their Bible college. For example, when students spend too much time connecting online with family and peers, they may see their social integration suffer (Kord & Wolf-Wendel, 2009) while minorities may feel their separation from their family and refusal to participate in dormitory culture can cause anxiety and perpetuate perceptions that they do not fit in (Morley, 2004). The concept of familial integration, the degree to which a student’s perception of family connectedness was met during their degree pursuits, helped me to understand why students made decisions to persist even when their family’s needs outweighed their academic requirements (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014).
Questions regarding financial status, an individual attribute, were asked to assess its impact on a student’s ability to stay in college (Tinto, 1993). Lack of funds can prohibit continued enrollment, creating the necessity to work in order to pay tuition, a situation that may keep students from participating in integrative activities (Tinto, 1993). The possibility that some students may have experienced negative economic integration, especially regarding the components of work and financial support, have been shown to increase the time necessary to complete a degree (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Question 15 allowed me to ascertain students’ perceptions of their economic integration into the Bible college.

Schreiner’s (2000) concept of spiritual integration formed the spiritual component of my conceptual framework of spiritual integration. I created questions 16 through 23 and borrowed heavily from Morris et al (2003) when developing questions 16, 17, 18, and 23 to allow student participants to voice their perception of the institution’s spiritual environment, with special emphasis on the degree to which they believed the college had affected them in a spiritual manner and whether it influenced their decision to persist. Question 16 was very direct and gave some insight into the student’s spiritual growth (Morris et al., 2003). This question was somewhat redundant in that some participants already had a high degree of spirituality, or occupied one of the latter stages of faith (Fowler, 1981), evidenced by their decisions to attend a Bible college.

In question 17, my intention was to draw out of the students their perceptions of the spiritual environment of their Bible college. This environment included the role of curriculum in both the formulation of Christian identity (Rhea, 2011) and IFL (Harris, 2004; McCoy, 2014), which may have increased their personal and academic knowledge of God. Campus activities, for example religious observances in chapel, may improve students’ knowledge of God’s
sovereignty in their lives (Glanzer & Ream, 2005). Question 18 delved into the interactions among students, faculty, administration, and staff. Student-faculty and peer interactions that occurred within a residential environment fostered a greater understanding of living a Christian life (Sriram & McLevain, 2016), whereas the classroom and positive faculty relationships predicted connectedness and learning (Sidelinger et al., 2016). I would describe every faculty member I interviewed as spiritual. Almost every student reported that their teachers provided instructional behavior beneficial to them (Astin et al., 2011b). The same was true when faculty expressed their Christian beliefs authentically (Booker, 2016; Lindholm & Astin, 2008). The student’s perception of their Bible college’s integration of faith in learning, as explored in question 19, depended on this being a successful process (Harris, 2004) and the college’s successful elimination of any dualism in the classroom (Esqueda, 2014; Iselin & Meteyard, 2010, Valk, 2012).

Question 20 was an effort to assess whether a student’s Christian worldview, making the safe assumption that most of the student body at each Bible college was Christian (Morris et al., 2004), became more attuned to biblical precepts if the learning environment was conducive to this concept. For example, the institution can influence Christian worldview development through focusing instruction on biblical truth and the Holy Spirit (Mittwede, 2013) as well as including the dimensions of behavior and heart-orientation in their Christian worldview curriculum (Schultz & Swezey, 2013). Question 21 explored students’ experience with curriculum-related ministry efforts (Atkinson, 2009) and how this impacted them pedagogically (Mullen, 2010), civically (Astin & Astin, 2015), and spiritually (Firmin et al., 2014).

I included question 22 to explore a participant’s personal identity to see how it would possibly influence the spiritual integration (Morris et al., 2004; Schreiner, 2000) component of
the spiritual integration process. Bible college students, especially those who are of traditional age, may still at least partially conform to their parents’ identities which may color their self-perception regarding their identities (Marcia, 1966). Any student, regardless of their age or student status, may be experiencing doubt that could lead to the development of their religious identity (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011) as well as a rapid development of their Christian identity (Rhea, 2011). The institution could influence this process through the actions and expectations of faculty and peers (Wilkins, 2014), through faculty who exhibit authenticity to their students (Booker, 2016), through the curriculum (Rhea, 2011), and through faculty who create an environment conducive to students’ questions regarding the importance of faith and Christian identity (Bryant, 2008). The final query in this section, question 23, hopefully motivated students to share why they believed the college was a good fit for them by sharing vignettes that provided a deeper understanding of their story at the college (Creswell, 2013; Morris et al., 2003; Schreiner, 2000).

In questions 24, 25, and 26, I asked the participants to share with me their perceptions of the religious environment at their Bible college (Alleman et al., 2016). The temporal nature of question 24 was an attempt to look at their actions and interactions over time to discover a process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Question 24 allowed participants to describe the factors that helped them to assess the institution in a religious sense. These factors did, indeed, lead them to perceive their fit within the Bible college (Alleman et al., 2016). Traditional students brought with them the religious values and practices acquired through their childhoods; in question 25 I assessed whether the students experienced congruence with the institution versus their upbringing or, for older students, the values and practices they adopted in adulthood (Alleman et al., 2016). Question 26 provided me with participants’ decision making process, taking into
account their institutional and personal experiences that led to their perception that they were religiously compatible with the institution (Alleman et al., 2016).

**Interview Questions (Faculty)**

*Opening Questions*

(1) How did you come to teach at this Bible college?

(2) How would you describe the role of faculty at this Bible college?

*Academic System Integration*

(3) How would you describe your interactions with your students?

   Probe: What is the college policy for making yourself available after normal hours?

(4) How would you describe the classroom environment you create for your students?

   Probe: How do you form relationships in the classroom? Describe how you make time for in-classroom conferences or one-on-one communication.

(5) What kind of student-centered academic challenges have you experienced in the classroom?

(6) How would you describe your Bible college’s ability to meet the learning needs of its students?

   Probe: Describe how students share their experiences in class.

(7) Please describe how students working while they attend college influences their ability to perform academically.

(8) Please describe how you would be convinced that a student was a good academic fit for your college.

   Probe: At what point in their attendance at the college is this usually noticeable?
Social System Integration

(9) How would you describe the students’ social environment within the college?

   Probe: Describe student interactions in the hallways between classes.

(10) Describe your efforts to develop relationships with students outside of the classroom.

   Probe: Where does this usually occur?

(11) Describe how you interact with students when attending extracurricular activities hosted by the college.

   Probe: Please describe how this interaction effects students.

(12) Can you describe why students would find your college a good social fit?

Economic and Familial Integration

(13) Please share any stories on how students’ families influenced their decision to stay at the Bible college.

   Probe: Describe how these may be different for traditional and older student experiences.

(14) Please describe how finances affected students’ decisions to stay at the college.

   Probe: Please share any stories you may have regarding issues with students meeting tuition costs.

Spiritual Integration

(15) Describe your worldview and how you share it with your students both inside and outside of the classroom.
Probe: How would you describe a Christian worldview? Describe how students have reacted to your sharing. How does your sharing affect the development of their Christian worldviews?

(16) Describe how you facilitate your student’s development of their Christian worldview in your classroom.

Probe: How does the curriculum facilitate worldview development? How do students respond to your worldview? Can you remember whether students’ assignments, or their actions in the classroom, reflected a change in their biblical knowledge and application of that to life situations?

(17) How do you assist your students in processing issues related to faith?

Probe: Please share any questions regarding faith issues that came up in class or outside the classroom.

(18) Describe how you integrate faith into the curriculum and classroom activities.

Probe: How does your college integrate faith into learning?

(19) How can you tell when students begin to integrate faith into their learning and their life?

Probe: Describe how students’ faith integration influences their actions or becomes evident in their assignments?

(20) What factors here at your Bible college most influence students’ spiritual growth?

Probe: Please describe how students experience spiritual growth, in your experience, when they encounter other cultures or people of other races. Or, when they engage in service learning or other forms of field education. Or, when they participate in student organizations.
(21) Can you explain how students’ participation in ministry opportunities, or chapel services at the college, helped their spiritual growth?

  Probe: Describe how students’ values or beliefs changed when they took part in ministry opportunities. Describe how your college’s chapel services, if you have them, affected your students.

(22) Describe how your college, or you, assist students in the development of their Christian identity.

  Probe: How has mentoring your students helped them to develop their Christian identities? How do you model Christian values for your students?

(23) How do you know a student has spiritually integrated, or has good spiritual fit, at your Bible college?

  Probe: What changes have you noticed about students’ actions/behaviors as they become part of your college’s environment? What have you noticed about students’ actions/behaviors as they failed to become part of your college’s environment?

*Religious Fit*

(24) What factors do you believe helped your students assess their religious fit upon their arrival at the Bible college?

  Probe: Describe instances when students agreed, or did not agree, with the college’s mission and goals as they relate to the Christian religion.

(25) Describe the college’s religious doctrine and practices.

(26) Have you ever witnessed students who did not agree with the college’s religious doctrine and practices? Please explain/describe.
The first two questions developed for faculty participants, which were easy to answer, opened the interview in a noncontroversial manner and allowed the participants to be descriptive in their answers (Patton, 2015). Questions three through eight referred to Tinto’s (1993) concept of academic integration. Faculty-to-student interaction, the topic of questions three through six, was an important aspect of a student’s integration into their institution of learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). These questions touched on how smaller Bible colleges offered greater opportunities for faculty interactions (Morley, 2004; Wagner, 2015), how students perceived their instructors (Sidelinger et al., 2016; Wheeless et al., 2011), and how faculty interactions influenced student outcomes (Chan & Wang, 2016; D’Amico et al., 2014). Question seven was informed by Tinto’s (1993) assertion that work-study programs were effective short-term answers to students’ financial problems and, at least in one case, aided a student’s ability to contribute to her peers. Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) expressed concern regarding a student’s ability to maintain a balance of external commitments and academic responsibilities – a situation described by a few students. Question eight attempted to discover the indicators, along with a possible timeframe, of a student’s congruence with a college’s academic system (Tinto, 1993).

Questions nine through 12 referred to the college’s social system (Tinto, 1993). Question nine was very broad, allowing the faculty member to describe the college’s social environment in his or her own words (Tinto, 1993). The next question referred to relationships that increased the quality of learning (Tinto, 1997) and, if the student was of the nontraditional variety, develop outside of the classroom but still depended on the teaching/learning dynamic (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Question 11 referred to extracurricular activities, a subcomponent of social integration, that were absent from small, commuter Bible colleges but present, to a limited extent, on residential campuses (Pascarella et al., 1983; Samuels et al., 2012). The final question
in this section asked faculty members to share their thoughts and experiences regarding a students’ social fit into their college (Tinto, 1993).

The concept of familial integration is the degree to which a student’s perception of family connectedness was met during their degree pursuits (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). In question 13, I attempted to find out if faculty had any insight to whether family influenced students’ integration into their Bible college. For example, faculty may have known when students spent too much time connecting online with family and peers (Kord & Wolf-Wendel, 2009) or noticed if their minority students did not fit into the college culture (Morley, 2004).

Finances influence a student’s ability to stay in college (Tinto, 1993). Lack of funds prohibited continued enrollment for some students creating the necessity to work, or suspend enrollment in some cases, in order to pay tuition. This was a situation that kept some students from participating in integrative activities (Tinto, 1993) or came to the attention of faculty as a possible academic issue. The fact that some students experienced negative economic integration, especially regarding the components of work and financial support, increased the time necessary to complete a degree (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Question 14 allowed faculty to weigh in on their perceptions of students’ economic integration into the Bible college.

Questions 15 through 23 referred to spiritual integration (Morris et al., 2003; Morris et al., 2004; Schreiner, 2000). Questions 15 and 16 focused on the faculty member’s worldview, which Schreiner (2000) found to be an indicator of student spiritual integration. Studies have shown that faculty can leverage their Christian worldview in the classroom when they focus on the spiritual as opposed to the materialistic (Valk, 2012), refer to the Bible as the answer to life’s most important questions (Esqueda, 2014), endeavor to understand their students’ worldviews in order to enhance the IFL (Kanitz, 2005), or make efforts to embody their worldviews to connect
with their students (Iselin & Meteyard, 2010). Question 17 examined faculty interactions with students. Student-faculty and peer interactions that occurred within a residential environment fostered a greater understanding of living a Christian life (Sriram & McLevain, 2016) whereas the classroom and positive faculty relationships were predictors of connectedness and learning (Sideling et al., 2016). Faculty who promoted spiritual values in the classroom were most helpful in this area (Astin et al., 2011b) as were faculty who expressed their Christian beliefs authentically (Booker, 2016; Linholm & Astin, 2008). Questions 18 and 19 referenced IFL and touched on a faculty member’s ability to infuse their instruction with their faith, demonstrate their faith to their students (Sites et al., 2009), or even attribute the success of IFL due to its incorporation into the curriculum (McCoy, 2014).

Question 20 touched on factors that Bible college faculty saw as spiritual growth influencers, such as experience with multiple cultures, service learning activities, interactions with other races, participation with student organizations, or learning in other countries (Astin et al., 2011b). Question 21 dealt specifically with how ministry or service learning opportunities influenced spiritual growth as they experienced compassion and care for others when involved in ministry (Astin et al., 2011b), reevaluated their perceptions of the less fortunate, experienced humility when they realized God’s grace in their lives, and realized that all people were created in God’s image (Firmin et al., 2014).

In question 22, faculty shared how they promoted Christian identity development by modeling the values and knowledge learned from stories about people of faith (Glanzer & Ream, 2005); by acting as mentors to students who had questions regarding identity, faith, and doubt (Bryant, 2008); or assisting students in their critical thinking about religion (Bauman et al., 2014). Question 23 allowed faculty to describe the characteristics that students exhibited that
identified them as spiritually-integrated into their Bible college (Morris et al., 2003; Morris et al., 2004).

In questions 24, 25, and 26, I asked the faculty participants to share with me their perceptions of their Bible college’s religious environment (Alleman et al., 2016). Questions 24 and 25 in this section referred to the faculty member’s perception of students’ fit into the religious environment using factors such as peer relationships, academic satisfaction, and contact with faculty and staff who empathized with a student’s religious incongruity (Alleman et al., 2016). The final question shed light on students’ incongruity, if any existed, with the college’s religious practices and doctrine (Alleman et al., 2016).

Focus Groups

I conducted two student focus groups and one faculty focus group during the data collection and analysis phase of the study (Patton, 2015). I conducted the student focus groups at site one and site three. The faculty focus group occurred at site one. The groups met at the participants’ Bible college where I digitally recorded the sessions. I acted as a moderator and attempted to bring the participants’ views regarding the study’s purpose to the surface. I ensured the focus group questions remained faithful to the emergent concepts and to the research questions (Creswell, 2013) and also asked the participants to check the progress of the process model to ensure it reflected their experiences. The digital recordings were transcribed and included in the study as data but were most useful as critiques of the emerging spiritual integration process (see Appendix K for a sample of a student focus group transcription).

Research Journal

I kept a record of all research activities to include appointments, discussion summaries, proposal writing, problems, dates, committee and IRB information, decisions made that changed
the course of the study, and issues that complicated the participant selection process. Any other information that I deemed appropriate became part of the journal (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The journal was also helpful in determining my impact on the collection and analysis processes, examining my responses to interviews and interviewees, and continuously evaluating the conduct of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) in order to incorporate a “degree of researcher reflexivity” (Cooney, 2011, p. 20) into the endeavor. Appendix L contains a sample of one of the journal entries.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data occurred concurrently with data collection and continued throughout the study in a cyclical manner (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I did this by converting the information from all appropriate data sources into text and placing this information into the qualitative data management program (Creswell, 2013). I used the NVivo qualitative data analysis software program to assist, as a data management function, in the analysis of the data.

Microanalysis

At the beginning of the research process, I employed microanalysis which is “a form of coding that is open, detailed, and exploratory” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 70) to develop the meaning of the data and assure appropriate development of concepts. This entailed a very detailed analysis of the participants’ voices by “focusing on certain pieces of data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 70) in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the data’s meaning with the objective being the construction of concepts. The microanalysis process was inductive in nature where the line-by-line open coding process explored the data allowing the emergence of codes. I derived the codes by interpreting, or assigning meaning, to the raw data contained in the qualitative data management program (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).
I used the NVivo qualitative data management program’s ability to attach a description to each code – referred to as nodes in NVivo. Doing this ensured that the microanalysis was very specific, but it also allowed for the evolution of the conceptual data into more abstract concepts and categories as the analysis matured. In order to better visualize the open coding process, I created a Nodes List, a portion of which can be found in Appendix M, that listed every single open code along with its description. The NVivo program did not allow this. Creating a Nodes List provided a means to search my codes and create other documents as needed.

**Concept Identification**

The process of concept identification involved identifying basic-level concepts where I placed similar conceptual data into groups using a conceptual label – this allowed me to reduce the amount of codes developed from the raw data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I continuously asked myself questions about the data and constantly compared analytical results with other sources of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Asking questions about the data was a type of strategy where I endeavored to think outside of the box and probe deeper into the data’s meaning. I reflected on my answers to avoid missing an important aspect of the data and enhance my ability to remove any bias from the process. I employed constant comparative analysis by comparing emerging concepts with data collection information (Creswell, 2013) and systematically examined and refined the variations in the emergent concepts (Patton, 2015). Asking questions and employing constant comparisons allowed me to develop these concepts according to their properties and dimensions as well as differentiating the concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 94). A concept’s properties referred to those characteristics that provided both a description of the concept as well as its definition whereas the dimension of a concept referred to the variations within the properties providing range and specificity (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).
The next step was taking the existing codes from the Nodes List (see Appendix M) and placing them into groups with similar qualities. I developed a Word document called the Nodes Analysis, a portion of which is found in Appendix N. Each concept was given a descriptor to give it greater meaning – I tried to do this *en vivo* when possible. I also tried to maintain consistency among the concepts by placing them within contextual groups. This was one of my greatest challenges – my personal concept of context was constantly evolving as I began to better understand how the emerging concepts related to each other. Throughout the analysis, I sensitized myself to context as much as possible to keep the concepts standardized within their own contexts.

**Memoing and Diagramming**

Analysis, according to Corbin and Strauss (2015), not only includes the development of concepts and categories but also keeping a record of the thought processes and decisions that explain how the researcher assigned meaning to the collected data. For this study it included the memoing and diagramming processes as a continuous part of the analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2013). I prepared memos by writing down my thoughts, regardless of how fragmentary or diverse, regarding the data (Tan, 2010) and found, over time, that it made more sense to me to develop the memos for each concept/category (see Appendix O for two examples of memoing). This also included recording my ideas about emerging concepts, developing and answering questions about the data, and putting into words my rationale regarding concept and category linkages (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Memoing was also part of my constant comparison process as I reflected on (a) my notes, (b) recent data collection, (c) memos, and (d) coding between data sets such as participant interview transcriptions (Jones & Alony, 2011). Memos may seem very similar to journals since
they both collect data important to me as the researcher. However, in this study, my journal
provided a continuous log of personal reflections that pointed more toward the overall study
rather than focusing solely on the analytical process as memos were designed to do (Corbin &
Strauss, 2015). I created diagrams of the relationships between codes, concepts, and categories
as they emerged during the analytical process. These were simple early in the process and
increased in complexity as the concepts and categories begin to mature. Diagrams were graphic
in nature and helped me raise my “thinking beyond the level of description” (Corbin & Strauss,
2015, p. 123). Two samples of diagramming can be found in Appendix P.

Theory differs from a mere description of a phenomenon in that it provides explanations
for things people do. In other words, it is necessary to link the actions and interactions, within
specified conditions, of people responding to situations as well as the “outcomes that result when
certain actions and interactions are taken” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 153). In order to develop
this theoretical model, I located the actions and interactions to fully understand their purpose
within context. Context linked concepts and increased the explanatory qualities of the emerging
theoretical model. It provided a location and explanation for people’s actions and interactions
that occurred under specific conditions and foreseen consequences (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).
The paradigm is an analytic tool that assisted me in conducting axial coding around categories.
This tool took into consideration the conditions, actions and interactions, and the consequences
that are consistent with the expressions people use every day: “When this happens, I do this, with
the anticipation of having this result” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 157).

**Axial Coding**

Eventually, it was possible to group together basic-level concepts into higher-level
concepts using axial coding. These higher-level concepts were referred to as categories and sub-
categories that expressed major themes running through the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The emerging major categories were more abstract in nature but kept the research grounded in the data through their close relationship with the original raw data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The creation of major categories and sub-categories also included comparing concepts to discover links among their dimensions and properties and grouping together those that were similar – a process referred to as axial coding (Tan, 2010).

I accomplished the axial coding process by constantly referring to the Nodes Analysis document (see Appendix N) to create the categories and incorporating the Conditional Relationship Guide (CRG) into my analysis process (Scott, 2004). A type of diagram similar to the matrices used in Corbin and Strauss’s (2015) text, the CRG is a practical and systematic approach to the rather abstract procedure of axial coding around categories. The CRG applies Corbin and Strauss’s (2015) questions of what, when, where, why, how, and the consequence to each category. This guide, a portion of which can be found in Appendix Q, was essentially a matrix where I placed the category in the far left column and the answers to the questions in the columns to the right of the category (Scott & Howell, 2008). The conditional relationship guide allowed me to continuously address the “loose array of concepts and categories” (Scott, 2004, p. 115) when I asked the questions in order to discover the patterns among the categories (Scott, 2004). This method also added a dimension of time to the data analysis from which I was able to see a process emerge (Scott & Howell, 2008). It also provided a means to address the paradigm’s considerations using the questions of when, where, and why to “identify contextual conditions and boundaries,” (Scott & Howell, 2008, p. 7) the question of how which “identifies actions and interactions among the categories” (Scott & Howell, 2008, p. 7) including the dimension of time and subsequent process, and finally the last question where I was able to
determine the category’s consequences (Scott & Howell, 2008). Corbin and Strauss (2015) stated that knowing the context is important because context grounds the concepts and minimizes distortions in meanings found in the data.

One aspect of my use of the CRG was importing both concepts and categories into the matrix. Since I was still in the coding process, this enabled me to build categories from concepts and continuously enlarge the dimensions and properties of existing categories. The initial CRG contained over 60 different concepts/categories that required further grouping into a more manageable number of categories. I did this by developing a second CRG, a portion of which can be found in Appendix R, with two additional columns. I placed the name of the sub-category under the “Sub-category” column located on left of the matrix, and placed the concepts from the initial CRG that shared similar criteria and contextual qualities on the far right of the matrix and labeled it “Sub-category concepts.” The emerging major categories were placed in the second CRG as rows before their sub-categories. This was difficult and took several attempts to develop my fist workable model. The final spiritual integration process contained five major categories and 11 sub-categories.

Core Category Development

It was during this stage that I began looking for a core category that would encompass the “major theme of the study” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 7), which was deductive in nature. The process of selective coding, where I filtered and coded “data which [were] deemed to be more relevant to the emerging concepts” (Jones & Alony, 2011, p. 107) in order to “accumulate data into categories which were most relevant to the study,” (Jones & Alony, 2011, p. 107) ultimately allowed me to see the core category emerge based on those categories that were most saturated with relevant data (Jones & Alony, 2011). The core category of desire to honor God was
developed through trial and error using the Reflective Coding Matrix (RCM), which allowed me to create “a relational hierarchy” (Scott & Howell, 2008, p. 8) through the development and contextualization of the core category. The reflective coding matrix placed the category’s descriptors of processes, properties, dimensions, contexts and “modes for understanding the consequences” (Scott & Howell, 2008, p. 8) in a horizontal column labeled as the core category on the left of the matrix. Once I saw how the five main categories, or themes, emerged during the data collection and analysis process I was able to place these into the “Processes” section of the RCM. From there I used the information from the Conditional Relationship Guide (CRG) to fill in the other sections of the RCM (see Appendix S for the RCM). I modified an aspect of Scott and Howell’s (2008) CRG by not placing actual categories in the “Properties” section – I instead developed properties that best described a relationship to a desire to honor God and, therefore, to the other major categories or themes.

This matrix forced me to find the relationships for each category to the core category (Scott & Howell, 2008). The resultant core category was (a) abstract enough to for me to use it as the “explanatory concept,” (b) appeared often in the data, (c) was consistent with the data in a logical manner, (d) was abstract enough to enable research toward creation of a general theory, and (e) experienced expansion in its depth and “explanatory power” when I related each category to it (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 189).

**Theoretical Integration**

Once I identified the core category, I used the relationships developed from the reflective coding matrix to show how the categories related to the core category and to each of the other categories – this is known as theoretical integration (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The theoretical scheme was finalized through ensuring its logic and internal consistency. I employed member
checks of the model during the focus groups as I continuously analyzed and synthesized the collected data. Data gleaned from the participants during focus groups, face-to-face discussions, and questionnaire data assisted my refinement of the developing model. I also identified categories that were poorly developed and returned to the data to ensure they had the density necessary to contribute to the process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Once the model and its explanation were complete, I sent these to the study’s participants for feedback and member checking purposes. Only seven of the 35 participants failed to respond. All feedback regarding the model and its explanation was positive in nature. Two of the responses regarding participants’ quotes necessitated very light editing of the manuscript. Appendix T includes a full list of participants’ feedback.

After developing the spiritual integration model, which answered the first research question, it was necessary to determine the role of spiritual integration. More specifically, I had to determine which spiritual integration concepts and categories that emerged during the analysis, as well as the indicators covered in Chapter Two, most influenced the students’ decisions to persist at their Bible college. To accomplish this I separated those influencers attributed mostly to spirituality from those influencers of academic, social, familial, and economic integration. In other words, by identifying the model’s spiritual elements used to describe the process of spiritual integration, I was able to shed light on the role of spiritual integration in Bible college undergraduate students’ decisions to persist – which answered the second research question.

**Trustworthiness**

The following constructivist criteria paralleled the traditional research criteria to include (a) credibility with internal validity, (b) transferability with external validity, (c) dependability
with reliability, and (d) confirmability with objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following paragraphs cover the steps I took to ensure trustworthiness using the constructivist criteria.

Credibility

I asked participants to conduct member checks of interview and focus group transcripts as well as the finalized version of the process itself to increase credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). My addition of the concept of triangulation, where a finding in a specific source of data enjoys corroboration with two other data sources, was a technique that increased credibility (Patton, 2015; Simmons, 2013). While triangulation was a means to enhance credibility, “grounded Theory builds an analytical case by constantly seeking new categories of evidence” (Jones & Alony, 2011, p. 107) and was therefore not necessary for enhancing credibility throughout the analytical process.

Dependability and Confirmability

As for dependability, I ensured proper transcription of every aspect of the participant’s interviews to include pauses - even if the data appeared unimportant (Silverman, 2005). As for confirmability, an external audit of the research process occurred during the final portion of the study to enhance confirmability. This is where the auditors, in this case my committee chair and second committee member, ensured that the “findings [were] grounded in the data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 323) and that a sample of the findings could be “traced back, via the audit trail, to the raw data – interview notes, document entries and the like – upon which they were based” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 323). I also provided sufficient enough detail in my memos to ensure any reviewer would be able to formulate judgements regarding the research process (Cooney, 2011).

Transferability
I used rich, thick descriptions in the study to provide abundant detail allowing a reader to draw their own conclusions to order to increase the transferability of the study’s results (Creswell, 2013). I attempted to enhance transferability of the results to a wider range of students through maximum variation of the student participant sample. There was also a variation in the Bible college sites that may have increased transferability. While Site One and Site Two were within a two-hour driving distance of each other in the Southeastern United States, Site Three’s location, in the northern portion of the Midwestern United States, added a regional variation to the study. Both Site Two and Site Three were residential campuses while Site One was nonresidential. Finally, both Site One and Site Two had approximately 160 students who attended on-campus while Site Three had approximately 340 on-campus students.

**Ethical Considerations**

As a doctoral candidate who planned to conduct research with students and faculty at three different Bible colleges, there were ethical considerations that I had to address (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I gained permission from the appropriate administrators before physically entering any one of the three Bible colleges for staff discussions and participant interviews (Creswell, 2013). I identified a gatekeeper to assist with gaining rapport with participants and site personnel at each site (Creswell, 2013). I disclosed the purpose of the study with personnel at each site (Creswell, 2013) and obtained permission from participants by having them sign a consent form that explained the study’s purpose, how I would use their information, and how I would provide confidentiality through the use of aliases (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Participants understood they were able to discontinue their support of the study at any time during the recruitment, interview, and focus group processes (Creswell, 2013). When interviewing minority participants, I endeavored to remain aware that I was a White researcher, employed
sensitivity to possible participant discomfort, and ensured they understood why I’m asking questions about their experiences and perceptions of the institution (Herndon, 2003; Mizock et al., 2011). I ensured the time spent by participants was well worth the expenditure and also committed to publishing the results of the study, if feasible, to ensure the emergent process derived from the analysis of participant experiences would benefit fellow students and higher education professionals (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I also ensured the protection of participants’ identities by assigning them pseudonyms and protecting their true attributes by storing this information on a secure computer within password-protected documents.

**Summary**

This systematic grounded theory study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) explained how undergraduate students integrated spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States as well as discerned the role that spiritual integration played in their persistence. I collected documents, conducted interviews and focus groups, and maintained a research journal as means to collect data for this effort. Student participants had completed at least one year of study in their Bible college, and I based faculty participant selection on their status as full instructors, those who worked at least part-time and had taught for at least one year. I employed the systematic grounded theory data analysis process to include microanalysis, concept identification, category creation, and the development of a core category using constant comparative analysis continuously throughout the process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I took precautions that ensured the trustworthiness of the findings as well as preserved the ethical standards set by Liberty University.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States and discern the role spiritual integration plays in persistence. This chapter presents the findings of the study, including the process of arriving at the definitions of terms important to readers’ understanding of spiritual integration. Next is a description of the study’s participants to include their gender, age, race, their site association, and other pertinent information. This chapter also provides the resultant model of spiritual integration and an explanation of the spiritual integration process to include the major categories, sub-categories, and concepts that constitute the process. Finally, there is a discussion of how the study’s findings answer the research questions.

Participants

The study’s participants were selected using the method outline in Chapter Three. The following offers more detail on each participant. Table 4 provides a list of the final sample student and faculty participants (n = 35) along with information that should assist the reader in better understanding their backgrounds. Table 5 contains the final sample student participant responses to the five questions on the Student Spiritual Integration Questionnaire (see Appendix D) regarding their spiritual integration into their Bible colleges (n = 28). The participant list is in alphabetical order, by pseudonym, which is close to the order in which I interviewed them.

Selection of the student participants occurred through assistance by the gatekeeper at each Bible college and their responses on the Student Spiritual Integration Questionnaire (see Appendix D). Forty-two students completed the questionnaire (n = 42) and seven faculty
participants \( n = 7 \) were interviewed totaling 49 participants \( N = 49 \). Only 30 of the 49 students who completed the questionnaire were interviewed. During the interview process, two interviewees were deemed unsuitable for the study due to erroneous responses on the questionnaire regarding time enrolled in their Bible colleges. In total, only 28 student participants \( n = 28 \) who completed the Student Spiritual Integration Questionnaire were interviewed for the study. The seven faculty members \( n = 7 \) interviewed for the study did not complete a questionnaire but were required to have been associated with their Bible colleges for at least one year. A total of 35 participants \( n = 35 \), what I call the final participant sample, were interviewed for the study; 28 were students and seven were faculty members.
### Table 4

**Final Sample Participant Information List (n = 35)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Pseudonym</th>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Bible College</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>College Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Cau</td>
<td>CB</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Cau</td>
<td>CB</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartholomew</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>CB</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernice</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>CB</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cyrus</td>
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<td>CB</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>AA</td>
<td>CB</td>
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<td>CB</td>
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<td>Single</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irene</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Cau</td>
<td>NBC</td>
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<td>Single</td>
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<td>His</td>
<td>CC</td>
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<td>Cau</td>
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<td>Cau</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>Single</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>His</td>
<td>NBC</td>
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<td>Single</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Sarah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Cau</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Grad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Pseudonym</td>
<td>Student Pseudonym (n = 28)</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Bible College</td>
<td>Traditional College</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>College Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas M</td>
<td>M 21 AA NBC No Single 4th</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew M</td>
<td>M 43 Cau CB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James M</td>
<td>M 35 Cau CB</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John M</td>
<td>M 59 Cau CB</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke M</td>
<td>M 68 Cau CC</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew M</td>
<td>M 58 Cau NBC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orpah F</td>
<td>F 64 AA NBC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuben M</td>
<td>M 46 Cau NBC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. M = Male, F = Female, AA = African American, Cau = Caucasian, His = Hispanic/Latino, Multi = Multiple Ethnicities, CB = College of the Bible, CC = Christian College, NBC = Northern Bible College
### Table 5

*Final Sample Student Questionnaire Spiritual Integration Summary (n = 28)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree or Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being at this school is contributing to my spiritual growth.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My understanding of God is being strengthened by classroom and/or campus experiences.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty, administrators, and/or staff are helpful to me in processing issues related to my faith.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This school provides adequate opportunities for involvement in ministry.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given where I am spiritually right now, this school is a good fit for me.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I assigned pseudonyms to each participant using male and female names from the Bible. These names were assigned in alphabetical order to illustrate the progression of interviews, including the faculty participants, throughout the data collection and analysis process.

**The Spiritual Integration Model**

I developed a graphic representation of the process undergraduate students experienced as they spiritually integrated into their Bible colleges by designing and redesigning conceptual models. These models emerged from the data collection and analysis process consisting of microanalysis, concept identification, and the development of major categories and subcategories from those concepts. These categories progressed with each new coding operation, aided by constant comparison analysis of existing data, resulting in a succession of models I generated as new ideas and insights necessitated their evolution. The model in its final form, Figure 2, offers a graphic representation of the process that will unfold in the succeeding sections. A visual model, according to Corbin and Strauss (2015), “should show the skeleton of a theory” (p. 300) and thus guide the reader through the proposed process. This final conceptual model offered my proposal, in a visual form, of the process that undergraduate students experienced as they spiritually integrated into their Bible colleges.
Figure 2. The Spiritual Integration Model.
Spiritual Integration: Arriving at a Definition

Before presenting an explanation of The Spiritual Integration Model, it is important to explain how I arrived at a definition of spiritual integration. This effort required the development of a definition for spirituality as well as one for a Bible college’s spiritual environment – both of which were integral to the definition of spiritual integration.

Spirituality defined. In the data collection phase of the study, participants were asked questions regarding Schreiner’s (2000) spiritual integration indicators. As the study progressed and themes began to emerge, participants were asked what they considered to be indicators of individual spirituality – specifically of undergraduate Bible college students. During the coding process, answers to these queries were gathered together within a concept titled “Spirituality.” There were 23 different responses within the concept with six as the most useful for developing a definition of student spirituality. These became the three spirituality indicators of (a) Christ-like behavior, (b) authenticity, and (c) interest in studying and talking about God’s word.

The first was “Christ-like behavior,” or actions speak louder than words, how they talk and interact, they loved one another, and always fruit. When asked what he would look for to assess spirituality, Noah said “actions speak louder than words, so I'm going to look toward the life they live . . . . Are they in the Word daily?” While David said, “But if you say you are Christian, I need to see it in your acts, uh, maybe the way you talk, your interaction with me as we deal with people.” Ruth focused on prayer and stated, “Or just like how much time they spend in prayer?” Felix wanted to know, “How they are interacting with others. Are they ‘me motivated?’ Or, are they ‘others motivated?’” As for love for one another Luke opined that “It’s a subtle answer here, I think. And you have to really look for it. The description in the Book of
Acts at Antioch – they loved one another.” Finally, in always fruit, Omar related his view of, “Do they have fruit that is of God? Do they have passion? Are they peacemakers?”

As for “authenticity,” or who we see them as, Hermes stated that “Um, because I really do feel like you can say one thing, but I just really want to see how you live it out.” Ruth was also concerned about how people acted when they were not in the presence of other Christians when she shared “Having people or someone they worked with before being able to tell them this is who we see them as.”

The final indicator of “interest in studying and talking about God’s word” was given emphasis by Gideon when he said, “I believe that would be the main thing. You and I start talking out here, and um, and we are both – are Christians – and we didn’t mention God or nothing.” Also included in the concept of talk about God was Matthew’s point that spiritual Christians should be talking about God when he asked “Does the Lord ever come up?” Hermes, in the concept interest in studying the Word, wanted to know if they studied the Word of God while Ruth was interested in, “Are you reading your … Like how much time do you spend reading the Bible per week?”

When I contemplated the three spirituality indicators as descriptors of a student’s Christian spirituality, I was able to develop a definition: A person who exhibits spirituality, in regards to Christianity, responds to situations exhibiting Christ-like behavior, demonstrates love and encouragement in his or her speech and actions, constantly shows an interest in cultivating a knowledge of God’s word, and behaves the same way when around fellow Christians or non-Christians.

The spiritual environment defined. Developing a definition of the spiritual environment relied more on looking at the resultant categories holistically and interpreting
participant data to create what I believe to be a very general description of the atmosphere at a Bible college. This included a quote from Andrew that best encapsulated the foundation of a Bible college when he said that, “I think there’s enough of an integral Christ focus here that you couldn’t come here and be anti-Christ and stay.” The three-word term of “integral Christ focus” I believed best described what the faculty, staff, and students, along with the curriculum, must embrace in order to foster Christian discipleship and spiritual growth. This commitment was espoused on the College of the Bible’s website when it informed prospective students that the college offered a Christ focused education. Also, the behavior of people who learn and teach at a Bible college must be spiritual in nature – which was already discussed when I defined spirituality. Therefore, my definition of a Bible college’s spiritual environment: The spiritual environment at a Bible college consists of the integral Christ focus of the college’s curriculum, faculty, staff, and students. This environment encourages Christian discipleship, Bible-centered instruction, spiritual growth, and authentic Christian behavior by all persons attached to the college. Before moving on, it is important to consider the fact that the spiritual environment is not a stand-alone category within the process that students undergo as they spiritually integrate into their Bible colleges – it is more an overall Christ-centered attitude that permeates the Bible college environment and includes elements from almost every aspect of the process discussed in detail in the following text.

**Spiritual integration defined.** Since I was trying to define a type of integration, Van Gennep’s (1960) integration model was used as the foundation for spiritual integration. As stated before in Chapter Three, an individual departs from one group and joins another through three stages. These stages were (a) separation from the original group, (b) transition into the new group, and (c) incorporation of the new group’s expectations and norms (Van Gennep, 1960).
Figure 3, is a simple model of integration that I created, from Van Gennep’s (1960) description, for illustrative purposes:

![Figure 3. Simple model of integration adapted from Van Gennep (1960).](image)

While Van Gennep’ (1960) model stated that a person must incorporate the new group’s expectations and norms, I viewed this as a student’s acceptance of the *spiritual environment* at a Bible college. Indeed, the *spiritual environment* is where the student will encounter the expectations and norms of a Bible college as embodied in biblical discipleship, instruction, and spiritual growth and must accept that environment to spiritually integrate.

The definition of a spiritually-integrated student relies on the building blocks of spirituality, the *spiritual environment*, and knowledge of Van Gennep’s (1960) integration model. The definition of spiritual integration is: Spiritual integration of Bible college undergraduate students occurs when they perceive that their spirituality, whether possessed by them upon their enrollment and/or formed during their attendance, has aligned with the *spiritual environment* of their college and therefore have accepted their place in that environment.

**The Spiritual Integration Model Explained**

The reader may notice in *The Spiritual Integration Model* (Figure 2) how the student processing through the model can move from *discovering* to either *developing* or *applying* before moving on to *accepting*. This was added to the model to show that students, perhaps those who
have been Christian throughout most of their lives and are familiar with contributing to charitable causes or to their church, may start contributing right away before actually building relationships or growing spiritually in their Bible colleges. The dotted line that surrounds the entire process represents the core category of desire to honor God. The core concept of desire to honor God touches every major theme within the spiritual integration process undergraduate students may experience in a Bible college. Bible college students, or prospective students, exhibit a desire to honor God whenever they direct their thoughts and actions toward pleasing God in their personal and professional lives. The other dotted line that surrounds the major categories of discovering, developing, applying, and accepting represents the spiritual environment. This shows that students will begin to perceive the spiritual environment, found mostly in the Bible college, only after they arrive and begin the spiritual integration process and eventually accept or decline their place in the college. Finally, the reader will observe the re-integrating loop at the bottom of the model. This allows a student to fall back and revisit an earlier theme in the event they encounter difficulty while progressing through the spiritual integration process. For example, a student who is contributing to the Bible college through a service learning project may return to developing so that she can build a relationship with a faculty member in order to perform the service learning requirement at a more enhanced level of understanding. Also, a student may return to seeking another Bible college if they have a negative experience in building relationships with their fellow students.

Table 6 provides a tabular representation of The Spiritual Integration Model with the major categories expanded to better illustrate the various concepts within the model and where they reside. I developed The Spiritual Integration Model to be free from jargon and unnecessarily complex descriptors to ensure its accessibility. This was done to ensure that any
reader who has experienced the *spiritual environment* at a spiritually-oriented college or university could easily understand where they may fall within the model’s continuum.
Table 6

*Tabular Representation of the Spiritual Integration Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seeking</th>
<th>Discovering</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Applying</th>
<th>Accepting</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeking God</td>
<td>Seeking a Spiritual Education</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Knowing God</td>
<td>College Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Calling</td>
<td>-Bible College Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-College Students</td>
<td>-Need Spiritual Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Family</td>
<td>-College Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Caring Faculty</td>
<td>-Appealing College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Devoted Faculty</td>
<td>-Focusing on God</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Caring Peers</td>
<td>-Collaborating with Faculty and Peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Building Relationships with: God, Faculty, Peers
- Participating
- Give and Take
- I speak at his/her Church
- Study Groups
- Give and Take
- Learning to Help
- Helping
- Not Just Coming to School

Growing Spiritually
- Challenge
- Internal/External
- Wrestling with Faith
- Worldview Development
- Change
- Incorporation of Faith into Life
- Bible College Attendance
- Personal Change
- Christian Identity

Religious Fit

Spirituality Status

College Fit
Readers may want to review Table 4, which contains a list of the study’s final sample of 28 student and seven faculty participants’ pseudonyms and demographic data. Reviewing this table may assist readers in maintaining their understanding and awareness of the quoted interviewees and perhaps provide some additional context. The list includes student participants’ gender, age, race, which site they attend as students, whether they are traditional or nontraditional students, their marital status and their year of enrollment during the time of their interviews. This list will also provide faculty participants’ gender, age, race, and the site where they taught during their interviews.

**Seeking**

Prospective students want to know more about God and have experienced a sense of guidance by God, or a *calling*, to attend a Bible College. They express a desire to attain an education, even a formal degree, with a spiritual or biblical foundation that would equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to share what they learned with others.

**Seeking God.** Prospective students wanted to know more about their Creator creating the desire of *knowing God* better. They believed they were led by God or heard a *calling* to attend a Bible College.

**Knowing God.** *Knowing God* was a concept that students experienced in childhood or recently in adulthood where they wanted to know God better. This came about because they did not have any experience with God, such as Bartholomew who described from his childhood how his grandmother would take him to church:

> And she would take me to church every once in a while, but we would have to work on Sundays. And I knew about God, but I didn’t have really the experience
of God, so it was like I knew that there was a God, but I didn’t experience – I would just go to church.

Participants found themselves wanting more in-depth knowledge of Him through personal and collegiate Bible study. Bernice began a personal study of the Bible as an adult:

I wanted to know more about God. I said, ‘I’m going to read the Bible.’ I was determined after I bought my house. I’m retired, I do not have to do anything. I’m going to read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. So I just started reading the Bible on my own, just reading it.

Later, Bernice wanted to augment that with formal study at a Bible college when she remarked, “You know, riding around, saw the How to Study the Bible on the signage here at [College of the Bible] and came in took the class and just stayed with it.”

After they began their journey to know God, in these cases by finding and enrolling in a Bible college, students could see His hand in their lives resulting in their knowing God on a personal level. This is how Aaron knew, through a staff member at the College of the Bible, that God touched his life after his enrollment:

I was talking to [staff member’s name]. She works there. We were talking about that and she said, ‘I remember the first day you came here, and look at you now. It’s like I can see God. His hand is on you, working in your life.’ Wow. It’s just amazing.

**Calling.** Calling was a concept where students were led by God to attend Bible college – even when that was not in the students’ plans, as was the case with Judith:
It turns out that this is the only school that worked out, like my paperwork wise, because God had a plan for me to be here. So, He made sure that all the other doors closed, so this is how I ended up kind of here. The same was true with Isaiah who was not expecting to go to Bible college but was happy he did, “And, me personally, you know, I found it as something that was cool . . . something interesting. So, you know, in my life I didn’t expect that . . . God had other plans and steered me in that direction.”

These students shared how they felt the Holy Spirit prompting them to learn more about God or clearly heard God tell them to attend a particular college as they drove by. Aaron believed he was called to a Bible college:

I pass by my present church where the school is and I hear God clearly tell me, “I want you to take the course ‘How to Study the Bible.’” I brush God off, keep going . . . Finally, I said ‘Okay, Lord. I’m going to go [College of the Bible] and get this class.’ And, uh, three and a half years later, I got four classes to graduate with my bachelor’s.

Felix sensed a calling to preach and attend Bible college to prepare for ministry:

I have been called, I believe, called of God to preach and . . . it was my determination to prepare effectively for that. I felt that I can have a call but not prepare – that wouldn’t be honoring the Lord. And so . . . if you’re going to do that I think it’s important that you do it right. And, so, that is why I’m coming to Bible college.

God led them toward formal education through loved ones who told them to follow God’s guidance or sensed the Holy Spirit’s influence to attend during their first visit to their
college. Judith was reminded by her father, who was concerned that she was staying home to care for her mother, that she was heeding God’s call by going to Bible college:

So, uh, and my dad was like, ‘I know what you’re doing, you’re going to try and stay local because you need to take care of mom.’ And he’s like, ‘I know how you want to go to [Northern Bible College], and I know how you’re scared, but you need to do what God wants you to do and if that’s stay here, then that’s stay here. But, do not close your mind to somewhere far away because that might be the place where you need to be.’ And, he’s like ‘It’s okay. Like, you can be scared to go – but if God tells you to go and then you better go.’

Later on, when Judith visited the Northern Bible College, she mentioned how she and her friends felt compelled to stay:

And once [we] stepped on campus we all got like this weird feeling that this was home. Which is like super weird and there’s nothing you can [ascribe] it to, but the Holy Spirit telling you this is where you need to be.

This calling results in their learning more about God through study at a Bible college and following God’s plan for their lives.

**Seeking a spiritual education.** Prospective Bible college students express a desire to attain an education, even a formal degree, with a spiritual or biblical foundation. This need for spiritual education will lead them to a place that will equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to share what they learned with others.

**Bible college students.** Bible college students exhibited certain characteristics that drew them to a Bible-centered institution of learning. Prospective Bible college students may have come from Christian homes, had parents who were believers but never attended church, or had
parents who were not believers. Quartus provided an illustration of growing up in a Christian home where the importance of studying the Bible was ingrained during his early years:

So I was homeschooled for the first nine years of my schooling. And every day we would have a Bible lesson to start the day. We usually would do family devotions around the dinner table every night. That’s something I remember. We would each get our Bibles out. We’d read a passage. We’d talk about it. Usually my dad would end up kind of wrapping things up with a lesson because he was a pastor and that was how he did things. But, yeah, most, um, every day of my life somehow or another my family would integrate the Bible in.

Esther’s parents believed in God but did not attend church:

I did not grow up in a church family. My mother and father both believed in God and so I had that foundation that I believe in God, but my mother and father just had a different idea of religion.

**Need for spiritual education.** Whether they grew up in a Christian home or not, most of these prospective students sensed a need for an education – even a degree – with a spiritual basis. This need may arise due to an individual’s call to a ministry while lacking a formal biblical education. Gideon, who spoke English as his second language, was already serving as a pastor following a failed attempt to finish a degree at another college:

We heard the commercial for the, at time, the [College of the Bible’s original name]. And I say, ‘Well I want to try it again.’ My wife encouraged me because we needed to, to be better prepared. So, we come here to try it and we like it. We started learning and we stay until we finish the bachelor degree. So, um, the reason that I believe [I came here] is I, I felt the need to be better equipped.
The need for a spiritual education may also come about because of the desire to obtain a non-theological degree but one that incorporates faith in the curriculum. Lois transferred from another college due to her desire to incorporate faith into her college life:

And, I was studying Criminal Justice and Women’s Studies, um, which I really enjoyed but I didn’t feel like it was right for me, it was like there was something missing. And, um, I kind of had, like, had a spiritual burst over Christmas break and I realized a lot of my lifestyle wasn’t fitting, um, the lifestyle God wanted me to live. And, so, I finished out the year at the school I was at and then I started looking at other colleges that I could take strictly just Bible classes.

Others may seek a spiritual education in order to strengthen their relationship with God, be around people of the same age who had similar goals, or just obtain answers to important spiritual questions. Hannah stated that one of the reasons she considered attending a Bible college was that it “allowed for me to strengthen my relationship with Christ, get more knowledgeable when it came to the Bible and stuff like that.” Samuel’s search for a spiritual education included being around fellow Christians, “And so coming to a place where there is a lot of other people that share my faith that are my age um, I don’t know – I just thought that that was the best thing for me.” This was echoed by Irene who stated “I just wanted to be with people that were my age, and were in the same, like, journey – like at the same page of their life.”

Many students want a Bible-based education that will provide them the knowledge necessary to lead people to Christ. They believe that learning God’s word in a formal setting is a key factor in this skill. Aaron’s search for this knowledge centered on non-Christians when he said, “Well, (pause) there are a lot – are a lot of lost people out there, and I would love to be able
to lead people to Christ.” Hermes expressed his desire to assist those who needed spiritual help when he saw his friends experiencing problems, spurring him to remark “I wanted to make sure that I was able to help them. So I wanted to make sure my faith in God was strong so I could show them His love.” Bartholomew also wanted this Bible-based education so that he could “. . . be a better teacher and preacher of the Word.”

This effort to gain enough competence to *lead people to Christ* was accomplished through learning about the Bible and attending a learning institution where an individual’s faith could grow stronger. Aaron stated that, “The only way I would do it is by studying and learning the Word of God and be ready for it.” The desire to *lead people to Christ* results in attendance at a Bible college where students will become equipped and readied to share God’s love.

**Desire to honor God and seeking.** The core concept of *desire to honor God* touches every major theme within the spiritual integration process undergraduate students may experience in a Bible college. Prospective students who are Christian and want to attend a college with a strong spiritual component exhibit a *desire to honor God* when their *seeking* places an emphasis on *knowing God*, occurs because they experienced a divine *calling*, or have *need for spiritual education*.

**Movement from Seeking to Discovering**

Movement between the two major categories of *seeking* and *discovering* is mostly logical in that prospective students want to know God better and are seeking an education with a spiritual foundation. This search for a spiritual education would most likely have drawn them to a Christian institution of learning like a Bible college. These movements were mostly prompted by the actions-interactions that Corbin and Strauss (2015) mentioned must link “to the conditions that persons are responding to and trying to manage or shape when they interact” (p. 172). Some
of these interactions occurred between individuals and their Creator. For example, Aaron experienced a *calling* as he drove past his future Bible college when he shared, “I pass by my present church where the school is and I hear God clearly tell me, “I want you to take the course ‘How to Study the Bible.’” Felix found the right answer to his calling by choosing to study at a Bible college, “And so . . . if you’re going to do that I think it’s important that you do it right. And, so, that is why I’m coming to Bible college.” Attending a Bible college also fulfilled the desire to *lead people to Christ* for students like Bartholomew who wanted to both teach and preach God’s word. Gideon’s *need for spiritual education* was awakened when he heard and advertisement for his Bible college, “We heard the commercial for the, at time, the [College of the Bible’s original name]. And I say, ‘Well I want to try it again.’”

**Discovering**

Students who were *seeking* godly knowledge and a Christ-centered academic degree completed their search for a spiritual education at a Bible college. Soon they were *discovering* a Bible college *family*, an appealing *college environment*, and a *religious fit* regarding doctrines and practices that they found agreeable.

**Family.** I would describe the *family* sub-category as a close-knit community of like-minded people bound together by similar beliefs and mutual love and respect. Specifically, the family environment is made up of Christians – *caring faculty*, *devoted faculty* and *caring peers* – who are all involved in the day-to-day activities of a Bible college. In other words, being at a Bible college is like being at home.

The family environment was noticeable by new students right away. Hannah remarked on this phenomenon, “Here at [Christian College], it just feels like a family right away. You just
get here and it’s a different atmosphere, different environment.” The experience of family was a comfort to Isaiah who had experienced some anxiety upon his arrival:

And, then whenever you, you know, you’re scared – kind of frightened – and because you don’t know what may happen, you don’t know what type of people you may encounter. Or here – luckily when you come here you encounter people that treat you like family, see you as family. And are there to help you out and make you feel welcome and not alone.

The family atmosphere received a boost from the presence of actual family members who enroll together. Andrew mentioned how couples attended his Bible college, “Then you’ve got families that are here together; husband/wife, husband/wife. There’s several of those.” In fact, Bartholomew, a student at Andrew’s Bible college, said “And my wife is also a student here. And she’s also enrolled at the Bible college because she has seen the growth in me and she’s been changed by the Word, too.” David opined that his family attendance should count toward tuition, “I had two daughters come through here and one’s currently still here and so I’m just bringing them in much as I can. And they still will not give me a family discount (laughter).” Luke shared an anecdote of a student who would bring her daughter to classes with her:

She came to school at nighttime with teacher’s permission when the daughter had some time off from school. She’d come and sit in on the classes and, um, the daughter will be coming to school here next year as a Freshman. And, it’s that family influence and family connectivity.

The concept of family was not only a positive factor that students discovered once they enrolled in their Bible college. As will be evident later, family would also become a
concept that propelled students from discovering to developing when they took steps to become a part of that family.

**Caring faculty.** Caring faculty in this study actively looked to meet the needs of their students, a concept I called accommodating faculty. While it was important to increase the academic challenge in a Bible college faculty tempered this rigor with grace – the concept of grace and rigor. Caring faculty endeavored to stop and explain concepts to students even when it may have been an inconvenience to the instructor and demonstrated authentic concern for their students through their actions. As people in a Bible college who hold a position of authority, it appeared appropriate for faculty to exhibit care for their students.

Students viewed accommodating faculty as instructors who were sensitive to students’ needs. Cyrus based the faculty members’ response to students’ needs on the positive relationships between them:

Well, the camaraderie that they have between the staff and the students, okay? Because like I said before, this is a Christian college. There should be love here of all places, you know? I could understand that at [local college] there’s no love, okay? But there should be love here and there should be, ‘How can we help you?’ And it is, you know? ‘How can we help you grow? How can we help you understand the Word of God?’ Okay? ‘If you’re having difficulty, let’s sit down and resolve this.’ And they do, you know?

Accommodating instructors met with students outside of class hours to discuss personal or class-related issues, provided students with the tools they needed to learn, and were more concerned with ensuring students’ understanding of topics rather than adhering to the course structure. Ruth shared how she was always able to meet with faculty when she said, “So I can often catch them before or after class and be able to talk to that person one-on-one.” Ethan was also
impressed by instructors’ availability when he remarked, “And so whether it’s class related or personal they [faculty] will take the time to work with you.” Abigail appreciated how faculty provided her with the tools to learn when she commented, “Well, I think – the faculty is always giving resources . . . providing tools and avenues to not only learn but to express what we’re learning. I really appreciate that.” Jacob was impressed that his professors were more concerned with students’ understanding a concept than adhering to the course structure when he said, “Not that their giving any unfair advantage or trying to help everybody, but their goal is more than that – they want everyone to understand the criteria opposed to just pass.” Faculty were able to demonstrate their concern for students through their efforts to accommodate their needs. This is important to the concept of family because students expect their family to meet their needs as the needs arise.

*Grace and rigor* defined the college’s commitment to sound academic rigor – but tempered by grace. While the college may continue to refine and even raise the academic bar, the faculty can provide grace to students who struggle with issues unrelated to apathy or neglect of studies. Faculty viewed this as a check-and-balance system where standards were set high with a corresponding nod toward forgiveness of students’ shortcomings - those which students could overcome with more instruction. Reuben, a member of faculty, expressed his position on tempering rigor with grace:

> And again, I think that's the ministry aspect of what we're doing. That, you know, if – if you felt that God has called you to kingdom work in whatever profession, we want you here, you belong here. And then, it’s our responsibility that – we need to help you get there. Um, but you stop coming to class or just, ‘Yeah. I'm not going to write that paper.’ It's like, ‘All right. I can't write it for you. Then I don't know what to tell you.’
And that's where the consequences kick in. But for students willing to try, um, we’ll go all out to help them.

Students valued professors’ use of grace and rigor as they held them to the college’s standard but spent the time necessary to ensure they understood the curriculum. This was done, according to David, through the use of a syllabus, a way for faculty to provide discipline but with benevolence:

One thing I love about all the teachers . . . is when they put the syllabus in front of you, that’s it. That syllabus now becomes the standard and they do not deviate from the standard. But they do show grace and mercy where and when it’s needed. If you are just not getting it, they will do whatever it takes to help you get it. Um, meeting one-on-one, setting you up with a former student of theirs – just try to help you.

Professors also exhibited care when they would stop and explain concepts to students even when it was inconvenient. Students desired clarity and better understanding of concepts they deemed important. They may have been new Christians with questions or students who struggled with a particular topic. Faculty would stop whatever they were doing, whether in the classroom or walking down the hall, to offer their explanation when students didn’t understand or were confused by a topic. Esther revealed how it was not unusual for the college president, even when he was busy, to stop and explain:

Took time out to answer your questions and – like [college president] could be going down the hallway and he’ll have something on his mind but he always stopped if you had a question. And either he would answer it or he’d say, ‘I’ve something to do. Let me get back with you.’ So [faculty] was awesome.
The concept of *authentic concern* occurred in the classroom and students’ personal lives when faculty members exhibited care for their students through their actions. For example, Samuel was astonished with his professors’ actions and obvious concern for their students when he remarked:

I don’t know if you've noticed that but they [faculty] sit and join us for lunch . . . . And even the president, you know [president’s name], I’ve had lunch with him on several occasions . . . you know, just here in the cafeteria. And I think that that's just amazing that they, um, I think that that shows not only a sense of community but a sense of, uh, compassion and how much they care. Because they’re willing to spend even more time with the people that they see enough, probably, every day.

Faculty demonstrated their concern by wanting to know what was going on in the lives of their students. Faculty did not mean to pry into the personal lives of students but were genuinely concerned whether their students were in need. Indeed, faculty cared for each of their students as individuals – not as a collective. In a Noel-Levitz *Student Satisfaction Inventory* (Noel-Levitz Incorporated, 2015), completed by 84 of the undergraduate students at the College of the Bible, 91% thought that the statement “Faculty care about me as an individual” was “very important” to them and that they were “very satisfied” that the statement was a reflection of their experience at the college. Abigail, a single mother and student at the College of the Bible, agreed that faculty showed authentic concern when she said:

Well, with [college professor], obviously, because we have a working relationship as well he knows what’s going on in my world, checks in on my son, things of that nature.

[Another college professor] also, just a caring man. He always asks about things that are
going on, never intrusive. I don’t ever feel like any of my professors are intrusive with 
information, but they genuinely care about what’s going on in your life.

*Devoted faculty.* Devoted Bible college faculty love what they do. These instructors *love to teach.* They teach *from the heart* and not just with their heads. *Love to teach* described the concept that instructors at Bible colleges loved what they did for a living. In this case, faculty were passionate about teaching, developed a fun and engaging environment, allowed students to ask questions, changed their teaching method to reach even one student, and tailored a class to fit the types of students.

David commented on the passion instructors exhibited when he disclosed, “And you can feel the passion that each professor has for whatever course of study that they are [teaching].” Abigail also saw instructors’ passion in the classroom when she remarked, “They choose the classes that they’re most passionate about and they teach them. I have not had a class with a professor that was not passionate about what they were teaching.” Faculty also show how they *love to teach* when James shared his willingness to tailor his classes to his students:

I try to stay on topic and get the material covered and all that, but I try to tailor the class. 

So the first class we ever have together, I ask what their ministry is and get to know them all. And if we have a whole bunch of pastors I’ll tailor it to them. If I have a whole bunch of young people who are just getting out in the world, I’ll tailor my examples to them. And last night I had a class with a couple of bikers, so I used some examples about the *Song of Solomon* and haunches of the horse and the saddlebag - so the motorcycle - and try to be creative in that way.
Students responded to this love of teaching by wanting to do their best and having a deeper respect for their faculty. In other words, faculty devotion provided another important dimension to the college family.

Faculty at Bible colleges taught with their hearts and not just their heads. This concept, called *from the heart*, occurred when faculty exhibited joy in their teaching through their propensity to laugh and joke around with their students, by admitting their mistakes and apologizing to students when necessary, and through their efforts to be approachable, helpful and knowledgeable, and avoid any perception of arrogance.

Cyrus explained how a faculty member’s jovial attitude with students creates a bond of joy and respect when he said, “[College professor] and I, we joke around a lot, you know, because he’s one fan and I’m another fan. But that brings us closer together and I respect him a great deal. And I enjoy coming here.” Aaron found faculty honesty to be refreshing when he stated, “The professors are really – they are very honest. If they make a mistake, they take care of it and they say I’m sorry.” Omar remarked on faculty members’ humility:

When they teach for example, it's not like, ‘This is this. That's it.’ I mean, you need to have that attitude somewhat because it's Scripture you're talking about. But, they’re not going to be like, ‘You're dead wrong! You might be going to hell if you keep on this track’ and like that kind of thing.

Faculty, when demonstrating this concept, created an enjoyable atmosphere and developed a personal link – a connection - with their students. Students found this type of faculty behavior endearing, causing this behavior to create within them a desire to become a part of the Bible college’s family.
Caring peers. Students in Bible college were naturally caring peers who exhibited care through their actions and attitudes. These students also enjoyed sharing abilities, life stories, and testimonies with each other. Caring as a concept referred to peers who were concerned about their fellow students when they failed to show-up for class, took the time to talk and pray for their classmates when they were down-and-out, and avoided any sign of judgment when their peers discussed something controversial in class. When someone was absent, Bartholomew and his fellow classmates usually knew or found out if they were all right:

And when somebody is missing we always ask a question, ‘Hey have you seen him this week, he didn’t show up to college this week?’ And we’re always concerned about where people are when they don’t show up to the classroom or when people are missing from class.

Thomas discussed his experience with praying for his peers who were in need:

I think as I was, um, just having conversations outside of classes with people where we would be either sharing our testimonies or talking about different . . . subjects. Um, if somebody was going through something we would pray with them. And I think I noticed that come alive more as I was, um, going through the classes and just being in that atmosphere of faith – just being all around, I guess.

Orpah, a faculty member at the Northern Bible College, offered a vignette of caring that occurred in her classroom when a student, a young woman who was rebellious in the past but had recently shown signs of growth, opened up to her peers during a discussion:

When she actually left my class, she thanked me because she was able to share so much in that class about her life and nobody, you know, looked down on her because of it. Everybody was kind of wrapping their arms around her. And, I, I did get a lot of
feedback from that class, ‘Thank you, [Orpah], that was just wonderful and we were able to share and nobody felt judged.’

When new students were shy, caring students would make sure they welcomed and encouraged them to join in college social activities - ensuring no one was “left behind.” Judith was shy when she arrived at her Bible college but soon found out her peers would not allow her to avoid becoming part of the family:

I wanted to be a member of the community, but I’m not the person that actively seeks out community. And so, I really wanted to be a part of things but I wasn’t going to, like, by myself go do stuff. So everyone else just kind of came to my room, like ‘You’re coming with me to do this thing.’ I’m like, ‘Okay.’ So, it was kind of a combination of both, me wanting to be part of everything and everyone really just inviting me to do stuff - making me come do stuff. And ‘We’re doing this thing and you’re coming whether you want to or not.’

Students were caring because they did not want to see anyone neglected and thus contributed to the family environment.

Peers shared with each other within a Bible college. This concept of sharing allowed them to share abilities, life stories, testimonies, and the similarities of their personal visions of the future with each other.

Felix appreciated peers who shared with each other:

Seeing, I guess seeing the different (pause) the diversity. I appreciate [it] more because I’m aware of it. Whereas before I wasn’t really aware of it. They add – knowing that there [are] other people like me that are, you know, they’re on a road, they’re on a struggle, they’re on a time of instruction. We’re all in it together. We help each other if
we need to understand concepts or show examples of what we did in the homework to kind of help each other understand it.

Reuben saw how peers, especially when they were from different backgrounds, created a special bond when they shared their life stories:

But I think students who grew up in a healthy, spiritual environment feel at home and those that have never had that also feel at home. And I – I think that peer relationships are really a big piece of that process, um, in just students being able to share their story and saying, ‘Wow. My experience is really different from you, but here we are. How can we support one another and help one another grow?’

*Sharing* enhanced the sense of family. This was accomplished through sharing rides in cars or trading information when trying to achieve the same goals as their academic and life journeys took them in the same direction. Hannah mentioned how sharing vehicle rides was an important way to meet new peers:

I did not have a car my freshman year. So that helped, too, I guess, just asking around and you go ride with different sorts of people. You see the different conversations, the music they listen to, things like that.

*Sharing* assumed an economic facet as when Bernice asked a classmate if he could share his knowledge of the job market to help her son:

One gentleman that I met, he works at a job and he has some openings. I mean, I asked him, you know, a job for my son. He was able to network that way. Just knowing that we’re going in the same direction, we’re achieving the same goal.

*Sharing* allowed peers to become acquainted as well as contributed, in a large part, to the overall Bible college’s *family* experience.
For some, the family at their Bible college created an environment that became their home. Abigail, who faced a situation at home that kept her from taking classes for a while, found a second home in her Bible college:

But, when I came back to school I did not expect as a single mom to come back to school. But, that’s what the Lord said. I couldn’t get a job. And I’m like, ‘What is going on?’ And so, I felt like the Lord said, you need to go finish what you started. I’m like, ‘Okay.’ I went to the school, I came back, first class. I felt like I had been on vacation and I had come home. The people were so excited to see me, my classmates, my professors were all like, ‘How are you?’ They really genuinely cared.

This experience was the same for younger traditional students, like Irene, who left family to live on campus:

I would say that it’s like my family, because, like, we’re all united in Christ. And, you know, I, I love my obviously real family – but earthly family – a lot and like, for sure, I miss my mom and I really miss my dog. But, yeah this is definitely where I’ve made my life, where I’m choosing to do life and, yeah, this is my home.

This sense of home appeared to have been the culmination of all the concepts that comprised the sub-category of family – caring faculty and devoted faculty and caring peers. Home was where the family resided – even if it happened to be a Bible college.

**College environment.** Bible college students may find their small institution an appealing college because it is accessible and affordable for any student who wants to learn in an environment that is continuously focusing on God and the Holy Bible. For students, this setting facilitates collaborating with faculty and peers on an intimate scale where biblical standards direct behavior.
**Appealing college.** Students who decided to stay at a Bible college found that the college appealed to them. This appeal stemmed from the college’s small size which created a sense of intimacy for students, a concept I called *small, intimate setting*. Formal and informal activities at small colleges also appealed to students and contributed in a positive manner to the college environment. The financial aspects of a Bible college were pleasing to students due to affordability. For some the appeal was the ease of accessibility for students who may have been out of the college classroom for many years because Bible colleges take these students, in an academic sense, from needing a degree to having one, a concept defined as *from here to there*.

Bible colleges’ have *small, intimate settings*, which I defined as the influence that a smaller college had on a student’s perceptions of their surroundings. This concept occurred when a small Bible college, with its close-knit community, had low professor-student ratios, professors knew what was going on in the lives of their students, faculty and staff became more acquainted with students due to enhanced one-on-one experiences, and the college was able to invest in their students due to the small student population.

The close-knit community created a bond that could last beyond graduation, which Matthew illustrated with this vignette:

Again, I mean the reason we still exist as a traditional undergraduate program is that we do have a reputation among our students for a close, caring community. Professors are available to you. They invest in the lives of the students. Just one illustration of that is the way, up until this year, way we did our stats on graduate employment or placement in graduate schools. [We would ask] the faculty what the graduates are up to. And they could tell us with almost a hundred percent [accuracy].
James, a faculty member, shared how small classes increased interaction when he remarked, “When you get this class of five, let’s say, that [means] more interaction between professors. So it’s ratio. It’s interaction levels, it’s number of peers that they have to interact with.” Students expressed how faculty and administration responded to certain situations, such as students’ personal issues, in a smaller college. Abigail expressed this when she said, “But, because we’re a small Bible college, because my professors know what’s going on in my world, they pray for me, I knew that I was going to be safe.” Omar touched on how a smaller college allows faculty to invest more in their students as individuals:

If you have such an amount of students [as in a large college] you don't have enough volunteers or staff to invest – then it's harder. Like if I have a cup full of water. I have, I'll say, ten cups that are empty. Well, there is only so much you can put into all of them. Then, none of them are going to be full . . . You can pour more water into that cup. It is more evenly distributed and a higher volume.

Hermes thought the small size of his college would enhance learning:

Um, initially the size, because I didn’t want like a really big university and most of the schools I went to as a child were smaller schools. And coming here, um, just getting a tour and seeing, like, how hands-on the staff was with all the students – I really liked it. Because you get like a one-on-one experience.

The intimacy inherent in a smaller setting resulted in student empowerment and the absence of students sensing they were lost in a crowd. Omar found that a small campus empowered students to rise to a higher level of competency:
It's smaller . . . everybody knows everybody, which is good. The more the students are empowered, the more that they take chances. If you have such a small pool, more people are likely to rise up instead of a big college.

Kenan was convinced that his ability to interact with peers and professors would have been more difficult in a larger college when he stated, “I’d feel like if I went to a Psychology class here I would interact more with the students and professor than, um, Psychology class at, uh, [state university] with like over a hundred students.”

While small colleges offered more intimate environments for both students and faculty, their small size also limited opportunities for student-centered activities that were more prevalent at larger colleges and universities. The next concept, known as the activities at small colleges, was where small colleges, especially colleges that had only commuter students, experienced limitations to the social integration activities they were capable of hosting - but students did voice their appreciation of them.

Omar mentioned how the Northern Bible College Resident Assistants (RA), where students’ part time job is to plan student activities, and community life personnel tried to include campus residential students in activities:

I think it's intentional. We have RAs that plan events. We also have community life interns. They are in charge of what goes on, on campus. What events can we go to outside of campus? Next week, we're going to an apple orchard outing. Just like they come out with creative ideas to get people involved and just to get to know each other a little more.
Commuter students normally came to class and left immediately afterwards due to work or family obligations. Andrew, who taught at the College of the Bible, said this about activities at a small, commuter-only campus:

There is a social environment outside of the school, but not really a lot because we’re not – they come, they take their class and they go back to work. There is not as much as you would have in a traditional Bible college.

Deborah, who was also a commuter, described how difficult it is for commuters to attend college activities:

So, kind of like the same thing when you go to a church and ‘How are you?’ ‘I'm fine, I’m blessed and highly favored.’ It might not necessarily be the case and usually maybe it's not. But, you know, people are just cordial and friendly. And a lot of people, as soon as the class is over, they got somewhere else they got to go.

Bernice, who also employed a church metaphor, mentioned how the social activities have improved at the College of the Bible:

It’s good. It has gotten better. They have functions to get us together, you know, the freshmen and the, you know, all the different levels. We get together and have a function, get to know people. It’s just like church.

When students took advantage of these activities, rare as they were, they tended to appreciate each other more. This was true of students who did not, or were unable to, take advantage of living on campus and missed the interactions that occurred there. Samuel, who used to reside on campus but began living at home to save money, explained how he missed his life in the residential dormitories, “I wish I could live on campus because I love being engaged
and being here. . . I don't know – it's just so much happens here.” A sentiment that Sarah, who was an online student but lived next to campus, shared when she said, “I mean I'm technically an adult online graduate. I just enjoyed coming to campus.”

I defined the concept of *from here to there* as where Bible colleges provided non-academically inclined students, or older students who were unable to attend formal schooling since high school, with the education they believed they needed to succeed. While some administrators of small Bible colleges were not as concerned with a student’s past academic performance as perhaps larger college or university administrators were, they did want to take students from their initial state to an earned degree. Andrew elucidated his Bible college’s stance on student acceptability:

> We don’t want to take your past ability, GPA, SAT scores, as a judgement on what you’re going to do now. We have an easy enrollment process. It’s very little that you have to have to get in. We want to take you from here and move you to there. We don’t want to be the people that take just the upper echelon students.

Lack of Christian training was another criterion upon which Bible college administrators did not base their admission considerations. Some students without a Christian background believed they were at a disadvantage when they applied to attend Bible colleges, but as Reuben was able to illustrate, their fears were unfounded:

> I talked to a student, just yesterday actually, and who was saying, ‘You know, I’m loving my Bible classes, because this is all new to me. I’m a new Christian. Uh, I come from a single-parent home. I was raised by my mom. I’m a new Christian and I was really nervous about the Bible classes because it’s – these are tough. I mean [these are] rigorous courses and I feel at a disadvantage because I know some of my classmates, they
grew up with this. They’re coming with 18, 19, 20 years of being raised in a church environment, [a] Christian environment, hearing Bible studies.’ She’s like, ‘I didn't get any of that.’ [She] talked with a professor and the professor said, ‘You know what, we all start in Genesis and there are things that we're doing in this class that – it’s new for everybody.’

What seemed to count in a Bible college, and what may have appealed to older students who were unable to attend college since graduating from high school, was the emphasis placed on students who were willing to put forth the effort to succeed academically. Bernice, a nontraditional student and United States Army retiree, said this about her Bible college’s academics:

If you put forth the effort, if you read, if you do your assignments, you do your work, you get a lot out of it. I mean, you can skim through but you’re not going to get as much result that you would have if you did the work.

Luke told his students that it was their determination that would get them through Bible college academics:

One’s IQ has no bearing on success in college. It’s your determination and your work ethic. People that give up, always give up. People who are determined to make it through no matter what, will make it through no matter what. And, okay then they got to be willing, too. And I always tell people, ‘Okay, God may have given you the ability to make straight A’s, but God also knows the time he’s given to you and the circumstances of your life.’

Bible college students discovered rather quickly another factor that contributed to an appealing college – affordability due to low tuition and the availability of financial aid. This
concept, which I called financial, helped convince Quartus that he could attend a Bible college and not accrue a large debt:

I knew I was going to have debt graduating and I just wanted to make that manageable.
And I figured if I’m going into ministry, which is – my plan is to do ministry of some kind – I didn’t want to graduate with 100 thousand dollars of debt and assume I was going to pay it off easily. You know, I wanted to be able to graduate with something that at least I was hoping would be manageable when I was done.

Hermes pointed out that not only was low tuition important but access to financial aid was key when paying for college:

I definitely appreciate the low cost here. Um, and also with the Financial Aid Department, they’ve been very helpful and with offering in-school scholarships and, um, so many different opportunities to be able to pay for school.

Students not only discovered an appealing college when they enrolled in a Bible college, this concept may have influenced their decision to stay. Students who wanted a small, intimate setting remained at their Bible college instead of leaving for a larger, more impersonal setting.

**Focusing on God.** A Bible college’s focus on God facilitates infusing God into the curriculum and centers academics on Bible-based solid truth. This focus increases students’ knowledge and sensitivity to experiencing God in their lives and provides a foundation for trusting the Bible.

Faculty incorporated, or built-in, the spiritual component of faith into their classes – infusing God into academics. This concept emerged because Bible college students found out they wanted to learn about God, not just gain knowledge from books, and they began to realize
that God was the center of everything. Andrew, a professor, illustrated how he integrated Christian beliefs into his courses:

For me, it depends on the class and the topic. I usually try to tie in some prayer, Scripture, or devotion to whatever we were talking about that day. That adds that sense of we’re not just here to learn a book, we’re here to learn who God is and worship God and pray.

This statement aligned with the website from Andrew’s Bible college that informed prospective students that their instructors would “incorporate faith, Scripture, prayer, and Christian principles into the curriculum and classroom experience.” Bernice described how one of her professors incorporated God into the courses he teaches:

My understanding of God is just I never realized that he was in all the things that we learn here, if that makes any sense. The particular teacher is [name of professor]. He does – he did public speaking, you know, grammar, literature. All of those things – those courses were centered around God. Like, it was almost like going to church every time we went into his particular class. Because it was a devotional, a video, or some type of song. And he is a poet so he wrote some stuff and just gets your mind in that – in the presence of the Lord in the class. I mean, we had church in there. The Holy Spirit was in there.

Students found from their studies that God’s hand was present in all disciplines because classes were biblically rooted and based in faith. This was Isaiah’s experience at the Christian College when he was asked about the spiritual environment:

Yeah, the fact that it doesn’t matter whether it’s a Bible class or a business class, God is still in the center of it. You know God is still the one who runs it, you know. Like I said
in my Bible classes – I was telling you – God was first no matter what. You want to be able to run a successful business. You know if you let God guide you that’s going to lead you, you know, far. So, the fact that God is the center of the conversation that evolves in every class is one of the ways I say it happens.

Sarah was amazed when her statistics class had a theological impact:

I remember coming into statistics and going, ‘All right, how are we going to talk about God in statistics?’ And sure enough, I mean, it was another hugely profound moment. I remember him talking about proof, the word proof and saying the only thing that's proof is a theological term. And that was huge to me. It’s true. Everything with science we can always, you know, change. But God’s proof is the only proof we have. So I feel like I look at everything from a more eternal perspective.

This created a worshipful environment that helped students maintain an interest in their academics while also making them comfortable with displaying their faith in class. Hermes offered an observation where his sense of comfort when exhibiting his faith in the classroom was enhanced:

Just being able to – I remember the first day coming into class and seeing the professor pray before class. And that was awesome, for me to be able to just see that. I didn’t, um, have to feel uncomfortable, I guess, showing my faith in an educational setting. And, being able to integrate God in all I did, like, in, even in my general courses like math and science. They found a way to integrate our faith in there.

The concept of solid truth was where academics focused on biblical truth – which depended on students’ thorough understanding of Scripture. Students embraced solid truth
because they wanted teaching that centered on the Bible, they wanted to attend a college where Bible knowledge was taught that could answer life’s questions, and they wanted their personally held biblical beliefs reaffirmed. John, a professor, referred to the Bible to answer students’ questions:

What I do is say, ‘Okay, well let’s look at the passages, here are the passages that deal with that.’ And then get other people - try to get other people talking about it - and stuff like that. And then maybe, you know some personal experience with somebody who has been dealing with that particular issue.

Omar’s Bible college helped him confront erroneous suppositions and change them based on Scripture:

The college has reaffirmed the truth. Because you can be a Christian for X amount of years – let's say 20, and know that. People have told you, ‘God loves you. God loves you.’ We never really believed it. When they affirmed the fundamentals like that you have a chance to receive revelation.

Students remarked on how biblical learning was truth-based, that the Bible was the main source of knowledge – motivating them to retain it and pass on what they learned. Isaiah learned how the basis of truth was found in the Bible:

Because everything is led by Him. Everything is, um, something that comes back to Him. Because we always go back to the Bible, because that’s the main source of knowledge, that’s . . . God’s word, you know? How can you go against that I mean?

Bible college instructors, like Reuben, found their truth in the Bible and taught accordingly:
I teach marriage and family, so that falls into our sociology curriculum – human services – and we have a whole section on sexuality. So, that’s a big issue right now. Because, okay, the Supreme Court defined marriage differently than we’ve traditionally designed it, you know, or defined it for the last 1,500-2000 years. Does that mean we’re going to change? Well, maybe yes, maybe no, but we need to look at the Scriptures first and what does this mean for us now, today.

Abigail wanted to receive biblical instruction so that she could share it and said that, “I know that I am going to get solid truth here - and because I want solid truth so I can give solid truth. Yeah, absolutely it’s a good fit because I know I’m going to get it.”

The concept of experiencing God occurred when students’ knowledge of God, learned while attending Bible college, allowed them to be more sensitive to experiencing Him in their lives. Aaron remarked on how he experienced God in his life even though at the time he did not realize it:

I didn’t see it. I mean I look at it now and I can understand it. I didn’t understand it when I first arrived. I didn’t understand why God got me there. I didn’t understand why He closed doors for me to do computer science. But I can look at it now and go, ‘Wow, God, you really drove me. That’s what you did. You really opened my eyes and let me see the beauty of you.’ To be able to have the character of Jesus in you, to be able to understand and know that God is in control no matter what, to be able to know that Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you, to be able to understand that this is what God wanted to do in your life, this is what He wanted to use you for, to be able to walk with Him and be able to see your family change, this is just priceless. But I didn’t see it in the beginning. I did not. I’m like why am I here? [Chuckles]
Experiencing God developed when students who attended their Bible college long enough to recognize divine influence realized they were led by God to attend a Bible college, the Lord led them to share their testimonies, recognized when God and the Bible became more interesting, and when they realized they had a great life. Cyrus wanted to further his existing career but found he was being led elsewhere:

I initially started at [local community college], um, in a different major. My career was in food service, I was an executive chef and I wanted to go to [local community college] to get my executive chef certification. And for some reason I lost all interest. And the Lord led me here. And the rest is history.

Students saw God’s hand in their Bible college when God was there for them, they began to see signs from God in their lives, His influence increased their academic abilities, and from the welcome surprise that arose when they attended college for a specific reason unrelated to faith but found learning about God was a very meaningful experience. Isaiah, with the benefit of hindsight gained from his studies at his Bible college, shared how he experienced God’s direction in his collegiate plans when his desire to play in a sport surprisingly coincided with attendance at a Bible college:

I wanted to keep playing soccer at a higher level after high school, but in my plans . . . I was just going to go to another school and just, uh, continue my studies. But then I didn’t think I was going to be playing college ball. And, then all of a sudden, I get this offer, you know, to come to a D-1 school and play soccer and it’s a Christian college, you know? It’s – to me that was, that was definitely God. He definitely had his hand on that, you know? [He] gave me the opportunity to play a sport that I enjoy and also learn more about His works and you know it was just – it was Him.
Trusting the Bible conveyed how students were taught to trust in the Bible. Students learned that the Bible was the true Word of God, that believers needed it today, and that God’s word was inerrant. When asked about which document or book was used as the source of truth, Thomas stated that professors would go to the Bible:

Oh, um, well I guess it depends on the context. Most of them will go to the Scriptures. Um, every now and then you’ve got a couple professors that are really knowledgeable about, um, I guess extracanonical [writings], like the apocrypha or something like that. I’ve seen people do that. Then sometimes they’ll go to a commentator and then back in the Scriptures as well. But it’s almost always some sort of Scripture.

Ethan wanted his biblical education to have a basis in the original scriptural writings – a factor that influenced his trust of the Bible:

I don't want to mislead anybody when it comes to God's word. And, that guarantee was not included at [university], [other university], you know, I wanted something strictly back to original autographs – the original Greek and Hebrew – and do it the right way. Not to just be able to hand stuff over to people but for the Holy Spirit to guide them to the truth. Let them read it for themselves, because they are going to be held responsible.

Later Ethan was given assurances that he could trust his Bible college faculty to provide biblically sound training:

Ever since, you know, I talked to [college president] – from the first day and [professor] at the end – they said, ‘No, we teach the first, original autographs.’ Truth, right. Once I saw they . . . when we’d have students come in here with different beliefs from different denominations, they would put a stop to it [saying] ‘We can talk about this later, but we teach the Bible here.’
**Focusing on God** was a concept students discovered after they enrolled in a Bible college. It contributed to the college environment by creating an atmosphere of awe of God’s word and the supremacy of the Holy Bible as truth and the source of all spiritual knowledge.

**Collaborating with faculty and peers.** The concept of *collaborating with faculty and peers* enhanced the college environment when everyone had the freedom to ask *questions*, discussions could occur in the *safest place*, and students realized that regarding their peers and faculty – *they genuinely care[d]*.

I defined *questions* as when students were able to experience better learning through frequent queries in the classroom. Students become more integrated into a college environment when they are free to ask questions in a safe environment free from ridicule. The fact that faculty developed an environment where students were free to ask questions was evidenced by James’ assertion that he allowed students to guide discussions:

> So I would say one of my greatest strengths or probably my greatest strength and my greatest weakness is the ability to go where the students want to go. It’s hard to pull that in, but I’m also up for answering any question about the text or even kind of ancillary to the text or whatever it may be we’re discussing.

This concept existed because students believed there were no stupid questions, they did not react to questions by others, they understood that asking questions increased their knowledge of God, and they understood that it was necessary to know the elementary things before they could comprehend the complex. Omar saw the freedom to ask questions without worry of embarrassment as a vital aspect of learning about sacred matters:
Like in high school, it is ridiculous to ask a stupid question, or a question in general. Because it might be stupid. But, in the kingdom of God, you have to know the elementary things in order to know the advanced things.

The realization of this concept occurred through students asking questions of each other regarding an opinion on a topic, faculty creating a friendly environment conducive to inquisitiveness, students leaving their emotions out of discussions, and the fact that everyone could learn from others’ questions. According to Isaiah, students’ opinions count in a Bible college, which increase collaboration:

That is why the teacher would go around, ‘What do you think about this? Give me your personal opinion.’ Everyone would give out personal opinions. And in some of my classes there has been at least 15 different people that have different opinions on something and we all just engage in, you know, intelligent conversations . . .

Perhaps a more meaningful kind of learning occurred when students questioned each other as when Cyrus remarked, “So when we question each other we pretty much come up with the same answer but different ways of obtaining that answer.” Engagement in the concept of questions led to better understanding and decreased the personal intellectual struggles which arose when students were unable to fully comprehend specific topics.

The safest place described a classroom where discussions flowed freely but within certain limits that protected student privacy. Students and faculty embraced this concept by keeping whatever was said in the classroom, keeping discussions on track by steering conversations back into more appropriate areas when the discourse became too intense, and encouraging questions without judgment. Samuel’s experience with tough discussions in the classroom was one of
safety and discretion. When asked who was most responsible for that safe environment, Samuel said:

Um, honestly I think the students are more than anything because if someone brings up a ... a tough topic, um, or a topic that’s personal, you know, chances are the faculty isn’t really going to go out and say anything about it. But students, really because they have the word of mouth, they can gossip and they can spread that. Um, they can skew the truth. But I've never experienced anything like that here in my three years, so.

Ethan found that professors steered the discussions away from tense issues when he mentioned, “And, you know if, if something that’s sensitive comes up the professors will say ‘We'll talk about that after class.’” This was faculty behavior that Quartus observed, too:

Um, a lot of times if something is brought up from a student, especially in class, usually the professor will give a general answer from their side. And then they’ll kind of say, ‘Okay, but I don't want to, like, really get into that because I don’t want this to turn into a harsh debate between any of us,’ or something like that.

Students embraced the safest place concept by freely discussing controversial or uncomfortable topics, considering all input as important, and requiring a safe environment before sharing personal issues. Karen felt safe enough to share, in the classroom, a struggle with faith experienced in high school:

But, um, especially with faith, I’ve brought up things where I've, like, ‘Oh yeah, I questioned my faith in high school with a world religions class.’ Or, whatever I may have said, they took it in stride very well and they responded in a way that was very helpful. And they answered my question. And then not only answered my question or responded to my comment, but also were asking me more questions about it, not necessarily in a
judgmental way, but trying to better understand what I was thinking at the moment, too.

Luke, a member of faculty, reflected on the trust that students have in their faculty and peers:

We’ve had some very interesting discussions. And, the students I think they respond to that openness. Because some of them have asked very personal questions in front of others. And, so some stuff has been talked about in the classroom where I thought, you know, 10 years ago it would have never been talked about.

This concept of *safest place* enhanced learning and the belief that Bible colleges are safe places for student discussions of controversial subjects and struggles with faith. Safe and secure students are key facilitators of a desirable college environment.

I described the concept of *they genuinely care* as faculty and peers demonstrating genuine concern for Bible college students. This concept was demonstrated through faculty, staff, and students wanting to be instruments of God’s action, students experiencing an unwelcoming institutional environment in the past, students knowing their peers relatively quickly, and Bible college faculty and students offering help when students needed it most.

Bartholomew saw his peers and faculty as God’s willing instruments:

The experiences of love and the willingness for people to help and pray for you and to have that concern for you really brought that home to me. Basically just the general concern about your well-being and your growth in the Lord.

Hermes witnessed an incident where faculty and peers provided care and support to students in need:

We had two students to kind of go through a real rough patch in their family lives at home. And, just seeing the school all come together to help those two students and pray and offer support. Um, seeing that, that really like influenced me that this was like a
great place. And just being able to see, you know, God in action, in that sense.

This concept occurred when faculty exhibited care about a student as a person – not just a face in the classroom, students experienced love and general concern from faculty/peers, everyone (faculty, staff and peers) encouraged each other constantly, and everybody respected each other. Cyrus appreciated faculty treating him like a person and not another student when he said “Well, they – let you know that ‘We know who you are,’ you know? You’re not just a face in a classroom, you’re a person, and I appreciate that.” Abigail saw the same behavior from faculty when she observed, “I looked back at what they have done for me as a person, they cared about me as a person and all the heart ache that I was experiencing.” Esther found faculty and her peers to be very friendly and encouraging:

Since it is a friendly college and there’s not a lot of negativism or anything like that – everybody is positive. And so it’s that positive, upbeat ‘You can do this.’ You know, you’re always encouraging everybody. Everybody’s always encouraging each other. Faculty and peers took the time necessary, regardless of the circumstances, to ensure new believers understood a topic before they moved on. This was supported by Bernice when she reminisced about a new believer who had questions:

‘Ahhh. You know, you don’t get that yet?’ You know, there’s none of that. Everybody is respectful. ‘If you don’t know’ – nobody was in the class doing that. It was like, ‘Okay, however long it takes for her to get understanding for herself,’ we waited. And it was – she had a lot of questions because she was a new believer.

The concept of they genuinely care created a positive environment that facilitated collaboration among faculty and peers.

Religious fit. When the Bible is taught rather than just denominational dogma, students
from various Christian traditions are more comfortable within the religious environment. This concept, called religious fit, referred to students who wanted to pray before class starts, desired a non-denominational curriculum, wanted their Bible college’s beliefs to be ones they shared, understood that a biblical education was more than academics, and wanted the Bible to always have precedence – not denominational doctrine.

Bernice liked the fact that professors prayed before class started when she said, “What I like is at the beginning of class before we start, we pray. We pray. And some teachers, we pray when we leave.” According to Andrew, the College of the Bible made sure students understood before they enrolled that their education would be more than academics – that faculty would expose them to a ministry-focused and Bible-centric curriculum with which their comfort and fit was necessary for them to succeed:

It’s built on this idea: You got an opportunity – here you are in college, and you are going to have an opportunity to ‘be poured into’ then go back and make an impact in your world. From the very beginning, at orientation, we’re saying it’s more than the academics. That line is put out there, and then the students, when they come, they say, ‘Here’s why I’m here.’ If that’s not right, they figure that out fairly soon. The emphasis is on that. Every class, not every class that would be an over statement, but the majority of the classes, it’s ministry focused. It’s ministry based. If that’s not your end game, then we’re probably not the right school for you. If you just want an Associate’s degree, you can go to the school down the road and get that. If you want to be trained for ministry and Bible vocation, that’s who we are. That’s just the nature of who we are.

Isaiah appreciated how faculty would always return to the Bible, not a denominational text, for
answers:

Those type of discussions are also, they get intense in a way that everyone’s just throwing facts and facts and facts. And, every fact looks okay and it looks good. And then, but, it all just traces back to the Bible and the way that, you know, it should be described. And the teachers that we have here they all have years of experience with the Word of God and, um, they’ve been teaching for a while and the same discussion. They have answers so, so we always get an answer, we always get, you know, what we’re looking for.

Also, students may have experienced religious fit when they enjoyed a sense of freedom studying the Bible in a nondenominational curriculum, the academics focused on Scripture and not denomination, they learned from instructors experienced in the nuances of biblical complexity, and they observed good practices such as chapel worship services where college personnel wanted to participate. When asked if the nondenominational character of the teaching at his Bible college figured into students’ experience of religious fit James replied, “Yeah, exactly. They’re just ‘Oh, we’re Christian, we’re not any particular thing.’ And that is what appeals to them. It’s not anything, it’s just Christian.” Gideon remarked that it was his college’s lack of denominational bias that contributed to his sense of liberty, and therefore his religious fit, when studying at his college:

Is, is not, um biased, you can say it that way. Or doesn’t force anybody into the doctrine of the college. It’s more let’s just study the Bible, let’s look at the Bible and that give you a sense of freedom, you know, when you come from a different denomination, which was my case. See, that was very important because . . . the focus is the Scripture not my doctrine.

Hermes accepted his Bible college’s religious practices after witnessing how chapel attendance
was handled:

I think the um, (pause) I remember coming in they spoke about having to attend the chapels and different things that the school did. But, honestly I think in that first week, actually seeing it being carried out – that really helped me more. And then I saw that, um, I saw that there were faculty and students – that it wasn’t just like a requirement but they were actually involved in, in everything. And they didn’t, like, really view it as a requirement. And that really put me into [seeing] that this school is, um, a true, you know, spiritual Bible-centered school.

This experience of student religious fit resulted in students learning God’s Word – not a focus on denominational dogma that may have turned some students of a different denomination away.

**Desire to honor God and discovering.** When students selected a Bible college, they find themselves discovering an appealing spiritual environment focusing on God. Bible college students’ desire to honor God become evident when, during this discovery, they begin experiencing God, are drawn to the college’s infusing of God into their teaching and curriculum, appreciate academics built on solid truth, learn God’s word while focusing on the Bible, and begin trusting the Bible, all of which result in a deeper understanding of their Creator.

**Movement from discovering to developing**

Processes that students revealed formed many of the connections between discovering and developing. Corbin and Strauss (2015) stated that a process “represents the rhythm as well as the changing and repetitive forms of action-interaction plus the pauses and interruptions that occur when persons act and interact for the purpose of reaching a goal or solving a problem” (p. 172). The spiritual integration process followed students from seeking a biblical education to accepting their place in the Bible college. However, there were many sub-processes that
occurred within the overall model that provided the connections between the major categories of
the spiritual integration process.

Students who moved from *discovering* to *developing* did so because they wanted to join
the Bible college *family* through *building relationships*. They wanted to *grow spiritually* through *challenge* and *change* because of what they encountered in the *college environment*.

Cyrus, as mentioned earlier, discovered a mutual pastime in a faculty member that turned
into a relationship based on respect – this took Cyrus from *caring faculty (discovering)* to the
*building relationships with faculty (developing)*. Orpah observed a student who in the past was
reticent to share with classmates open-up one day and share when she realized her classmates
were not judging her – a result of moving from *caring peers to personal change*. Quartus’
moved from *collaborating with peers and faculty (discovering)* to *worldview development
(developing)* when he explained his development of a worldview:

So I would say it’s a combination of classwork as well interaction with professors,

hearing other people's perspectives from peers and professors over time kind of definitely

changed my thought process about the way the world works.

Irene described a process of moving from *appealing college*, where she knew she was in a safe
place, to *building relationships with peers* as a way to join the Bible college community, or
family:

Getting involved, for sure. Just like learning everyone’s name, um, I think I had to be

intentional about spending time with people. You know like, at lunch time is a really
good time to like meet people because everyone’s in this space together and it’s, it’s
pretty small. And so you know those first few weeks, whatever, it’s kind of like, I don’t
know where to sit, so you just like sit with whoever and just talk to them.
Irene’s desire to become a member of her Bible college family was indicative of many students who find the family as well as the college environment appealing. Another area where students were drawn to developing included the concept of focusing on God and how learning about God and the Bible motivated students to move further along the process of spiritual integration. For example, Esther moved from focusing on God, in this case the concept of trusting the Bible, and the change she experienced when her increased understanding allowed her to embrace the incorporation of faith into life:

And there’s some things you do just have to take on ‘faith’ value. And the principles of life, the concepts and things are in the Bible, but you just have to dig a little bit deeper. And, I guess my faith in . . . God has always been there, it’s just understanding of how . . . he works – of his plan, the sovereignty and everything of God and (pause) the part man plays in it.

Quartus’ focusing on God created a challenge and moved him over to wrestling with faith where he overcame his doubt:

And then maybe on a personal side – with something that I’ve been challenged with at the college – after I’ve researched it and come to a conclusion, now I have the stuff to back-up my belief. I have a mental note of it, too. Not only just, like, here it is in the Bible, but I’ve thought through it all.

Developing

Prospective students who were seeking God and a spiritual education found what they needed at a Bible college. Upon their arrival they were soon discovering a college family and an appealing college environment. Students who found the college environment favorable wanted to join the Bible college family through building relationships with God, faculty, and their peers.
They also began growing spiritually as they faced challenges as Bible college students and experienced internal and external change.

**Building relationships.** Students who want to become part of a group, such as the family at a Bible college, begin by building a relationship with God, building faculty relationships, and building peer relationships. A personal relationship with God assists students in understanding more about the purpose of an education based on biblical precepts. Building relationships with faculty, including staff personnel and their peers, connect students to the people whose integral focus on Christ would ultimately define the spiritual environment.

**Building a relationship with God.** Bible college students began to understand, relatively soon after their enrollment, their need to have a relationship with God. This relationship became more prominent as they gained a greater understanding, through their Bible-centered curriculum, of who God is.

Attending Bible college ushered students toward building a personal relationship with God. The first step was for students to learn about God, such as they were unique creations of God, they were able to identify the need for changes in their lives, and that a relationship with God was a high priority that required personal commitment outside of the classroom.

As Aaron’s spiritual knowledge grew, he became more aware of the changes in his life that were necessary as his relationship with God developed:

I started to see there are things I need to change in my life – to really have that relationship with God. For people now to come over and ask me, ‘Can you please pray for me?’ Uh, one time I asked why and they said, ‘Because we know that God answers your prayers.’ Wow. So, I don’t think I would have this when I started the college.

Later, Aaron related how the College of the Bible prioritized a relationship with God when he
said, “The school teaches you that it is your relationship with God. Anything else doesn’t matter. It is your relationship with Him.” Irene found this to be true at her college, too:

The biggest things that I’ve learned that have impacted me the most in my life are things that I’ve learned from one-on-one time with God. Not things I’ve learned from a classroom. And, I think that [Northern Bible College] prioritizes [your] relationship with God. Like above anything else. And, so obviously that’s a personal choice to do that and, you know, make time for God. But [Northern Bible College] definitely emphasizes that, this is something you need to be doing, and this is something that we value that you do for yourself.

The importance of setting aside time to spend with God also resonated with Omar who said, “I keep going back to the personal time. Because personal time with God is just so huge.” Karen discovered that knowledge of the Bible, while very important, does not replace time spent with God building that personal relationship:

It is hard at times, however to be in class learning about the Bible all day and then still make time in the day to, um, have that personal time with God. And that's something that I'm working on right now – is making sure that, yes, I am having this biblical knowledge in class, but that's not the same as building a relationship with God, because that is your own personal time. That's you and God. Not you in a classroom and a teacher plus God.

The concept of who God is describes how a student gains knowledge about God in the college classroom and also during personal study. This concept’s viability in the lives of Bible college students was exemplified when 93% of the students interviewed for this study either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement that their understanding of God was being strengthened by classroom and/or campus experiences (see Table 5 for the final sample student
questionnaire summary). Also, students were taught proper theology in the classroom that focused on God’s many characteristics. Quartus, who was beginning to see his need to understand God in a more personal fashion, learned about God’s many attributes in his college:

And so, now having gone through Bible courses, and my own Bible study through those courses, and journaling through either passages or through topical things in the Bible through different courses and talking with professors, I have come to understand, I would say, attributes of God – characteristics – a lot better. I’ve, at least the last semester or so, I’ve been at least thinking to myself, like, I don't understand God better as a person. At least to me, because I know that whenever I think of God I think of something that he's either doing or can do. And that’s just the way I, I conceptualize it. And so for me I know that at least right now my perspective on God is really characteristic-based. Um, and not necessarily – or I should say attribute based – and not, I realize how little of a personal connection I have when I study his attributes.

Bartholomew learned who God is through sound theology at his Bible college:

It helped me to see my – it helped me to realize who God really was. And it helped me to see what God wanted me to see. Everything was created by Him, for Him and that nothing belongs to me. That I’m only a steward of what God has given me. Either I can be a good steward or a bad steward, but God has led me into the responsibility of it and I will have to give an answer to him on what I do with it.

The doctrines taught to Bible college students as well as the faculty members’ personal illustrations enhance students’ understanding of who God is through knowledge of His righteousness and mercy, through their spiritual understanding of their surroundings, how God expects believers to live, and how to interact with others. Felix’s time spent at his Bible college,
coupled with his personal study, illuminated his understanding of who God is:

I’ve grown more since I’ve been coming here [and] I probably comprehended more of God’s grace and his love. And the fact that God is so good. I knew God was good before, you know? But, devotionally when you learn – when you grow – you start thinking about what all these people said about God and their opinions about Him and what the Scriptures says about God. And it’s really intensified personally, um, a deeper understanding of the reality of who God is.

Esther shared how her awareness of who God is benefited from faculty members’ personal insights about God when she remarked, “They would give Bible illustrations and, uh, personal illustrations. And just make you more aware of how God is.” Hannah’s Bible college educators taught her to let God guide her life, “They always try to teach in ways that you can know more of God. And allow for him to influence your life and take over your life. Because we should live according to His plans instead of our own.” The concept of who God is allows Bible college students to build upon their relationship with God.

**Building faculty relationships.** Students began building faculty relationships when their instructors took the time to build friendly relationships with students – or created faculty rapport, students began to see their faculty as friends, and faculty demonstrated characteristics of loving Christians. These relationships were also built through faculty who related to their students as professors as pastors, when students thought their teachers are amazing, and when faculty consider discipleship one of their responsibilities.

I defined faculty rapport as when students began to see their faculty as less the “sage on the stage” and more as a friend. This concept came about because faculty and students enjoyed interacting, students wanted faculty to share their professional experiences with them, and
faculty were deliberate in their actions to know their students. Faculty built rapport through interactions that transcended the normal teacher-student relationship. This was how Andrew, a faculty member, described this interaction:

Most every class, for me, we began in prayer and have interaction time. There is always some joking around and hanging out before class, cutting up, which loosens them up. They see us [faculty] not as the sage (laughter), but more of a friend. I think that helps, because it builds more of a rapport with us.

Reuben, when asked to describe how he developed relationships with students, shared his thoughts on building rapport:

I think you'd have to do it deliberately. And that's probably the magic word. You have to deliberately take the time and the energy to reach out to students. Some might be naturally more outgoing so they're going to jump right in the conversations and some are quieter, that you might have to make the effort to connect with. And maybe not in class where they might feel singled out but, you know, ‘Hey, let's grab a coffee. . . . Can I see you during office hours?’ Or . . . maybe catch him at lunch where you see him at a table and, ‘Hey, here's a seat. Um, can I sit with you?’ And then, just build that relationship more individually.

*Faculty rapport* occurred through faculty knowing their students by name, building relationships with them within and outside of the classroom, and facilitating rapport by sharing both good and difficult professional or personal experiences. Andrew mentioned how instructors need to know their students by name to build the rapport when he said, “First of all, you get to know them by name. On campus, of course, there is the interaction and relationship before and after class.” Felix reiterated Andrew’s assertion when he said:
But, I do feel like they all address me by my first name and do take interest in my personal life and my family, too. So it’s not just all about school it’s ‘Hey, how are you doing?’

Lois described how her professors would go out of their way to acquaint themselves with their students:

Some of the professors, like, live in the neighborhood or are around campus a lot. So, even when they’re not on the clock, they still will see you, like, walking a dog around and come over and . . . talk to me and say, ‘Hi.’ Um, or . . . they’ll go to the games with the students and, like, sit in the students’ area and talk to students. And, so it doesn’t seem like it just ends once you leave the classes or once you’re outside their office – it’s a continual relationship.

Esther was impressed with the way her professors, many of whom had pastoral experience, dropped their guard to share their spiritual and familial problems:

You know, they not only tell us what we have to do but they also experienced a lot of the, uh, pressure that we go through. So it was them sharing their growth and their spirituality and their problems – family problems, financial problems – uh, questions they had and how they grew. It’s helped me because it’s, like, I’m not on the limb by myself. Other people have gone through these and they’re willing to share that.

Students interacted more with faculty members who emulated these qualities – and when they enjoyed faculty rapport the faculty-student relationship flourished.

The concept of faculty as friends was where faculty took the time to build friendly relationships with students. Faculty developed these relationships through taking time for prayer and personal interaction before class, setting aside extra time with students for both personal and
professional reasons, creating an open and inviting classroom atmosphere, supporting student sporting events, and generally making students feel at home in the Bible college.

A student’s unique testimony may have been all a faculty member needed to create a connection that would turn into friendship, as was the case with Aaron:

Friends, I mean I have friends over there, but when I need help, I go to my doctors, to my professors. They take the time to sit down and talk to me, especially they know that I came from Islam and sometimes it’s fascinating for them to see how God is working in my life. Many times, I have people come over and tell me, a couple of my doctors are like, ‘I have this Muslim friend that I’m talking to. What do I need to do with this or that?’ I tell them. So, you create a friendship with the students, but you also create a friendship with the professors, too. They are there for you. That really helps.

Bernice found it easy to become acquainted with friendly instructors and shared, “But they’re so open and inviting, you just – not compelled but you’re just at ease like a friend. You just go and talk to them.” One faculty member discovered a connection with Lois:

Yesterday I wore a shirt from Nicaragua and a professor stopped me, he’s like

‘What’s your connection to Nicaragua, I’m going there next summer, so I was just wondering, like, what your connection was?’ And, it turns out he’s going to see some of the same people I was there seeing. . . . Um, yeah, I feel like there is a lot of that, like, they want to build relationships with students. [They] try to make themselves very approachable and open to student communication.

Faculty friendliness manifested through being easy to approach and personable, inviting students to their home when the students were unable to travel home for a holiday, and by commiserating with students when they were stressed or joyful, which engendered a closeness
with students. Cyrus was convinced that making friends with faculty members was easy when he said, “Well, they’re very personable and approachable. So having those two attributes, it’s easy for me to befriend them.” The personable nature of faculty was described by Hannah:

Definitely, like I said, just making me feel right at home. They constantly greet me, ask me how I’m doing. They’re supportive as in going to our games. They’ve asked me what it is that I want to do and find ways to get me there.

Faculty constantly checked on their students and would invite them over to their homes when they lived far from their families, according to Hermes:

Especially I love how, our international students that we have here, how they [faculty] make sure that they have, um, I guess ‘get the family feel’ being so far away from home. So they’ve invited students to come to their homes for holidays and they always consistently check on us, so I really like that.

This concept helped faculty put their students at ease and eased the effort of building a friendly relationship with their students.

Faculty were seen by many students as loving Christians who showed their love through actions. Faculty demonstrated their love by promoting a positive atmosphere in their classrooms and reacting in a loving way to students’ questions. Aaron described his professors as loving Christians when he said, “Oh, they are awesome. They are awesome. All of them. Not picking one above the other. All of them. It’s a great atmosphere to be around Christians. They are all loving Christians, all of them.” Abigail was encouraged when her faculty shared their testimonies when she remarked, “And, you just know – you start to know them and they all have no problem sharing testimony of what God is doing in their life at this moment and I really love that.” Bartholomew appreciated how his faculty reacted to students’ questions of faith:
Well if somebody has a question that’s all set on faith they would react in a loving way to it. So it’s not judgmental if they got the wrong understanding of it but they would act in a loving way and the correction would be like, ‘Well you need to re-read the Scripture or you need to figure out what this word means in it.’

This concept occurred because faculty prayed for any student who needed it, students saw Jesus manifested in the actions of their instructors, and students regarded faculty as loving and caring Christians. Perhaps the most prevalent action performed by faculty that demonstrated their love was prayer, as explained by Sarah:

Um, that was huge to me. Every professor I’ve interacted with, except one, who is no longer here anymore, asked me throughout the course more than once, ‘How can I pray for you?’ There were times that I dealt with health issues of my children. And I felt their prayers for my family. There were times where spiritually my husband was not in a good place. Everyone was lifting me up and holding me up. So I mean you can’t fake that.

Faculty at one Bible college gathered weekly to pray for the college – and also prayed for individual students, as stated by Quartus:

And, uh, then on maybe a prayer side there's several staff and faculty I know who meet weekly in the mornings before, before breakfast actually, in the cafeteria. So it’s before students are up or anything. They meet down in our commons area and they pray. And they pray for individual students by name. So they’ll have a list every week and they'll have written down prayer requests for those students. They may have even talked to them beforehand, that way to see what's going on. And then they pray for them.

As loving Christians, faculty reflected Christ in their actions, as evidenced by Aaron who described his professors:
He is really one of the – he’s had a lot of influence on me. [Professor] is just amazing. He’s really amazing. I truly see God in him. I truly see Jesus in him. The way he conducts himself, the way that he has the knowledge. But [second professor], too. [Third professor]. I can’t take anybody out and say well, this one is better than the other one. But it’s [professor] and [second professor], both of them; these two have a lot of influence on me.

The concept of loving Christians effectively illustrated how faculty members’ Christian characteristic of love drew students closer to them.

Many Bible college faculty members were former or practicing pastors who led churches. This referred to the concept of professors as pastors where faculty were not only teachers but also employed their skills as pastors in the college environment. This concept came about because faculty had shepherding hearts that enabled them to guide a new believer from a ‘babe’ in the faith to a more mature Christian, they were willing to sit and listen to students, they made themselves available, and had experience as pastors so that no questions – however personal – surprised them. Luke explained how he uses his pastoral experience while mentoring students:

Follow my steps, keep doing what I do. It’s like a dad with his little kids, when he’s walking in the snow. Does he let the kid walk knee deep in the snow all by himself, or does he say, ‘Walk in my footsteps and you’ll be safe.’ And, so see that’s that role of mentor, that’s that role of guide, that’s the role of spiritual fatherhood, where you sit back and say how do I help shape these lives? And move these lives forward? And let them understand their place in the world, and what they can do.

David mentioned how his professors provided counseling to students:

On the school's [social media] page, uh, as a student who just graduated here named
[name of student] who I think said it best – our professors here are pastor professors.

Meaning that they care individually for each of their students the way a pastor does for his entire flock. Um, and that interaction has, I mean, regardless of what it is, I’ve called them for non-school related issues and said, you know, ‘I just need help in this area.’

Matthew, a faculty member who was a pastor, shared an anecdote of a student who exhibited suicidal ideations stemming from his Type I diabetes. This episode occurred during a Bible study Matthew attended to grade the efforts of the student Bible study leader. Matthew, who was also a Type I diabetic, asked the student who exhibited the suicidal ideations to come to his office:

But, but my main approach is to ask questions, try to ask open-ended questions, let him talk. And then, um, in that case, I would have been referring to campus counselor. I mean that, uh, that's beyond my expertise. But, what I want to get them to do is to see that Jesus is Lord over everything. He’s Lord over my diabetes as well as my Bible study. And, so, ask questions, talk with them, pray with them. And then stay in touch.

Esther shared how it was nearly impossible to mention something personal to Bible college professors that they have not heard as a pastor before:

And you don’t feel embarrassed to ask questions. You know if you have a very, very personal question then, like, that you really don’t feel embarrassed because since most of them have been pastors they’ve heard it all. So nothing seems to surprise them.

These pastor-professors engaged in preaching as well as teaching because they had their hearts in their subject areas, they exhibited concern like a mother or father by listening to students, and they fully explained concepts that challenged the long-held beliefs of students.

This concept was also evident when 93% of the students interviewed for this study “agreed” or
“strongly agreed” that faculty were helpful to them in processing issues related to their faith (see Table 5 for the final sample student questionnaire summary). Ruth’s relationship with one of her professors was one of such care and concern that she regarded him as a father figure:

[Name of professor] is like a second dad to me or a dad that I never had. Um, so I would say that it was very important in my time here at [Northern Bible College] in developing in my character and, um, healing from my past. And then being prepared to serve Christ when I graduate.

Isaiah described his professors’ thoughtful ability to fully explain concepts when students clung to previously held beliefs:

So, now those arguments they get hard to describe because people already been, they’ve already had [a] mindset for a while and you can’t really change somebody’s mindset in a second – so it takes a while. . . . So they don’t, they don’t just brush you off and say, ‘No you’re wrong, this is right. We’re not going to agree with you because you’re wrong.’ No, they tell you ‘This is why.’ They give you a long thoughtful explanation, and if you don’t understand it then they’re willing to go the extra mile for you so you can see why things are, are written the way they are.

Faculty offered spiritual and biblical, not just academic, education that was conducive to building friendships with students.

*Teachers are amazing* referred to faculty members’ love of teaching the Bible and their ability to exhibit a measure of grace when necessary. Students described these instructors as priceless because of their humility of spirit, their willingness to talk and listen, and their positive influence in students’ lives and how faculty made it a point to know their students by opening up their offices and life to them. Aaron was very enthusiastic describing the excellence of his
instructors when he said, “The teachers, they are just amazing. The love of the teachers to teach, but the knowledge of the Bible, the stuff I learned from them in three-and-a-half years is just—it’s priceless. It’s really priceless.” When researching a question over summer break, Thomas found himself confronted with a difficult doctrinal topic and needed assistance:

And I was looking at the Bible and I was like, ‘I can see both sides. How do I do this?’ And uh, I emailed the head of the Bible department and he got back to me within like an hour and a half—over the summer when no one's really around! That was really nice, and he broke down everything step by step. He answered all my questions super thoroughly, even more than I expected. That, that’s been really amazing.

Karen was able to reach out to one of her professors during a difficult time:

I was having a really bad day and I was . . . wanted to meet with her because of an assignment. And, um, she ended up talking with me about life in general. Just being able to flow so easily, by accident, into matters that aren't necessarily academic, and yet, they are so happy to be there for you.

Michael appeared to have witnessed the same behavior by faculty who opened up their offices to him for non-academic student needs:

Um, but they’re really friendly, really open. When you walk into an office and you’re like, ‘Hey can I talk?’ The laptop closes and they say, ‘Yes.’ And, they devote their attention to you. So, really good experiences with the faculty here.

This seems to develop a sense of patience, humility, and love in students that made them want to give what their teachers gave—their best.

The concept of teachers are amazing occurred through faculty members’ humility of spirit, their willingness to sit and talk with their students, their offer of grace when students need
it, their ability to be tough but encouraging, their ability to focus on individual students so they
know they are a priority, and their non-threatening manner that puts students at ease – even to the
point of openly disagreeing with their faculty. Michael remembered how professors would act
with grace when presenting a view that conflicted with his own theology:

You know, um they don’t push that, they don’t push any doctrine, they don’t push
anything like that, at you other than, ‘This is what the Bible says. You, you don’t have to
believe this but, this is what we think.’ Um, and they do it in such a way and present it in
such a – gracious way, a loving way, um, that it’s changed me for the better.

When disagreements in doctrine arose in the classroom, Gideon thought his instructors handled
these incidents very well:

Most of the, most – in the instructor part – they create a good environment. A good
environment. And when we hit challenging topics, maybe discrepancies on doctrine or
Bible views or something like that, um, we always have the chance to, to talk about it.
And the instructors were, in my case, very, um, loving and gentle.

Bible college instructors who were also amazing teachers tended to make students want to give
their best effort and created in their students a desire to build relationships with faculty.

I defined *discipleship* as the faculty’s ability to offer students a vision, sometimes through
modeling, of what it means to serve God as Jesus did. The Northern Bible College’s Academic
Catalog mandated that an important faculty responsibility was to model in their personal life a
commitment to God – perhaps a nod toward discipleship instruction. Faculty incorporated the
concept of *discipleship* into their classrooms because they wanted to pour into their students their
knowledge and experience, they had a vested interest in their students, they were naturally
helpful and knowledgeable, they were able to impart real-world experience, they were credible
instructors because of their experience, and they took their responsibility as discipleship mentors seriously.

*Discipleship* was an actual academic course where, according to Cyrus, students learned what it meant to be a disciple of Christ:

[Professor], I think I’ve had four classes with him. All very outstanding classes.

Discipleship, you know, the understanding of discipleship. What it means to be a disciple of Christ. What it means to be a disciple in your family, a disciple in your church. You know, it helps you grow in your faith.

Andrew saw his fellow Bible college faculty members actively engage in discipleship when he said, “For many faculty, there is a sense of discipling [sic]. They are really pouring into their students. Some are here, and they leave, but most of us have a vested interest.” Jacob saw how faculty modeled discipleship when they opened their own homes to students and sacrificed their time to support students in other ways:

Um, there is always something going on and like the [college professor and his wife] for a long time, they do something for the students all the time. They come to every game and every sporting event that they can. They are some of the biggest fans I know. I think, before I was here, I think some students didn’t actually have a place to live and they lived with the [college professor and his wife]. So, the school is very, very invested in its students and wanting to make sure the students have the best experience they can.

John, an instructor, shared anecdotes of his Christian service with students as a way to provide discipleship training:

And so when I share different things, a lot of times even in the middle of, you know, we’re teaching the Bible study, I’d still talk about this is how I would approach
somebody over this counseling issue based off of this passage. And that gains a lot of credibility because I’ve done a lot of that.

Abigail found that her instructors took their discipleship responsibilities very seriously:

It’s all about me being the best that I am in Christ and they [faculty] want to cultivate that. They take it very seriously, specifically the deans and [professor] included. They know their responsibility and they do not take it lightly.

Within this conceptual area, faculty were very active in creating a spiritual atmosphere that cultivated Christian excellence through teaching God’s word accurately, modeling Christian practices, guiding students through daily devotionals at the beginning of class, following Bible-centered values, and allowing the discussion of ministry and personal life problems in class.

Cyrus’s appreciation for accurate biblical instruction was evident when he remarked, “Um, the fact that we have godly men such as [professor], [another professor], and others, that are truly trying to teach the Word of God in accuracy.” Michael was thankful for faculty who modeled humility for him as well as the importance of Christian service:

And so the service aspect has been huge for my spiritual development as well. Because I have always struggled with pride. And, like seeing – not just being told – but like someone showing me how to humble yourself and serve someone else has been just, like, crazy impactful for my spiritual life.

David had the many different facets of salvation brought to life for him through sound discipleship:

So when I understood my own salvation, oh man, it just – the proverbial lightbulb went off. (laughter) Wow, this is why I’m saved. This is how I’m saved. Now I can explain it to somebody else. Instead of people saying, ‘Trust God. Try God.’ I mean, that’s the
general answer for most layman. (laughter) And so this school opening up my understanding or illuminating my mind as to salvation in different points – things that I didn’t think I’d know about.

This concept developed students into Christ followers and assisted faculty in building relationships with their students.

**Building peer relationships.** Bible college students enjoy *making and staying friends* with each other. These students experience more success and become more a part of a family when they act as, and have, *supportive peers*. Bible college students also enjoy the simple act of *hanging out* together during their free time.

Students who attend Bible colleges made and maintain relationships with their peers. This concept, which I called *making and staying friends*, occurred through peers who were themselves, found they shared similar goals, developed camaraderie through seeing the same people in class and other situations, and built upon existing connectedness. Bernice discovered that authenticity helped her make friends:

> Just being myself. Understanding that we are all in here for a common goal, that helps.

> And just be yourself. You don’t have to pretend to be anybody, although I did find out there were some people in here like that. Just by me being myself.

Samuel maintained that it was impossible not to make friends in a Bible college:

> It’s really easy to make friends here, honestly. Um, it’s, it’s a tight knit community like I said earlier. And, too, I mean when you see someone everyday it's hard for you . . . not to befriend them to a certain degree.

When students had something in common it created a bond, as voiced by Cyrus who was connected to others through ministry:
We are both in the pastoral care within the church and he’s also a student. So there are other men here that we text each other, you know, we try to stay in contact with each other. There are other individuals here that are also affiliated with the [local county jail] ministry, so we’re all connected in some way, shape, or form.

Making and staying friends facilitated peers meeting and talking outside of classroom hours, learning and growing together, overcoming cliques, having a desire to stay in touch with each other during breaks or after college, and knowing that friends made in Bible college were friends for life. Students at Bible colleges, even the older students who commuted to and from college classes, enjoyed spending time together in fellowship, as was the case with Aaron when he remarked, “Well, um, I have a couple good, good buddies from the school that we talk. We go out and meet some other Fridays, uh, just talk.” This behavior was typical of residential students albeit on a larger scale. According to Quartus:

There’s an [local restaurant] just down the street. And it’s at least every Friday and a lot of times even randomly maybe a Monday or Tuesday night. It's just, ‘Hey, these two RAs are driving vans and there's a couple other people driving. Who wants to go?’ And we go. There could be sometimes 30-plus of us going to [local restaurant] at the same time.

While at school, peers could become members of cliques. However, there was a tendency at Bible colleges to overcome this behavior, as stated by Thomas:

And it’s also cool to see some people that are, uh, associated with some groups are, are still outside of that . . . I guess stereotype. Um, and it’s cool to see people that you wouldn’t normally think would hang out with, um, other certain people, hanging out together. So I think that's pretty cool.
Peers stayed in touch during breaks from college, mainly in off-campus environments, in order to maintain their friendships, according to Michael:

> Uh, but over the summer, you know, when everyone is gone . . . I’ve traveled across the state to go to concerts with, with peers of mine. . . . I’ve gone to Chicago, to go to comedy shows with them, whatever it might be. Um, yeah, those totally extend beyond campus. I would say a large . . . part of the relationships that I have grown here, exist off-campus.

Friends made in Bible college became close, according to Michael who said, “I’ve met the best friends I’ve ever had in my life here. Um, all but one of my groomsman in my wedding is going to be, is going to be from here, yeah.” Bartholomew, an older student who commuted to class, said the same thing:

> I’ve made friends during my enrollment in college. I call them lifetime friends because the friends that you make here in the Bible college and the friends that you make in class, you know them for life. Even beyond that because you will meet them in Heaven, so the friendship that I made, I can carry on for life. And I know that they will do anything for me throughout my ministry career.

This concept resulted in greater camaraderie, peer relationships that were strong enough to last a lifetime, and increased their love of going to college.

Peers who supported each other, and therefore participated in their peers’ college experience, experienced greater success and were more apt to perceive themselves as part of a family – a concept called supportive peers. Some students, like Abigail, regarded their relationship with peers to be the difference between success and failure in Bible college:

> I am a social person. If I didn’t have peers here I probably would have failed. People,
and I’d do the same for them, spur me on, let me know, ‘Okay, it’s okay that you got a B. It’s okay that you got an F.’ I have a couple of those in my repertoire. It’s okay that your son is – you need to stay home today because your son is sick, it’s okay.

Also, peers saw each other as family where everyone needed encouragement, an observation that was brought to Samuel’s attention when he encountered some serious personal problems:

I stayed on campus for a little bit to be away from my house. And, you know, everyone was just so supportive. And . . . everyone was just not only saying that they were praying for me but spending time with me . . .

Supportive peers offered grace when errors were made by becoming a mentor to younger peers, through equipping fellow students for service or growth, and understanding that their friends had incredible potential. Karen, who worked in the campus library, provided support to peers by being there for them when they needed a willing ear:

And so I feel like people know that they can come and talk to me about things. And that I won't judge them. And that I can either comfort, if they just need to talk, that’s fine. If they want my advice, I can give advice. . . . And also, just through being involved in activities. And I'm part of the community – I'm part of the body of Christ.

Supportive peers provided assistance to their friends by modeling Christian values, as was the case with Samuel:

I can think of so many people that have helped me, um, grow in my faith and have helped me, um, develop, you know, my character as a man of God. And I can also think of the times that, with those same people . . . I have gone out and had, you know, fun with them or I have enjoyed a certain degree of fellowship with them. That creates an even closer sense of community. That to me is, I don't know, that's what makes it . . . the perfect
combination . . . of personal development and, um, fellowship.

Omar could see the potential in his younger peers and decided to address that through supportive mentorship:

I mean, everybody needs encouragement. But like specifically, these people because they have so much more potential than they are aware of in the moment. I think it’s a very powerful thing when a person is empowered. Because that gives them fuel to give to somebody else.

When peers participate in each other’s lives through this type of support, it results in continued enrollment and contributes to a Bible college’s participation in the body of Christ and the overall perception of the college as family.

Peers enjoy spending time together outside of classroom hours. The environment in a Bible college is one where students are able to engage in hanging out because they want to build relationships, everyone is friendly, no one is treated differently, the time between classes is not wasted but used to talk, and students are able to build their communications skills. When asked if he spent time with peers who were not involved in athletics, Kenan said, “Yeah, I hang out with um, just like ministry students or stuff like that.” Kenan also said that all students could approach any other student for just about any reason:

It’s good. Everybody knows everybody. So, you can just knock on somebody’s door and say I need some salt or something, and everybody hangs out. So, it’s really good.

Quartus, who spent his freshman year on campus, still chose to visit campus during his free time:

I lived on campus my first year, and I really enjoyed that. But also this year I live off campus and I choose purposely to spend time here outside of class. So, outside of the classroom maybe for sport activities or for just playing board games or something I'll
come on campus and hang out with people. So I still keep that connection even after moving off campus.

Peers still chose to spend their time *hanging out* to develop their friendships through talking before and after class in the hallways and breakrooms, joining impromptu gatherings in the dorm, being seen as an individual, and by participating in informal outings such as bowling or gathering for lunch. Andrew observed his students taking their free time to become acquainted with each other, when he said, “They tend to hang out in hallways, and visit and all. You’ll often find them outside, hanging out, doing stuff as well.” Andrew went on to say, “Before class and after, in the break room particularly, they will come in, sit and hang out and talk. Lean up against the wall in the hallway. There’s a lot of that.” Judith mentioned the interaction peers enjoyed on campus and in the dormitories that leads to students *hanging out*:

Just the interaction, living with other people from, like, different places. Having really weird things happen, like, eleven p.m. someone, like, running up and down the dorm hallways screaming ‘Random dance party time,’ or whatever. Just meeting new people, developing new relationships because that’s a big part of life after college, too. So, just like building up communication skills and social skills. And, like, these people are probably going to talk to you for the rest of your life.

This concept of *hanging out* built camaraderie, allowed for greater interaction among peers, and facilitated the development of new and existing relationships.

**Growing spiritually.** Bible college students face *challenges* placed on them externally or from within themselves. Students also face *challenges* that evolve from doubt as well as the struggle to develop their own biblical worldview. The students in this study underwent *change* due to attendance at Bible college, when their Christian walk necessitated changes in their
behavior, and when they either began to adopt or mature in their Christian identity. This
challenge and change, which occurred as they learned more about themselves through their study
of the Bible, led to growing spiritually. Indeed, the importance of spiritual growth was evident
when every student participant who was interviewed for this study either “agreed” or “strongly
agreed” that being at their Bible college contributed to their spiritual growth (see Table 5 for the
final sample student questionnaire summary).

**Challenge.** While Bible college students encounter internal and external challenges, they are also subject to challenges as they face the concept of wrestle with faith. These students found worldview development – an important, albeit complex, construct – a challenging endeavor.

The concept of internal challenge was where students experienced growth after facing challenges from within. Internal challenge occurs when students’ question their own beliefs, embrace the pruning and chiseling required to bring them closer to Christ’s image, dig deeper into God’s word to uncover their place in His plan, see difficult relationships as opportunities to
grow, face personal life challenges, and understand that without challenge there was no growth.

Quartus challenged himself to learn more in a private manner when he stated, “There's a
lot of challenging myself to learn on my own.” Quartus articulated how he accomplished this
through asking himself questions regarding his beliefs:

And I had to sit down and think, ‘Okay, why do I actually believe this?’ Like, maybe,
‘Why do I think I was baptized? Why did I decide to do that?’ You know? Or, maybe,
‘Why do I believe certain spiritual gifts are around, certain aren’t? Or maybe they’re all
here or maybe none of them are here?’ That kind of thing. And sitting down and
actually like, ‘Okay, why?’ I need to have biblical background for everything.
Abigail fully expected to undergo challenges, some through personal conviction, as she grew in her knowledge of Scripture:

We are being molded into the image of Christ. Pruned, based on different passages.

And, so, I expect to come to college, my Bible college and be chastened. I expect to be pruned. I expect to be chiseled down to the image of Christ.

Omar decided to take on difficult relationships as opportunities, or *internal challenges*, a way to grow and mature as a Christian:

But, those things are opportunities. They are not hindrances. They’re not displacements.

Because a normal person would say like, ‘This person did this. I know. I’m done.’ But, if you see it as an opportunity to grow and to mature, then you just don’t – you welcome it. You’re not going to walk away.

Indeed, without challenge a student may not experience growth according to Judith:

Oh yeah, because you can’t grow if you aren’t challenged. Because if you aren’t challenged you just remain the same and you remain stagnant. So, you need to hit something where it’s like, ‘Okay, this isn’t easy, so I have to think about it and I have to work really hard.’ And, because of that, then you grow.

I described the concept of *external challenge* as when students perceive a challenge from an outside source, such as a faculty member or peer. *External challenge* could occur through students’ exposure to Bible college curriculum, when faculty challenge students to understand the context of biblical events to reach a deeper understanding of Scripture, when faculty give their students a little push to think and grow at a higher level, and when faculty challenge students to live the Scriptures – not just learn them.

Bartholomew took up the challenge of studying the Bible due to his college’s curriculum
when he said, “The curriculum has encouraged me to grow spiritually because it has challenged me to study the Word of God and to show myself approved by studying the Word.” Students learned the importance of context, a difficult concept to learn and time consuming to employ, and how it was a worthwhile challenge when studying God’s word. David found employing hermeneutics, the science of interpreting Scripture, was challenging to all students – especially newer ones:

Because I’m, I’m not sure if all the faculty are members of the same denomination, but I know the students aren’t. They come from different biblical denominations and the one thing that unites us is the Word of God. So that’s why they push hermeneutics. You do your hermeneutics and you do it consistently, you don’t change it. You will get the answer you’re looking for and sometimes that’s a struggle for a lot of people, a lot of newcomers, coming along. But once they start doing it - you see [emphasis added]. . . . Last year, one girl just, she said, ‘My understanding is, is different than . . . everybody else's. So I need somebody to help me work through this situation.’ And that’s when the teachers and the faculty will come along, sit down beside you, ‘Let’s go through this, step-by-step.’ So when you have it, you have it. At least, a clear understanding when you leave here.

Faculty challenged students to think at a higher level. One professor, known for expecting excellence from his students, gave Isaiah a little push beyond his comfort level to reach new heights in his own thinking:

I took his class, one of his classes, and turns out he was hard. But the reason he was hard was because he makes you think at a higher level that you didn’t think of, you know? And he was such a simple teacher, a simple guy, a great guy to get along with, but at the
same time, you know, he would just make you think. . . . you could be thinking something small here and then, ‘Why do you think that?’ Or, like, ‘Why do you do this?’ thing, like, throw little facts at you. And that little bubble they had, it keeps increasing and growing and growing and growing until, you know, you come to this great answer, that you’re like, ‘Wow. I came up with this answer?’

Isaiah ended his anecdote by stating, “All he does is give you a little push, you know?”

Students who had doubts about their faith or experienced struggle with their understanding of the Bible encountered the concept of wrestling with faith. These instances of doubt or struggle came about because students had a limited understanding of who God is, had a limited understanding of faith, experienced a dissonance with what they were taught about the Bible in the past and what they learned in Bible college, had trouble letting go of erroneous beliefs, still sought a revelation from the Lord regarding an aspect of faith which they did not fully comprehend, were still undergoing a maturation process in their relationship with God, and had doubts about their own level of faith.

Reuben found that, as an instructor, when he compassionately engaged with students who struggled with a scriptural precept that conflicted with their personal philosophy they were more likely to learn, and therefore, grow:

But I think any of those issues, if you approach them dogmatically without a high level of humility and compassion and grace, I think that’s what students struggle with. Because they don't have the grounding to approach and say, ‘Okay. I want to think biblically about this.’ And yet, they seemed to have an argument. I mean, ‘Yeah, what’s wrong with that?’ I don't know. So, encouraging them to get back in and let's think about this, let’s really dig in.
Students who were challenged by a dissonance with their long-held beliefs and what they recently learned in their study of the Bible would, according to John, grow stronger for it if they trusted in God’s word:

I think they have to believe that the Bible’s the Word of God and that’s the center of it. Anything else after that, people may have a different viewpoint. I’ve had different people with different viewpoints in my classes and they’re like, ‘Wow that makes so much sense.’ And, ‘I’m struggling with this but because I wrote a paper that’s exactly contradictory to what you just said.’ It was like, ‘I’m having trouble, just letting go of something that has been so much a part of me.’ But as long as they acknowledge the Word of God and they’re willing to let it change their life, then they’re going to be okay.

Bernice struggled with her own beliefs and began to question herself, which apparently led to self-awareness. She said, “Because you think you know, but you don’t know until you get in here [laugh]. What you thought you knew – not so much. So it makes you more aware of yourself. It gives you grounding, it really does.” Likewise, Quartus provided an explanation of how facing your own doubt can lead to growth when he stated:

I feel that if I didn’t have anything to challenge what I believed in I would believe it ignorantly. Um, and so one of my roommates was a Muslim for most of his life. And some discussions with him have really both intrigued me and also, um, helped assure me as we talked about, like, things that he used to believe in that made sense when he just mentioned them... He would talk about why he changed it. I was like, ‘Wow, that... that makes so much more sense to me now why you changed what you believed in.’ And it, even though I didn’t go through the challenge he did, it strengthened my belief on a certain point. And then, maybe on a personal side, with something that I’ve been
challenged with at the college – after I’ve researched it and come to a conclusion now I have the stuff to back up my belief. I have a mental note of it, too. Not only just, like, here it is in the Bible, but I’ve thought through it all and made sure of why I believed it. When students were able to wrestle with faith in a Bible college environment they had the resources to overcome their struggles and doubts, resulting in a more thorough grounding in the Word and a stronger faith.

**Worldview development.** Students arrive at a Bible college facing the challenge of developing their own worldview – a complicated concept that is not easy to learn or to teach. Students are perhaps unable to articulate their worldview, or have only a rudimentary knowledge of the worldview concept, creating a need for Bible colleges to encourage worldview development. The Christian College’s Academic Catalog stressed the importance of worldview development in its educational objectives and stated that students should graduate with a worldview that integrated biblical precepts with general education. Bible college students relied on established curriculum and faculty experiences to create their own evolving worldview.

**Worldview development**, more specifically the development of a Christian worldview, was a delicate balance between faculty instruction and students’ understanding of how their worldview would color the way they viewed the world – it was the lens through which they filtered the information they processed through each day. This metaphor of a lens was used by James to articulate the importance of developing a Christian worldview:

> But in order to approach the world you need to have – to see things and moral decisions through the lens of the Scripture. So you have to make ethical decisions not only in your personal life but also in your ministry because we are equipping you to launch you in the ministry. So we want you to be able to make the decisions in leadership and in ministry,
so that you do it in light of biblical principles.

Bible college students are required to develop a Christian worldview because they need to know what the Bible really said, how to communicate the Bible, and to be able to make personal and ministry decisions in light of Scripture.

The College of the Bible website stated that students were expected to develop and eventually possess a Christian worldview through their understanding of other major worldviews. They were also expected to learn how a worldview could influence their decision making process. According to Andrew, an instructor at the College of the Bible, faculty taught worldview using the Bible as well as the college’s Christian values:

I think in the classroom, we try to teach . . . it from the Bible, help them understand the biblical mandates. I think we do that in the culture of our core values and institutional goals as a college which we hold to. We keep our mission vision in front of us. It’s in all the classrooms. It’s in all our documents. We try to make that a major issue along the way. I think that helps the biblical worldview by saturating our students.

While courses alone intellectually challenge students, the development of a Christian worldview requires them to incorporate biblical precepts into their learning – thus shaping the lens of their worldview to properly interpret their surroundings. Sarah discovered this while taking courses in counseling:

I mean every paper we had to write it would be from a biblical worldview. How would you treat this patient? Now, you’re still learning about medications and you’re still learning about treatment and techniques. But I mean, you know, the difference between, like, biblical counseling and secular counseling is it’s three not two. The secular counseling is you and the doctor. Biblical counseling is asking God in on that.
Bible college faculty assisted students in developing their worldviews by exposing students to the struggles they would face when they viewed their occupations through their worldview, by telling students who struggled with this concept that “I know you can do this,” through encouraging their students, through teaching them how to defend and articulate a biblical worldview, and exposing students to competing worldviews. When teaching sociology, Orpah found that allowing students to struggle with the hard questions facilitated their Christian worldview development:

What am I going to do when this person has domestic violence – been involved in domestic violence? What am I going to do with a woman who has children and no daycare? You know, or divorced. . . . So, um, I may not force my own personal beliefs on the students, but I do ask them to try to get some forethought on what you’re going to do. How does your faith impact what you’re doing? And, sometimes it’s very, superficial, you know, ‘Oh yeah, we should love everybody.’ Takes a little more. . . . And, so hopefully by asking them those hard questions, they begin to say life isn’t always like a white light. There’s a lot of gray and ‘What am I going to do,’ you know? James understood the importance of teaching the difficult concept of a worldview and even viewed student failure to properly grasp it as instructor failure:

We want our students to graduate with a biblical worldview and so we help them to understand what that means and how to defend that, how to articulate that. And, so, if they leave here without a biblical worldview, then we haven’t done our jobs.

The challenge students faced when developing their Christian worldview came to light when faculty explained how they envisioned the desired result of worldview instruction. For Matthew, he saw students as instinctively assessing their surroundings in light of Scripture:
So, um, I want to see our students develop that instinct, that intuition that is creation, fall, redemption, new creation. . . . My most recent students I went outside the direction where the course was going to stop and say, ‘Okay. How do I use this? How do I use these four categories to query anything I’m looking at? So, where does creation persist in this? How has the fall ruined it? How might redemption make it better and what does this have to do with forever?’

Even though students were taught to develop a Christian worldview, according to Matthew, it was a difficult proposition because “You can write a paper but it isn’t a worldview until you are intuitively responding according to it.”

Bible college students, even those who had a foundational Christian belief, may not have enrolled with a fully formed Christian worldview. These learners encountered challenges as they continued to add to, or subtract from, their evolving worldviews. Sometime during his sophomore year, Thomas began to notice the emergence of his Christian worldview when confronted with various situations:

We’ll be able to look at a, a situation and kind of see what's going on. Is this a sin problem or is this, um, is this something spiritual? Is this some kind of spiritual warfare? I’ve had a lot of situations where normally I’d say, ‘Oh, well that situation just kind of sucked,’ and then think about it later. I was like, ‘Oh, I wonder if there was a little bit of prodding from some spiritual stuff there or whatever.’

Some students’ evolving worldviews changed – leading to growth and greater understanding. Quar tus, a second year student, saw his worldview evolving continuously and recognized that it would just take time:

So I would say it’s a combination of classwork as well interaction with professors,
hearing other people's perspectives from peers and professors over time kind of definitely changed my thought process about the way the world works, the way I should act about things. That kind of thing. It was, I would at least push it to my second semester, maybe even this summer and into this semester now. It continues changing.

Also, evolving worldviews increased students’ sensitivity to their surroundings, helped them see others’ needs, and allowed them to apply their faith to specific issues. Reuben found that when students struggle with scriptural precepts that fall within the Christian worldview concept, it was best for faculty to respond with grace:

And I think partly, where the worldview comes in is if you don’t prepare your response with a level of humility and grace, it’s easy to look like a bigot, if you don’t agree with the common view. And, so one study that said – it’s higher in the secular world – but among evangelical Christians, 61% have no problem with gay marriage. I was like ‘More than half?’ [I] forgot where I read that but I was like, ‘There can’t be any way! And yet, I see some of that in my classes in students that will ask, ‘I don't necessarily agree but I understand where society is coming from as well. How can this be wrong if two guys want to get together? It’s monogamous, they love each other. Isn’t that a biological urge that – talk me through that.’ So, we have those types of conversations that we need to have in the classroom.

**Change.** Bible college students experience change, or the alteration or transformation of their intellect and/or spirituality, when exposed to the Bible college environment. Bible college students change as they begin to embrace the incorporation of faith into life. They also transform simply through change from Bible college attendance and experience growth through personal change when God molds them into being better servants. Bible college students see
their identity change as they grow in intellectual and spiritual knowledge.

Bible college students experience change through their incorporation of faith into life. The Northern Bible College’s Academic Catalog confirmed the importance of integrating biblical knowledge into the context of life as a part of their educational philosophy. Students discover the importance of incorporating faith into their lives because they need to change their attitude and responses to situations, it is necessary for them to make better decisions, and there is also a necessity to live their lives better according to biblical precepts.

Karen learned that she could defend her faith in a more positive manner, a change in how she asserted herself, when she integrated faith into her life:

I think that’s a lot of what I learned here with how to integrate it [faith] into my daily life, is like how can I still speak with love and speak with truth and yet not cross over the boundary of being rude? Which I used to think that everything that was assertive was rude, but it’s not.

Isaiah’s change occurred in his actions and thoughts because of the knowledge he gained from the Bible while in college:

The Bible – I was able to understand it more and I was able to see things differently than I did before. So, some things that I would do before, I wouldn’t do now. Or like, some things that I thought before – I don’t have the same mind on things that I do now. So, the school has influenced my life and some of my decision making and some of the ways I live my life, you know.

Cyrus experienced change when he applied what Christ said into his life, “But if you apply what Christ has said in Scripture it will give you peace. And I have peace, you know, because I know that I’m safe, I know where I’m going.” Ruth, after her freshman year, realized change when she
began applying Bible college lessons to her life, “. . . eventually like the things that the teachers or faculty tried to teach me. Like, I did start actually applying those things to my life and it's made a huge impact on me.” Judith came to Bible college already incorporating faith into her life when she said, “But, yeah, it’s [faith] played a really big role, because it influences what I do, what I say, how I think, and all the important and not important things.” However, when Judith began learning more in college about her faith her determination to incorporate faith was strengthened, resulting in a change in her understanding:

That’s something I brought with me, but definitely was strengthened and developed further while I was here, just in learning of different theologies and understanding why I believe what I believe and why what I do is a reflection of that. Which was awesome just having the professors pour into me, helping me grow in my own faith as I was here even for just a short period of time.

Embracing the concept of the incorporation of faith into life, such as Cyrus who mentioned earlier that he felt a sense of peace, appeared to be a component of change and subsequent growth. When asked how he knew he was incorporating faith into his own life, Bartholomew said, “By the changes in the actions that I’m making and how I responded to different situations that came about.” Bartholomew was more specific about how he changed when he continued, “Probably after my first year of enrollment I started not to get mad at situations. I started to act calmer around different things that were happening to me. And it’s that my whole attitude started to change.”

It may be possible to incorporate faith into life over a period of time. Noah posited that immersion in a godly culture over a long period can manifest in the incorporation of faith into life, “People who go to church three times a week, they’re reading their Bible, they’re doing their
Bible studies, things like that, it happens, and I think a much slower rate here [Northern Bible College], you’re so immersed in the culture.” Noah went on to say that students may experience this phenomenon because of what they do personally and what occurs around them:

You’re reading the Word, you’re in the Word every day, you’re praying before class, you’re praying at the end of every class, just about. Um, your conversations at lunches and things almost . . . three out of the five days a week are, are something of a faith-based nature, a religious nature. You can’t help but have it affect and, and seep into every other aspect of your life.

Isaiah discovered that the result of his incorporation of faith into life was a subtle process that changed his actions:

I wasn’t just . . . going through the motion of things. Now it’s just . . . I was actually incorporating the things that I learned here into my life, you know. And, I didn’t even realize it, it just happened, you know? It’s just, as time went by I started doing things that we’d do – talk about in classrooms. It’s like, oh, our faith is ‘this,’ we did ‘this’ because of ‘that.’ And now, all of a sudden, it’s just common sense and a way for me to, you know – it became . . . like, one of my senses.

Students’ experiences while immersed in the Bible college environment lead to change – which lead to growth. This concept of change from Bible college attendance affects students who want people to see Jesus in them and when they perceive problems in their lives. Aaron revealed how he was changed by his attendance at a Bible college when he said, “I’m more vocal about Jesus, but I’m also more loving. I want people to see Jesus in me. I go on and talk about Jesus. I want to live it, too.” Michael, with the benefit of hindsight, saw how his over-assertive personality needed to change if he was going to be a servant of Christ:
Um, I believe actually the most important [thing], at this point in time, is being an example of a changed person, personality wise. Going from, honestly, just six months ago being a loud-mouth opinionated, like, combative individual – politically speaking, . . . I’m really trying to just be that example of, like ‘Hey listen. I’m being honest, open – I was a jerk. I’m different now.’

*Change from Bible college attendance* was evident in students’ willingness to teach others when they experienced how a Bible college influenced them as individuals and ministers, when they avoided getting stuck on “things” instead of focusing on Christ, when they devoted themselves to Christ, when they cultivated a sensitivity to the lost, and when they experienced turmoil as a result of Bible college instruction. Time spent in Bible college was instrumental in creating a change in Ruth that enabled her to begin the healing process with her family:

I feel like it’s helped me create boundaries with my family at home, um, especially when I lived around here the first years and I was away from them. I was able to better heal from everything that I’ve been through since I had space. And now, even since I’ve gone back and lived with my family, it’s helped me go back and create those healthy boundaries with them.

Perhaps a sincere observation from a family member could be an objective way to know if attendance at a Bible college changed a student. This was the case with Aaron who witnessed very positive, spiritual changes in his wife causing him to ask her a question:

‘What are all these changes?’ I mean she enrolled in the foundation class [on] her own. She is going to the women’s Bible study on Thursday. She comes with me to the Bible study on Monday, goes to church on Sunday. So, she said, ‘You.’ I said, ‘Me?’ She said, ‘Yeah, you. I see Jesus in you. I see you talking the talk and walking the walk, and
this is what few people do.’

When Judith visited her home during her enrollment in Bible college, her mother would remark on her transformation:

Like, um, my mom when I would come home and stuff. She’s like, ‘I just can see the change in you. Like it’s only been three or four months and I can just see the change in you and how much you’ve grown without even talking to you about it. I can just see, like, in the way you act and the way you talk and the way you carry yourself now, how much it’s affecting you in a good way.’

Bartholomew, a military veteran, was told by his wife how she observed changes in his relationships and how he handled a combat-related disability:

She’s seen the change in attitude in how I deal with stuff, and how I handle . . . my disabilities. And she’s seen how the Word has changed me as a father and how I parent my kids. And, how I care and I try to teach the Word to my three sons. And how my three sons are learning and growing in the Word of God.

Bible college students change as they learned. At times this change creates turmoil.

Gideon, a pastor who spoke English as a second language, said this when he was asked to expand on the turmoil he experienced at his Bible college:

Um, (pause) well when you start dealing with – maybe with your own concepts or increasing your knowledge and, and when you realized you been doing things that you thought that were right and they [were] not. . . . When I come here to learn, my learning will change me. And, change create turmoil. We as humans, we are, um, we don’t like change. Yeah, create friction. You stand behind the pulpit and ask everybody else to change, but I’m not changing. (laughter) So, so I believe that all of us here – that we
change. You see you will not find a diamond – you have to grind it. When you grind something, it produces heat and friction and all that stuff. So as God refines us – we feel the heat.

Bible college students undergo change on a more personal level which leads to growth. This concept, which I called *growth through personal change*, occurred because students found that their behavior needed to change, they were too judgmental, their lives or studies were only touching the surface of the Word, and they were not leaning on God. Isaiah believed that it was his study of the Bible that was responsible for his new found patience, when he said, “I’m more patient now then I was before. I’m – because you know, I was real impatient, if I had an opinion I would want everyone else to have the same opinion, you know.” Isaiah went on to discuss how he became less judgmental, too, when he remarked, “The only person that can judge you will be God. You know I have no say in that. So, that’s me [being] less judgmental than I was before when it comes to judging other people or seeing other people.” Some students were delivered from fear due to the change in the way they depended on God in their lives. This was the situation for Hermes, whose grandmother was a significant influence in his Christian upbringing, when the alterations in his Bible college program were going to impact his enrollment:

I really learned to trust God because at first I was very afraid. And um, I remember at one point actually talked to my advisor because I kind of felt upset. Because I came in thinking that the program was one way and it was kind of out of their control, but they had to change it to keep the program remaining. And I was very worried and wasn’t sure if I was going to complete everything I needed to complete on time. So, I feel like that really pushed me towards God more than ever. Because I kind of had to stand on my own faith and not my grandma’s and everything I grew with.
Growth through personal change also occurs when students become more disciplined and intentional about their studies and their ability to communicate biblical truths is enhanced. Sarah’s growth through change occurred when she became more disciplined in her approach to studying in Bible college, “Um, it made, I mean aside from the fact that it made me disciplined in the study of the Word, which I needed, because as an artist, I’m not really disciplined about anything.” Sarah continued later in her description of her personal growth, “So I think from a spiritual standpoint, it made me very disciplined and, um, intentional about parts of the Word that I intended to study rather than just being inspired to take it a different way.” David discovered that his ability to talk to others about Christ, even though he was always able to talk to people about anything else, changed dramatically due to his studies:

But [it is] one thing to talk and hint at and hint around or give generalizations [about Christ], and in my ignorance I thought I was being clear or deep or dramatic or really explaining myself. Not having – not only the vocabulary but the right vernacular to clearly, uh, express what it means to be a Christian. . . . Where before I’d been like, ‘Well, you just need Jesus.’ (laughter)

Faculty also observed the changes in students’ personal understanding of Scripture as they underwent the learning process. Andrew observed this in students as they began to really study the Bible and discuss it in the classroom:

I think that whole Bible process, the more they understand how to read the Word and understand the Word, changes the Word’s effect on them. That comes about as a regular case. As we go through passages of Scripture and talk about it, they’re going, ‘Oh, okay, that’s how that works.’

Overall, the concept of growth through personal change appeared to result in changes in
students’ spiritual lives and a greater reliance on God, both of which led to growing spiritually.

**Identity.** Students’ identities change as they identify more with Christ, a concept I called *I know who I am*. Students in a Bible college begin to identify more with their Creator because of the *identity instruction* they receive from their faculty.

The concept of *I know who I am* describes students who tie their identity to Christ because of what he did and what he will do. This concept arose in the life of Bible college students because of their identity in Jesus, their belief that they were created for Him, everything leads back to Him, students’ realization that their identity was tied to Christ, and the belief that if you did not identify with Christ you would be lost - you would have no value. Declaring one’s identity in Christ was definitely a thread woven into the fabric of most Bible college students. This was reinforced through personal study and biblical education. Abigail’s Christian identity was firmly established before attendance at Bible college, but a life altering event brought her Christian identification into greater focus:

I have seen so much change that it almost makes me emotional. I know who I am in Christ. I knew who I was in Christ before, then I went through a divorce that just rocks you. And this [College of the Bible] was home. I mean, I had a family and this [College of the Bible] was home during that season. So, for me it was the reminder of who I really am, studying up Scripture and making sure I’m praying. I’m making sure that I’m taking time to understand the biblical foundation of the Bible, like, culture of the Bible.

While it is important for Christians to find their identity in Christ, it is just as important to know the full meaning of that, as when David alluded to a change he experienced regarding his understanding of his true identity, “I’m a Christian. And I can see that knowing fully what that means.” Noah explained how his very worth is tied to his identity in Christ, not in his role of
father or combat veteran, when he said, “My value is found in the person of Christ, and daily I'm reminded of that, and I, I find deeper meaning in that.” When asked if his changed identity was a product of his education at the Northern Bible College, Noah continued, “Oh yeah. That's definitely from being here.”

Students who identified themselves as children of God did so for many reasons. Hannah mentioned how it was moving from home at a young age to attend college that helped her to understand who she was:

I mean, I know I’ve always known that [I was a child of God] but definitely moving out here and having the courage and just making the decision to follow the plans that God has for me. That’s definitely helped me understand and be proud to say that I am a child of God. So I definitely, that’s something I would say.

Judith described how her biblical knowledge, gained while a student, changed her identity to being a child of God when she said, “Because if you don’t find your identity in Christ you get really lost, superfast, because if you don’t have an identity in Christ then you really have no value. Because through Christ we find our value.” I asked Judith if her identity changed due to her Bible college education, and she said, “Like I knew I was a child of God, but it was not part of my identity. That was something I knew, but I did not apply.” Ruth realized a change in her identity when her dependence on titles fell away as the major components of her identity – as illustrated by this exchange:

Ruth: Yeah, I grew in my worth a lot and realized that that’s really a huge area in my life that I can, um, impact others in because of what I've been through. But at the same time, like, I kind of had the titles of going to a Bible college and being a worship leader kind of, uh, lead my life I should say. And I had to work through that as well because it's not
about the titles . . .

Interviewer: Well, what is it about then, in your opinion?

Ruth: God. Like, serving Him.

Interviewer: Sure. So what’s the most important aspect of your personal identity then?

Ruth: Uh, knowing that I’m a child of God and what my purpose is.

It was interesting, too, that Ruth mentioned how her struggle toward I know who I am not only resulted in her greater appreciation of a Christian identity, but also her stated desire to use her stronger identification with Christ in helping others – a concept that falls under contributing, which is a sub-category of the next major category of applying. This process alluded to a clear movement along The Spiritual Integration Model.

The change in students’ identities that occurred at a Bible college led to growth, as stated by Lois:

It’s like I feel like I know my God better now. Um, and I also feel like I know how to pursue a relationship with Him more. Um, and then [my] putting that into practice is growing me as a Christian. So, even though my title as a Christian hasn’t changed, I feel like I grew more and [am] more of a practicing Christian.

Omar experienced growth through change, too, as he learned to be more confident in who he was in God and to lean on him for support:

Just being very established in who I was, and being not confident in myself, but confident in God. Because He is the one that made me. He holds my identity. The change this semester has been leaning more into God.

Michael’s identity was changed through his opportunities to minister to others teaching him humility and building his character:
Even something like working at the recording studio here. Um, that was a service, you know, that was – you serve people doing that. And that has taught me humility – which is a tough cookie to swallow if you don’t have any of that. And so I really believe it’s affected my character, um, in my identity and strengthened my identity in ‘Who am I? Am I an obnoxious person, am I self-centered or am I a servant?’ So, it’s helped me shape my identity.

This growth may very well have been attributable to students’ investing in their personal identities, according to Matthew:

Now, there’s a lot of Christians who are just surviving as Christians. They’re not thriving. We probably got a fair amount of those in our upperclassmen. The degree to which they personally invest and, say whether you’re talking about your friendships or your classes or student life activities or chapel, the degree to which they personally invest and say, ‘This is, this is me,’ again – identity. ‘This is what I’m about. This is what I’m here doing,’ is what determines whether they’re thriving or just surviving spiritually.

Students who adopted the concept of *I know who I am* found they had grown in personal value, became more confident in their relationship with God, and discovered they were relying more on their identification with God rather than more secular titles to define their personal identity.

The concept of *identity instruction* is where the Bible college faculty and curriculum encourage students to identify with Christ. In this concept students either begin to identify with Christ or strengthen their identification with Christ because the instruction at the Bible college encourages them to discover a more Christ-centered identity, faculty point students toward a new identity in Christ, and the Bible college environment encourages students to find their Christian identity.
Bible college faculty asked questions of students regarding their Christian identity so they could develop and articulate their own identity in Christ. James built on students’ theological knowledge to change their identity-focus from themselves to Christ:

But here I would say it’s helping them to understand that being a Christian or a believer – that is their identity now is in Christ – and what does that mean for them? And how do they live in light of that identity? And how do you formulate your identity more holistically through understanding and articulating and developing your own personal theology? In your own personal philosophy of ministry?

Andrew posited that instructors should teach and act like Christians if students’ identities were to evolve into a Christian identity, when he said “I think, also, who we are as instructors and the role we play – disciplining them, loving on them and modeling for them. I think that’s how we model it for them.” When asked how faculty modeling can help encourage students toward a Christian identity, Andrew said:

Modeling, yeah. When they see it lived out in their instructor, then they do it. A good case in point of modeling to me and modeling to them, would be – more of our mission – would be servant leadership. If you walk around the school on any given day, the person you will most likely see carrying out the garbage is the [College of the Bible] President. The students see that and now you see students taking out the garbage. Because, they see if the President is not too good to do that, then I’ll do it.

According to Luke, modeling servanthood was also a method employed by faculty at the Christian College to inspire a Christian identity:

If there’s a piece of paper on the floor, you don’t walk by it, you pick it up. If there’s trash in the room, you pick it up and put it in the trash can. Everybody does it. Why?
Because the teachers – the president – are willing to do it themselves. And, if you see people like that doing it, then guess what? It’s not demeaning for you to do it. So, that’s that, you know, it’s that practical servanthood.

One Bible college employed a campus-wide campaign that focused on Christian identity. In this particular case, Samuel found himself surrounded by identity-themed posters which led him to confront his personal identity resulting in change:

Like who, or what is your identity? Who are you? Who is God to you? And that’s when it really hit because I – all of these things were around me and I couldn't help ask myself the questions that were already there. You know who, like, who am I? And why am I here? What is God to me? And so these questions have helped shape my identity. I think that it was really through, um, finding God and more of who he was that led to finding myself, finding my identity in my pursuit of God.

**Desire to honor God and developing.** Students place an emphasis on seeking God and subsequently find themselves discovering a college environment that keeps them focusing on God. Students begin developing within their college and show another facet of their desire to honor God through building their relationship with God. They also begin growing spiritually as more knowledgeable Christians due to the challenge of biblical worldview development and wrestling with faith as well as the change that occurs from Bible college attendance and an evolving Christian identity. This developing, within the context of spiritual growth and relationship building, results in an enhanced personal relationship with God.

**Movement from Developing to Applying**

Bible college students who develop through relationship building and spiritual growth yearn to use what they learn to help others. They look to their peers for assistance in their
ministries and desire to serve God and their communities through their Bible college’s service learning programs. Irene’s movement from *discovering* to *developing* was due to her desire to join the Bible college *family*, but she also moved from *building relationships with peers* to participate in *study groups* – a jump from *developing* to *applying* – when she said, “Definitely getting involved, just going to them, because there’s lots of campus events and stuff and they’re very fun. Going to [a] small group . . . which is like what we have instead of chapel on Thursday mornings.” The student Orpah described, the one who experienced *personal change* due to her classmates’ nonjudgmental attitude, moved further from *personal change* to *give and take* due to her sharing a personal anecdote in class:

> She [Orpah’s’s student] was in the class last week and she was very open. I mean she was talking and we combined classes so there were like, oh, 30 to 40 students together. But she, she was responding to me very well and I thought, ‘Wow, she’s still growing but she didn’t shut down and she didn’t leave the college,’ you know. When she actually left my class, she thanked me because she was able to share so much in that class about her life and nobody looked down on her because of it. Everybody was kind of wrapping their arms around her.

Hermes encountered an *external challenge* from his professors which brought him to the *give and take* concept where he was better able to explain his point of view:

> But, coming here . . . seeing, like, the different expectations that the teachers have for me. And they, like, pushed me . . . because they knew, I guess, I had more in me. And I was, like, a quick ‘go to the answer person.’ They taught me how, like, to dig deeper, to really explain my point of view.

It is also possible to move from *discovering* to *contributing*, as Michael demonstrated
when he explained how his Bible college’s small, intimate setting prepared him to engage in the *helping* concept:

So, the small college environment, I think, is important to me because I’m a very relational person. And, I think that when I have a good relationship, and close-knit relationship, with my community as a whole I’m going to be better prepared to go out and serve people I don’t know.

**Applying**

Once students develop through *building relationships* and spiritually grow through *challenge* and *change*, they begin to look for ways of *applying* what they learned. Bible college students apply their learned knowledge and skills through *participating* in the classroom and *contributing* to God and community.

**Participating.** Students were able to leverage their recently acquired knowledge to facilitate their participation in the classroom and to assist their peers in ministry efforts. Faculty encouraged students’ participation in their learning through the *give and take* that occurred in the classroom. Peers supported one another using the concept of *I speak at his or her church* through participation in church events. Also, students participated in *study groups* that allowed them to learn and help others to learn.

I defined *give and take* as when faculty empowered students to add, through questions and interjections of personal experience, to their teaching. The *give and take* concept came about in the lives of undergraduate Bible college students through their enjoyment of asking questions, their predilection to interject their experiences into classroom discussions, empowerment to drive discussions, and an expectation that their interjections would elicit comments and critiques. Faculty had no trouble prompting questions from students who enjoyed
asking them, a factor mentioned by Bartholomew, “We enjoy asking questions.” James provided an example of *give and take* in the classroom that involved students’ experiences:

They definitely bring personal examples. I’ve taught in church leadership and we’ve talked about all the ways church can go wrong and all the different types of leaders. And so we definitely bring a lot of personal examples in that. They all bring their own unique perspective as well.

One of the reasons that Bernice enjoyed her classes was the ability for students to speak their minds on the subjects at hand, “We always chime in on whatever the subject is. If anybody has any idea or wants to say something, we just automatically give our opinion. We’re not necessarily asked.” This type of *give and take* resulted in students’ challenging an instructor, as Gideon observed:

[You always] have a chance to give your opinion, to ask questions, to challenge the teachers. And they were grateful to listen to and, and sometimes honestly to [say] ‘Well I don’t have the answer to your questions.’ So, you have that inviting environment, too. To ask them to comment and critique – if you can say it that way.

Students asked questions because they needed answers – even when the queries probed a Bible college’s denominational origins or could have been from a Muslim who accepted Christ. Students were empowered to contribute their experiences, described as interjecting, to answer questions of their own or add to the learning of others. This increased the understanding of students to the point where they considered themselves competent to teach what they recently learned. Lois, who grew up within the denomination that founded the Northern Bible College, found the *give and take* in the classroom impressive due to the instructors’ efforts to maintain a
nondenominational aspect to their teaching – even though it would creep in at times – and how this fact generated discussions that enhanced her learning:

But there is such a wide variety of students here – you get a really wide variety of beliefs and backgrounds. And even though our professors kind of don’t necessarily say, ‘Hey, we’re teaching to [Bible college denomination] doctrine,’ you get a lot of that. Um, but having that variety of students [creates] a lot of discussion and, like, brings a new perspective. And I don’t really feel like I have changed any of my beliefs so far, coming here. But, I do feel that having so many perspectives and new points of view helps me understand why I believe what I believe.

Aaron engaged in the give and take of classroom discussions by asking questions specifically about his conversion from Islam to Christianity when he shared, “You know, coming from Islam to Christianity, I did have a lot of questions. I need answers for it. What better place to ask these questions than in a Bible college?” Students may interject while the instructor is teaching, something they were struggling with at their home church, which happened to Andrew:

Anyway, I think, students will say in the midst of a conversation, in a lecture, they will just interject what’s happening. I think about [student’s name], in a church leadership course . . . she was struggling with stuff in her church. She will just say this concept we’re talking about didn’t happen in my church. My church [emphasis mine] – they just pour their hearts out.

This give and take in the classroom gave every student an environment where they were free to participate and where faculty were more concerned about students’ learning than they were adamant about controlling the discussion.

I defined the concept of I speak at his/her church as Bible college students’ actively
participating in the ministry efforts of their peers through visiting or speaking at their church. This type of active participation occurred mostly among older Bible college students who were active in their home churches. Because students grew to know each other in the classroom environment, they wanted to support each other’s efforts to satisfy the student ministry service requirement; a student’s ministry needed the assistance of a peer who could communicate with a specific group, and knowing peers’ skill sets was useful for future ministry endeavors. Abigail actively participated in her peers’ ministry efforts because of the friendly classroom interactions:

I have been asked to speak to a youth group on more than several occasions because of the classroom environment. We get to know each other in the classroom on a spiritual and friendly basis so that when you’re asked to come we know what to expect. I’ve been asked to come and speak at a couple of different things.

Aaron, a veteran wounded in combat, was asked by his peers to speak to people with specific needs because they knew how his background and skills could serve God:

One of them wanted me to go and speak at his church. He’s one of the leaders in the, uh (pauses) the Wounded Warriors. So, you know, he wanted me to speak to Veterans. It’s next month.

Abigail asked her peers to participate in her ministry efforts:

And then there have been students that I knew. I needed a project to do for my church, possibly. And so, I would go to [peer’s name], or I would go to someone that I knew has what I need because of the networking. . . . I know [peer’s name] skill set and I know how he can influence this group of people that I’m working with. So, why not bring my brother in and be that family?

Students also engaged in this concept when they supported peers’ ministry efforts
through attendance at a special church service, when they encouraged peers in their ministry efforts, and when they invited peers to church services. Bernice participated in peers’ ordinations at their churches, “I went to a couple of – what do you call them – ordinations, a couple of them for people that were here. So awesome.” Cyrus shared how he would invite fellow students to his home church on special occasions, when he said “Sometimes I’ve invited my classmates to my church, you know, friends and family day.” This participation in unique spiritual events appears to be a way for peers to support each other and constructively apply their special talents and experiences to assist a fellow student’s ministry efforts.

Participation in study groups allowed students to learn and apply their proficiency in certain areas to help others learn. Students took part in these groups because multiple peers studying together created a synergy that enhanced learning; courses were harder than expected that required a higher level of focus, and these study groups were convenient – especially if the student lived on campus. Jacob enjoyed participating in study groups because they afforded a respite from solitary study, when he said “I like group work because then you don’t have to do everything by yourself. It gives you a chance to bounce off ideas.” Having other people present also offered different perspectives that contributed to success, according to David:

Everybody who . . . every study group I’ve been a part of, not only passed whatever test or whatever thing that was coming up – we aced it. We aced it. Just different insights, maybe I didn’t look at it from their point of view or this particular thing. But . . . everyone without fail, if I’m in a study group – we ace it.

Ethan appreciated when peers participated in study groups and applied their knowledge to assist others:

Study groups and the counseling, you know, before mid-terms and finals was very critical
because . . . if you didn’t attend a study group with key people leading and trying to help and assist you there is a big [difference] in your grades.

Hannah found that living on campus, where students were more available to assist others, increased participation in study groups when she said, “Especially if you live on campus, it’s so convenient. Because you can just walk over and be like, ‘Hey. Do you want to study for this together?’ And then you end up studying and then you do well.”

Participation in study groups was successful because students from different backgrounds and life situations were able to apply their knowledge and experience to helping others, students were able to study right before a test, it helped to see others were struggling with similar academic issues, and gathering together with the same goal was conducive to growing and learning.

In some cases, participation in study groups was helpful for students due to the diversity of the group, as when Abigail’s United States History class compelled her to join a study group:

That was one class that did challenge me. The study groups were great. Mixed ages, mixed races, mixed life situations, and demographics so it was good. It really – I mean, I did get an A in that class and I know it’s because of the study sessions.

Hermes’ participation in study groups was most helpful when others were able to show how they, too, were struggling with the subject matter:

I remember the first study group I was in. I think everyone was still kind of nervous to admit, like, their shortcomings and their flaws. I think just seeing, and getting to see, that you may have two other people that have the same struggle in a class as you and growing and learning together, that really helped.

Participation in these groups enhanced students’ ability to apply their knowledge and skills to
help others while the other students who most needed assistance received it from their friends.

**Contributing.** Contributing to the Bible college, or contributing to someone on a personal level, is a way for students to sense they are a part of the college. This part of the spiritual integration process focused on how students’ knowledge and skills learned at Bible college allowed them to contribute in various ways to the college and community. It is also important to acknowledge how contributing to the college or spiritual environment led to their ownership – or sense of being a part of – that environment. A case in point was Michael’s contribution, albeit one based on life experience and not on Bible college curriculum, that resulted in his believing he was a part of the college. Michael explained how his knowledge of caring for individuals who experienced an epileptic seizure resulted in this phenomenon:

They had a seizure disorder, had epilepsy, and it was really bad at that time and I was the only person that knew how to handle that. And, so . . . Residence Assistants started calling me when they were having one. So I would come and I would be there and I would tell them, like, what they needed, what this person needed. I remember about two weeks into classes, maybe three, the Dean of Students came up to me right after my friend had had a seizure, and they’re getting taken care of, and he said ‘You know, I want to thank you for what you’ve done for this campus already.’ And, ‘I’m praying for what you’ll do in the future.’ And, I felt in that moment, and I was like ‘Wow, I’m actually part of this family.’ You know, he, he is like telling me and thanking me for what I’ve contributed. And that was the moment I felt it, and that was like two weeks, maybe, into my Freshman year.

It was revealing to note in Michael’s narrative how the Dean of Students not only appreciated his recent efforts but mentioned how he would contribute to the college in the future. This
highlighted the importance of students participating in and contributing to the college’s welfare as well as enhancing their perception of being a part of the college family and, when contributions are spiritual ones, the spiritual environment.

In Bible college, students gain spiritual knowledge and skills for ministering to the needy, guiding fellow Christians, and showing the way toward salvation. The concept of contributing is where students are able to actually apply what they have learned to help others. Learning to help is a concept where students learned the specifics of ministry and how to lead others in their Christian faith. Bible college students in this study engaged in helping as a way to apply their knowledge when witnessing to others about Christ and helping their peers. Students also served God and contributed to both their community and Bible college, including taking part in the Bible college's service learning program, within a concept I called not just coming to school. All of these concepts allowed students to contribute their time and knowledge to support the college, and therefore, develop their sense of being a part of the college.

Learning to help described students’ desire to learn as much as they could at Bible college in order to use their knowledge to minister to others. The concept of learning to help motivated students because they wanted to choose electives based on ministry needs, to be ready for any situation, and to learn more to help more. Abigail chose her electives to better serve others, and said “But, I’m not just taking an elective because I need to take an elective. I’m taking an elective because this is going to influence and affect the ministry that God has called me to.” In that same vein, Cyrus wanted to ensure he was prepared for any type of service when he stated, “I wanted to come and learn as much as possible to be ready for any possible situation that might occur within my ministry.” Samuel wanted to take classes that focused on family psychology and lifespan development to use that knowledge in his own future family:
And so I love it because in all those classes it places an importance on not just the knowledge, but about why it’s important to us in our faith. If you end up getting married and having a family, what are some things that you can do to take care of yourself spiritually, of your spouse spiritually, your kids and all that, your household? What are you going to do to be a leader of God?

Students wanted to learn as much as they could to enable them to help the lost, which was what Bernice meant when she said, “I’m going to keep going because I’m learning more and I can go out there and help more. I can talk more intelligently out there to the lost.”

Attendance at a Bible college allowed students to answer questions about the Bible while preparing them to assist others who were confused and needed to hear a defense of the Bible. Hermes appreciated how his new knowledge enabled him to answer questions from his peers:

“I’m more so a person, especially with my peers, where they come to me for having different questions. And I’m using it as a witnessing tool, because I’ve been able to reach a lot of people that didn’t have a faith background. And, I really love that here, that I’ve been able to do that.

Esther became more confident in her ability to defend the Bible and was better able to answer the questions from people seeking the truth:

How do you defend ‘God wasn’t created’ or ‘God’s always existed’ and things of that nature? And you just have to accept it on faith. And those are questions that I’ve always been – when I would talk to other people they’re like, ‘Well, do you really believe the Bible?’ I’m like, ‘Yeah!’ But now I know why I believe the Bible. And I’m more confident in my ability to defend the Bible.

Embracing the concept of learning to help prepared students to contribute their knowledge and
skills in future endeavors to help others.

*Helping* is where students apply what they learn to help others. Bible college students made this concept viable through applying newfound knowledge, or their experience coupled with that knowledge, to help their newly arrived peers, by reaching out to peers in need, giving back, answering a calling, being a spiritual leader, and sharing their new found knowledge with people in their church. *Contributing* through *helping* was as simple as being there for newly-arrived students, as was the case with Esther who accepted the responsibility of *helping* freshmen at her college:

Whenever I came here as a freshman I knew there was certain things I was looking for from some of the older students. So now that I’m the older student I try to go to the freshmen and you know help them or introduce myself and see where they’re coming from and what help they need.

Noah, an older student who was married and had children, led a study group at his college that focused on marriage skills. When asked, Noah agreed that facilitating the group helped him to spiritually integrate into the college because he was contributing to the younger students:

Yes, absolutely. To, to give back, if you will. To pour into these students. You know, I’ve been married for 17 years and I opened with, ‘17 years of marriage does not make me an authority on marriage. It makes me an authority on what not to do.’ So let me – so it allows me to pour into these guys, um, hopefully things that will allow them to have a good, successful, godly marriage, and relationships. And a marriage is a model for . . . what their relationship to Christ should be. So hopefully this affects more than just their marriage. But if I can pour that back into them, I’m giving back to them . . .
Students were sometimes driven to help their peers. Samuel was compelled to contribute his time and fully engage with freshmen. In fact, Samuel was so effective at this that they thought he was a Resident Assistant:

But, you know, that made my heart warm because the fact that they were able to recognize me as a leader to them when in actuality I’m just, you know, walking with them. And, um, trying to . . . be a friendly face and to get them welcomed, introduced to [Northern Bible College], to give them . . . the things that I so much aspired to have out of life. I want to give to them.

Students contributed by helping someone in need. Omar reached out to a peer who was struggling:

I went to somebody’s – a peer’s apartment. I reached out to him because I saw in his eyes that he was just struggling. I contacted him. He said, ‘Hey, yeah, just meet me up at my apartment. We can talk and stuff.’ He didn't know what my intention was. Because I got there – he was like, ‘So, what's up?’ ‘Well, I don't know. I was actually going to ask you that.’ He was like, ‘Yeah. I'm struggling with my salvation. I don't know if I'm actually, like, saved or not.’

Noah, using the metaphor of watering a flower, also spoke to The Spiritual Integration Model’s elements of developing and then applying when he said:

You have to train your mind and inform your mind [developing]. Then, you can go on and head on [applying]. These people, like my peers, they don’t always know what’s going on. But, if you can walk alongside them, help them nurture what's going on in their lives – that flower will pop up.

Students also contributed to their communities as a way to give back – this is what Karen
had to say:

I feel like, um, I do give back to the community of [Northern Bible College original denominational affiliation] because I get involved and I'm a productive member of the community as a whole. Not necessarily because I'm this incredible person, but because I know that God's working through me to be a positive, active working member of the community.

*Helping* may also have been a calling from God into a specific ministry that not only fulfilled that calling but also provided assistance to the greater community. Aaron, who spoke English as his third language and was raised in the Middle East, felt called to speak to believers about his conversion from Islam to Christianity:

The first semester, uh, God already used one of the professors there to – his son is a pastor. He’s a professor and he’s a pastor, too. And, his son was doing a series about Islam. So, he asked me to go and speak. I never did that before. That was my first time. So, we went through stuff and I went over and I spoke in his church. (Pause) I liked it. I mean I was feeling if this is God’s will, help me to like it, help me to feel comfortable with it. The second time I did it, you know, in that professor’s church, I knew that this was my calling. I knew it right then.

Karen also experienced a calling to engage in the *helping* concept at a Christian summer camp where she was able to share Christ with children:

I've grown up going to that camp. So, I’ve always wanted to work there and I felt like God was calling me to work there? . . . I’m working there for two weeks and then coming back and having three days before class started.

Samuel was a spiritual leader of a small group and shared this:
I think it’s definitely different to be someone receiving the knowledge, than, you know, to [be] the one to give it out. And so it’s very humbling and it’s very – it’s an awesome experience to be able to, because they're all, like, voluntary.

Samuel agreed when asked if leading a small group on campus made him feel like he was contributing to the *spiritual environment*.

Students, especially older students who may have encountered significant struggles in their lives, reached out when their peers were going through something they had experienced, such as when Noah helped out a fellow student:

If nothing else, even for just simple practical application, like, um, a good friend here on campus – she's having some health issues. And, my own personal issue – health issues, whatever – I can talk with her about that, and extend a hand that way. I know that there are a couple other older students here [that], yes, will reach out in that way whenever possible.

Another older student, Sarah, embraced a maternal role in her Bible college and was even able to contribute to her peers by engaging them in her vocation:

I sort of just took on that momma role, I feel like. You know, one came in and had a, um, sore throat and I gave her tea, because I had a tea. . . . I teach ballet, so I hosted a worship dance on campus last semester. Just a free event if people wanted to come. And I didn’t think anyone was going to show up, because no one knew me. Here’s just this old student. I just stood in front of chapel one day and said, ‘If you want to come worship and dance, come with me.’ Seventeen people showed up. I didn’t know any of them. They thanked me for the opportunity. They allowed, like, some of their vulnerability to come out. They were all kind to one another and to me.
Bible college students’ eagerness to share with others what they learned directed them toward helping at their church or even in their own family. David was so excited to be able to help his fellow congregants that they had to calm him down:

Because I was just so excited and then when I’d get up or teach Sunday School in church and I just start giving them all this information. They said, ‘Hey, professor back down.’ (laughter) That’s what their nickname was for me. ‘Back down, this is way too much information.’

David also applied what he learned by helping his children, “My kids don't even realize that they were my first counselees as I was going through the counseling class. As I learned it I just applied to them with their problems in their situation (laughter).” Ethan used his knowledge from Bible college to help senior citizens at his church:

There are people in the church, senior saints are what I call them, they won’t talk to the pastor, they won’t talk to the elder, you know, the people that have been there, but they’ll talk to me. . . . So, the school with the Word has built truth and has given me time not only to give them hope and encouragement but also to build them up – actually to what the Scriptures says.

Students are able to serve God and contribute to both their community and Bible college by taking part in the Bible college’s service learning program. The Northern Bible College’s Academic Catalog stated that the education provided to students was oriented on service, calling students to follow scriptural commands to serve God on campus and in their local church. This concept, known as not just coming to school, occurred due to Bible colleges integrating service into the curriculum, students understanding that attending a Bible college was more than going to school, students learning that serving was rewarding, students understanding that they could
build relationships while serving others, and students knowing that service could result in growth when it occurred outside of the insulated, Bible college environment.

Service was a concept that Bible colleges integrate into their curriculum as explained by Michael, “So the service requirement is just a part of the [Northern Bible College] life, it’s integrated within that so . . . you’re always doing something to serve someone else.”

Bernice found that serving helped students stay involved and raised the college experience above classroom learning when she said, “And I like it that they keep you involved. You’re not just coming to school with the learning we had and . . . not sharing it, you know what I mean?”

Meeting a service learning requirement was an uplifting experience for some students, like Cyrus, who had an opportunity to see the results of their application efforts:

The Bible study for Seniors, I tell you, it’s wonderful. There’s one gentleman, he can’t hear, but he comes in and he just sits. He’s an old preacher, he says, ‘I can’t hear but I’m filled with the Holy Ghost.’ And others come in with their Bibles, look like they’re 60-year-old Bibles, and they’re reading the Word of God. It is just an uplifting feeling to know that regardless of where they are, they still have faith and trust. And they’re still on that path, that marathon of life, okay? It’s just an uplifting experience to me to be able to be in their presence and I thank God for that opportunity.

Michael described a similar experience when he received a blessing following a service learning activity:

I think you go in having this like, ‘Oh, I’m going to minister to them and they need me and I’m God’s gift to them’ or whatever. Um, when really you walk away realizing, yeah, you needed them. You learn something about yourself.

Some students, such as Kenan, were motivated to find their own service ministry where
they were able to apply their skills and knowledge, “I actually went on my own and did a soup kitchen. And, I, like, looked it up online, called the people who were doing it all and did that for my Community Service.” When asked how this affected him spiritually, Kenan explained, “Because I wasn’t doing it for the hours and the grade, I was doing it because . . . I want to help people. Because I know there’s people who don’t have my life and aren’t as lucky, I guess.”

There is also a learning component to Bible college service requirements that provided Bartholomew with the opportunity to work with children and exercise leadership skills:

So I worked [in] 2014, that summer, in Vacation Bible School on [nearby military installation] and it taught me how to work with children. . . . And it taught me how to understand what it meant to be a servant and to work and do a lot of things that you don’t normally get a chance to do in leadership.

Thomas built relationships while serving in an urban ministry that focused on the homeless:

And it's a downtown homeless ministry where we meet together a couple times a month and, uh, put together little grab bags of sandwiches and encouragement cards and bottled water. We go downtown and we go around to some of the homeless individuals. And we're not necessarily just looking to hand out. We’re looking to start conversations, show them that they’re not completely forgotten by society, establish relationships and just show them that we care.

Students saw the Bible college environment as a shelter from the real world where engagement in off-campus service learning was a way to truly serve God in less idealistic surroundings. Irene explained her view of not just coming to school and its effect on her spiritual growth this way:
I think that it definitely helps because I think sometimes being at Bible college you get to live in a bubble. And, I don’t think that is what God wants, I don’t think he wants us to live in a bubble. And, so, doing ministry definitely kind of bursts that. And you see real people living real lives, you know, because not everyone gets to go to Bible college and go to chapel every morning and all these types of things. I think that seeing that realness and still remembering who Jesus is and, like, how you can bring Jesus to that situation.

Students who engaged in community-based versions of *not just coming to school* experienced growth when they were able to apply what they learned in service to others.

Karen’s service learning centered on mentoring a young child at a public school:

> How can I use the tools that I’ve been given to show love to her in a way that’s going to impact her? Not in a way that I want to show love, but how is it going to impact her and just – I have to constantly be thinking about her. And I feel like that’s really helpful because, um, this world is so self-centered and I can be very self-centered at times. And so, in mentoring, I’ve found that because I'm so constantly thinking about her, that if I start to stray it won’t work.

When asked how this influenced her spiritual growth, Karen replied, “Yeah, I think so, because it’s one thing to have biblical knowledge and to understand theology and it’s another thing to put into practice.” Indeed, Karen very eloquently illustrated how students learn, when *developing* at a Bible college, and then perceive the need to move along *The Spiritual Integration Model* continuum to *applying* what they learned.

Students found that attending a Bible college was *not just coming to school*, it involved experiences that guided them toward spiritual growth, developed an increased confidence in their abilities to contribute to their communities, and most importantly facilitated their sense of being
a part of the Bible college. This emergent sense of being a part of the Bible college would eventually lead these students toward an overall acceptance of the college’s environment – especially the spiritual environment.

**Desire to honor God and accepting.** When students’ development reaches a point where they are able to leverage their relationships and growth, they are empowered to begin applying their skills and knowledge. Students in this study did this through participating by speaking at their peer’s church or contributing by learning to help others via their chosen ministries, or helping others through their own personal ministries, or not just coming to school where they were able to contribute through service learning requirements. Thus, they were able to satisfy their desire to honor God when they served others.

**Movement from Applying to Accepting**

Students who move from applying to accepting discover the attributes of family and a favorable college environment, become a part of the family through building relationships, grow spiritually through challenge and change, and apply what they learn in their Bible colleges and communities. Students move to accepting, where they accept their place in their Bible college, because they know their attendance at a Bible college is an opportunity given by God, they appreciate the comfort and safety of a Bible college, and they enjoy the opportunities to connect. In other words, they accept their place in the Bible college because their spirituality status aligns with the college’s spiritual environment and they find the overall Bible college environment’s positive influence is a good fit for them.

The following exchange allowed me to understand, albeit using my own words and his concurrences, Michael’s thought process that led him to accept his surroundings:
Michael: The first thing when I, I visited, was the enrollment specialist met me at the little area by the café...

Interviewer: Okay.

Michael: …in fact that commons area was brand-new when I came. And, uh, they got me a free drink from the café. And then the facilitator of the Music Program came – he’s now actually a ‘double award’ nominated producer in Capitol Music. He’s not here anymore, but you know we were walking around and everyone’s like ‘Hey,’ first name basis, ‘Hey Tommy, you know Brittany, how’s it going,’ you know? And, I was like ‘Wow, I want that, I want to be part of this.’ So, I immediately . . . I saw it, it was desirable. I think they modeled good community and I wanted it, and I saw it. And it was good.

Interviewer: Alright, super. So, um, what I’m hearing then is, as an individual, you know what you wanted as far as a goal goes. And you already said that, um, wherever you went to college had to have a godly foundation...

Michael: Yes.

Interviewer: …if you will. So, you found [Northern Bible College] – that fit the bill – and there are certain characteristics of this school that attracted you.

Michael: Yes.

Interviewer: The music program, um, the godly quality of the instruction. But also that family atmosphere. So, then you enroll right away, you see that the religious aspect of the, uh, college is not something that turned you on or turned you off? Something that actually, uh, that you felt comfortable with and you noticed that right away.

Michael: Yep.
As for this process, Michael’s recognition of the family atmosphere, the biblical foundation of the college, the overall spiritual tone of his Bible college, and the apparent comfort with his surroundings pushed him toward accepting his place in the Bible college.

**Accepting**

Up to now, students who were once seeking God were soon discovering a family and were drawn into an appealing college environment at their Bible college. They began developing through the building of relationships with faculty and peers and growing spiritually through challenges and changes brought about by their Bible college attendance. Students now must either be accepting of their Bible college’s spiritual environment dependent upon on how well their own spirituality status aligned with that environment or must face departing their college when their spirituality status fails to align. The concept of college fit is dependent upon a student’s perception of the college itself – whether the college is a positive influence in his or her life. Both of these parameters become the final phase of the spiritual integration process and ultimately convince students to either depart or contribute to their persistence.

While conducting a focus group at the Northern Bible College, the initial title of the accepting category was the sub-category of fitting in under applying. During the focus group, Omar raised an objection to the use of the term fitting in based on his assumption that “We're so unique in our personalities. And, so, like I told somebody the other day, “Your difference makes a difference.” Omar went on to say:

And so like, fitting in is just kind of like, “eh,” (Omar shrugged his shoulders) with me right now, because I don't want to fit in, I want to be who I am and who I am is not like anybody else.

Judith chimed in with her opinion of fitting in when she said:
Because, like, fitting in is attached with cliques in our generation. It’s very much attached with conforming yourself to become like someone else, so that way they accept you. But here they accept you and you don’t have to change who you are.

This convinced me to move fitting in from a sub-category under applying to become its own major category. I also changed its title to accepting to align it with the focus group members’ obvious dislike of the conformity they ascribed to fitting in. The use of accepting incorporates Judith’s use of the term and also resonates with Van Gennep’s (1960) model of integration where it is necessary for individuals to adopt, or accept, the expectations and norms of the new group to fully integrate into that group.

**Spirituality status.** Students’ own spirituality status determines whether they accept the Bible college’s spiritual environment. I defined spirituality status as a student’s personal level of spirituality in regards to aligning with a college’s stated or perceived level of devotion to Christian precepts. As discussed earlier, the spiritual environment at a Bible college consists of the integral Christ focus of the college’s curriculum, faculty, staff and students. This environment encourages Christian discipleship, Bible-centered instruction, spiritual growth, and authentic Christian behavior by all persons attached to the college.

In this study, I found that a Bible college was unique in that a student who stayed must have accepted its spiritual environment or departed because they were unable to contend with the spiritual environment. A student may have enrolled who was not spiritually aligned with the college but, through exposure to the spiritual environment, changed to a point where they began to adjust to the Bible college as they grew spiritually through their education and godly relationships. Abigail saw this happen in her Bible college as interactions with Bible college personnel in the spiritual environment had an impact on students’ spirituality status:
Being that encourager and – I really don’t think that if the people at the school didn’t love Christ the way that they did I just don’t know that there would be the same experience. And, for those that maybe are struggling in their faith or those that are wolves in sheep’s clothing, when you are praying for your school and you’re coming to a place that the Lord’s hand is really on they don’t stay very long. And, even if they are volatile to begin with they don’t stay volatile for very long because people will love them.

Andrew was asked if an academically inclined student, but one who was not spiritually aligned the college, could remain for four years:

I guess they could, but I don’t think they probably should. I think at some point there would be enough rub on them from us, in a positive way, that they would say, I’m in the wrong place. Or, I’ve seen the light, if you will. Then, they put their faith in Christ. I think there’s enough of an integral Christ focus here that you couldn’t come here and be anti-Christ and stay. You either get onboard, or you leave the ship.

A college’s curriculum, textbooks, and chapel services would either have aligned with, or subtly changed, a student’s spirituality status. When asked how she fit into her college’s spiritual environment, Hannah touched on the some of the spiritual integration process concepts when she listed the factors that aligned with her spirituality status:

Definitely, already coming into a school that is shaped the way it is, the spiritual aspect (religious fit). With the spiritual courses, just like I mentioned, the textbooks and everything like that (focusing on God). That’s definitely been beneficial. [Also] Chapel services [and] the opportunities to serve outside of school (not just coming to school).

Some students arrive at a Bible college with their spirituality status already aligned with the college’s spiritual environment and are willing to integrate spiritually into their college
because they sensed a need to do so. It appeared that Ethan’s *spirituality status* was such that it was his need, and the Bible college’s ability to provide for that need, that motivated him to continue with his studies, when he stated, “The college is right in line with what I was seeking and what I received. The spiritual guidance, the direction, I mean everything was exactly what I needed.”

The *spiritual environment* encouraged Ruth to understand grace, a complex topic that Ruth struggled with, and integrate into the Bible college. I tried to understand the process that took Ruth from a struggling student to one whose *spirituality status* aligned with the *spiritual environment*. In the following exchange, it appeared that the process was successful because she eventually aligned with the *spiritual environment* and accepted her place in the Bible college:

Ruth: . . . They [Northern Bible College] emphasize God’s grace a lot and just continually hearing that over and over and over again. I have really had to work through that and then eventually I was, like, ‘Okay, now, I understand this,’ and started to see it work through my life.

Interviewer: How long did that take?

Ruth: Probably the first two years.

Interviewer: Okay. So, um, that's like the first two years were tough for you.

Ruth: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: And spiritually you came in as this person and then in two years, they ‘took you to another place’ it sounds like.

Ruth: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: And that's when, again, that's when you start to really integrate into the school spiritually, . . .
Ruth: Yeah.

Interviewer: . . . it sounds like to me, because your beliefs and their beliefs . . . were starting to meet in the middle somewhere.

Ruth: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Grace was also a concept that Michael found challenging, but after some required reading and faculty input, he began to understand the concept – a process that helped him align his spirituality status more with the college’s spiritual environment:

I had a theology class that was about, um, the church body. And, I was able to express in that class the struggles of, of life. And the professor’s right on board with that, right? You have some professors, your like, wow . . . I want to be that someday. And, then this guy was, like, ‘Oh, we’re here together now.’ Right? Like, ‘We’re on the same level . . . we’re on the same space spiritually, developmentally speaking.’ We read Dirty God, by Johnnie Moore, which is a great, great book. It’s called Dirty God: Jesus in the Trenches. Then we also read, The Best Kept Secret of the Christian Mission, by John Dickenson, or John Dickson, pardon me. Both of those really just tore down perceptions about religiosity, you know. I can do something to work my way to God and [they are] saying, you can’t and you don’t have to. It’s grace, and coming from kind of a legalistic community in high school that was like a breath of fresh air once again. Um, I think that’s really when I realized like this is a great spiritual fit.

When students’ spirituality status failed to align with their Bible college’s spiritual environment, their inability to do so would not only have been obvious but could have called their decision to enroll in a spiritual institution of learning into question. Cyrus offered an example of this when he explained why he accepted his place in the Bible college’s spiritual
environment:

Well, by teaching me how to live saved and stay saved and [exude] spirituality through my life, that’s pretty much it in a nutshell. Because if you’re being taught how to live a Christ-like life, but you’re not living it, why are you here? So when you’re taught how to live a Christ-like life and you live it, everybody should see it.

Cyrus, in effect, found that his spirituality status aligned with the college due to the faithful teaching of Scripture. Even though Cyrus did not agree with every aspect of their theology, he did say this when I asked him if he spiritually integrated into the college:

Yeah, because even though I have the issue with ‘once saved always saved,’ basically their philosophy is my philosophy, okay? The way they teach Scripture, I’m pretty much okay with it. It’s just that . . . one per cent, you know. (laughs)

Desire to honor God and the Spiritual environment. The core category of desire to honor God influences students’ accepting their place in the spiritual environment. Spiritual students, with their spirituality status aligned with the college, would decide to stay. Conversely, students could depart because their spirituality status did not align with the college – perhaps due to their motivation to serve Christ not corresponding with their peers’ desire to honor God. Andrew witnessed this in his Bible college with a student, when he shared:

He had no faith, did not exhibit a faith-trust in God, in any spiritual life situation, right? When he was here, he wasn’t here. He’s still here, but he’s not very involved. He probably won’t be here much longer. He’s here going through the motions, but he’s not here for the right reasons.

Andrew continued with his description of the same student and his explanation of why students would either decide to stay or depart depending on their spirituality – or what I see as a failure of
their *spirituality status* to align with the Bible college’s *spiritual environment*:

I don’t mean he’s academically motivated, but I don’t think he has a faith. From my perspective, he doesn’t have a strong enough faith factor, if any, that would motivate him. I think our other students love God to the point that, ‘I know I need to do this, I need to work hard at this because God gave me this opportunity. I want to know Him better. I don’t want to let Him down. I want to love Him.’ So, they’re more internally motivated because of who they see God is. Their grammar, their schooling, their studies, or whatever doesn’t motivate them, but their love of God motivates them. This guy, for example, is not motivated by either one.

Conversely, a student’s lack of *desire to honor God* could manifest in their refusal to accept the *spiritual environment* because it does not provide them with the trappings they believe will make them happy. In other words, their *spirituality status* is not at a level where they would be willing to set aside certain lifestyle choices to earn a biblically-based education. Hannah described such a person, “And another girl, she left because, I guess, not that we were too religious. But she just wanted to go to a bigger school to have more fun and do more activities and things like that.”

**College fit.** Although students may see the Bible college environment in a favorable light, they will acknowledge their place in it when they accept it is a positive influence in their lives. This concept of *college fit* came about because students believed they were called to ministry, experienced positive emotions about their Bible college growing even after they were enrolled for years, and believed they were in a safe environment – especially if they came from a dark period in their lives. The concept of fit – spiritually speaking – was apparently important to 93% of student participants when they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement that their Bible college was a good fit for them (see Table 5 for the final sample student questionnaire.
Students realized they fit into their college when it produced positive results in their ministry. Abigail realized that her Bible college, coupled with her own Bible study, was equipping her to create a devotional for a women’s ministry due to her, “... learning how to break down Scripture and then putting it back together. And then helping women see it, specifically for women or teens, that is just the coolest feeling in the world.” This feeling was made possible due to Abigail’s fit into the college and its corresponding positive influence on her ministry. A student’s college fit may also have been a product of their learning as when Bernice said, “Because I’m learning about the Creator – what He has to offer, what He wants us to do.” Abigail went so far as to describe her fit into the college as being attributed to practicality as well as spirituality:

But, it’s because this place is a good fit to my son. I mean, to talk about the practical – the hours work for me, the time slots, the amount of classes that are offered, the classrooms and building; practically, physically, spiritually.

A Bible college’s positive influence on students can continue to grow even after years of enrollment. According to Esther, this positive influence most certainly contributed to her perception of college fit:

And I guess that fact that I’m still here and I still have my feelings for the school, my feelings for the faculty and the students is still growing and becoming more positive so I think that’s a sign for me that it was a good fit.

A student’s college fit could have been augmented by how the college administrators structured the curriculum. Esther believed that the courses in her Bible college were offered to students in a fashion where each course would build on the course preceding it as when she stated:
Well the first course really is “How to Study the Bible” and which I think is the basic one. And that’s the one that is the foundation of how to study the Bible. It pointed out a lot of why things in the Bible are repeated and why does this come before that and why do they keep saying stuff over and over and over. Um, so the curriculum . . . one course builds on another. It’s like they have a good foundation and what I learned from that carries over to the next class I took and which it just progressed. I think the classes and the way they have the classes structured just really progress from one level to another.

Kenan, a fourth year student, used the metaphor of puzzle pieces coming together to describe course structuring at his college. David asserted that curriculum structuring caused him to become excited about succeeding courses, a situation that contributed to his college fit:

And with the curriculum now, I’m more excited because based off of what I have learned in other classes I’m excited to learn some more, um, just of God. I don’t think [I ever] want that thirst to be quenched, if that makes sense. So the curriculum helps me to look forward to learning even more.

A sense of comfort or safety may also have facilitated a student’s perception of college fit. Hannah, who visited another Bible college and was asked to transfer there, decided not to do so because she fit into her present college:

And they were asking me, they’re like, ‘Are you transferring here, too?’ They just constantly kept asking me and I was just like no, no, no. And I was proud and I was telling them, I was like no. The [Christian College] is a really good fit for me.

Hannah went on to describe one of her reasons for her college fit, “Yeah. It’s been a really good comfortable feeling to be here.” The Bible college as a place of comfort was
mentioned by Orpah in her description of the relaxed environment in her classroom that contributed to students’ college fit:

Very friendly, I mean it’s a very relaxed atmosphere. I’ve had students who come into my classroom just before class starts and they’re chattering and they’re talking – they’re talking in the hallway. And a couple of weeks ago somebody brought in a basket of apples, so that was funny, ‘Do you want an apple?’ There’s just a lot of interaction between students here and, um, it feels good, it feels comfortable.

James shared an anecdote about a student who found safety at the Bible college:

I think of one student in particular who came from a difficult relationship and just - the exhale that came when she came into a safe environment. I believe there is a big change for her and it’s really helped her grow.

**Bible College Student Persistence and Reasons for Departure**

In this study, students who persisted for at least a year in their Bible college were interviewed and their data analyzed to develop *The Spiritual Integration Model*. Students frequently mentioned the concept of persistence in this study after either being asked why they persisted or indirectly while answering other questions. The same was true regarding the concept of reasons for departure, although this question was not one of the original questions but one I considered important as the interview process progressed throughout the study. An analysis of both Bible college students’ persistence and their attrition, or reasons for departure, was necessary in that obtaining an understanding of students’ decisions to remain at a college can best be understood when there is some comprehension for their reasons for departure. This necessity to analyze Bible college students’ persistence and attrition will become evident when I apply the analyses to the spiritual integration process.
Persistence. Students’ reasons for their persistence at Bible colleges are many, but most center on relationships with faculty and peers. Students who decided to remain at their Bible college did so, for the most part, because of the relationships that they formed with their faculty and peers. They also stayed due to the influence of their families and the influence of their Bible college environment. Tenacity, a trait that drives some people to finish what they started, also plays a part in students’ persistence.

Faculty. Relationships with faculty members played a major role in student persistence at Bible colleges. Irene mentioned how the Bible college as a community influenced her decisions to continue to attend college on campus when she said, “I think that if I didn’t have that community I would probably just end up doing, like, online school, stay at home.” But it was Irene’s faculty relationships that were the major factor in her persistence, to the point that remaining would not even make sense, “They definitely made my decision to stay here. Again because I, I need that person . . . pouring into my life. Like, one-on-one. And, if I didn’t have that, again, it would be kind of pointless to me.”

Students remained longer at a Bible college if they had a positive relationship with a professor. When James, an instructor, was asked if the interactions with faculty affected students, he remarked:

I think so. I think it helps with persistence, that fancy word you all use. Definitely when you [the student] know a professor you’re going to stay at that school for a larger percentage of time than those who just come and go and drop out.

James then added that it was the care the faculty expressed for students in their actions that kept them coming back:
And they also know that when you come with problems, you’re not just going to say it’s not like [a large state college]. You miss a final, you missed a week. Nobody cares. But here [College of the Bible] people actually care, so that helps a whole lot with that.

James ended his discussion by stating the importance of faculty and student interactions and the integration into the Bible college interactions promote when he said:

And so I think that is the easiest way to assess this, you know, a person who is here in their third year, they come and go and they don’t talk to anybody. I don’t know that person, that doesn’t happen. So that’s how I would asses it. The person who doesn’t integrate doesn’t stay.

Faculty members encouraged students to persist. This was evident when Michael, who wondered why writing essays was necessary to play music, spoke with instructors when he struggled with academics:

I’ve had some great conversations with faculty when I’ve felt down, depressed and say, ‘why am I doing this?’ I stayed up until three o’clock last night working on this, this essay – like I don’t have to do this to play music. Then I talk with a faculty saying, ‘I’m struggling right now.’ And they’re really encouraging, to be persistent, to keep on keeping on, you know? And, that’s a huge factor, I would say.

Rapport that students formed with faculty played an important role in Bible college students’ persistence. “That’s a factor of why I’ve stayed,” was Esther’s response when asked how important relationships were with her instructors. Esther continued to explain faculty impact on her decision to remain:
I think if I had come here and I did not have that rapport – if I did not have that feeling that they cared and then they were genuine – I’m not sure I would have stayed. I, I would have probably have ventured out and tried to find something else.

Esther’s explanation then veered into a more spiritual direction when she remarked:

But I, I think the college is, um, they’re genuinely interested and I think they’re very spiritual. I think they’re founded in their religion – their belief in everything – and so that is [another] reason that I’ve also stayed, because I think they are sincere.

**Faculty and peers.** Samuel asserted that the peer and faculty relationships he developed at his Bible college were a very important part of his persistence – as important as the degree he would earn:

I’m a very relational person. And, for me I guess, a tool of [my] success. And also just something for me to want to come back and stay at a college would be to . . . develop these relationships. Because, I don’t know, I think that's [what] sells it. Because, in the way that I see it, is that in a couple years from now – when I graduate and I have my diploma – that’s not the only thing that I walk away with. I walk away with, um, the relationships that I have with my peers and my professors and I think that that’s grand. Honestly.

David believed interactions with faculty were important to his persistence, “Being able to get that . . . time you needed was very much of the reason why I stayed and continue to just strive to finish.” It was also David’s connection to fellow students with whom he shared a common background that was the deciding factor in his persistence:

And knowing that when we talk about experiences they can relate and they can help and share. They know how to pray. They have been, you know, where I am. And we just
help each other all out and, and just learning from their experiences and meeting all these people. That’s the factor that has helped me stay.

**Family and Bible college environment.** Hannah’s persistence was centered around people and the opportunities offered by her Bible college when she said, “What is it that keeps me here? Definitely the people, the opportunities I’ve been blessed with.” More specifically, when asked if she thought the family-like relationships with faculty were enough to keep her at the college, Hannah said, “Yeah, I do feel like [that] honestly, I really do.”

“Family” was Bartholomew’s answer when asked about his decision to remain in his Bible college, “My wife has influenced my decision to enroll at the Bible college and remain there. Because, she has seen the growth and the change in me as a man.” Bartholomew went on to mention how peer interactions also influenced his determination to persist, “That affects my decision greatly because I know that we have peers that care about students’ success and they care about other students learning and retaining the material that they are learning.”

For Gideon it was the family environment that persuaded him to return from one semester to the next, “There was a big sense of family and good relation. And I believe for me . . . that was the first reason why I chose to stay.”

Bernice also found her relationships with peers influential in her persistence, but it was how she described the Christian atmosphere that promoted a sense of the eternal that impressed upon me a very spiritual significance, “Because of the importance of it, you know, reality, eternity. We don’t have time to be all here doing secular things. That’s not going to benefit us. So, I’m geared more towards eternity than secular stuff.”

Students returned, even after a hiatus due to finances or other reasons, to Bible college because of the environment. Ethan had this to say about students returning to his Bible college,
“Oh yes, we’ve actually had some students leave and come back. You know, they took a break for a while and they came back to school to finish up because they missed it.” David was convinced that it was the Bible college environment that pulled students back to class, to finish regardless of the circumstances:

And everybody who I have seen come here – they do whatever they can to come back to finish. Some people are taking just one class a week. Some people are taking you know, two, three classes. Or they are in the same boat [as David], they run out of money. But no matter where they go, they do whatever they can to get back to [College of the Bible] because of the environment that is just so prevalent here.

**Tenacity.** Tenacity coupled with a desire to be a better Christian motivated Omar to remain enrolled:

It's having the finish line in mind. Where I want to be. What I need to do today to get there. I focus hard on studying. I focus hard on opportunities that may rise up where I can develop and mature as a Christian and human being. To have a higher influence in my spheres of influence. It is just with that in mind; like I can’t give up. I won’t give up.

Quartus was of the same mind when he told me that, although peer relationships were a great comfort to him, he persisted because he was enrolled in a Bible college to earn his degree, “But that's because of my personality. Like I said, I’m task-oriented. So for me part of just going to college, I’m like, ‘All right, [Quartus], you're going to learn here and that's the way it’s going to be.’

**Reasons for departure.** During the interviews, I asked students to share anecdotes of why students they knew personally or knew of were compelled to depart their Bible colleges. I also asked students why they would depart their Bible college.
Although the latter question was hypothetical, it did allow me to better understand why students remained in their colleges.

Students stated their reasons to depart depending on two conditions. One, they would mention something that existed in the college that they believed was a factor in their persistence, but would have departed if it ceased to exist – such as positive relationships or chapel activities. The second condition was where they declared their disapproval of a situation that did not exist but would be anathema to their continued enrollment – such as faculty arrogance or denominational bias. The reasons were varied across a broad spectrum, but the main reasons for departure were the Bible college academic rigor, the perception that Bible colleges included too much Jesus, a possible lack of emphasis on chapel activities, a lack of interaction and the perception of negative behavior exhibited by faculty.

Rigor. Some students came to Bible college unprepared for the intense course work while others were unable to conform to the spiritual environment. Michael remembered how students who started out with him in the music program left because they did not understand the rigor required to complete the program:

My music class started out with 21 people, we now have five, like that was my freshman class of music majors. There’s five of us now. They left because they wanted a ‘Here’s how to be a Worship Leader degree,’ you know, ‘Here’s how you play four cords and sing about Jesus.’ Um, they didn’t want a Bachelor’s of Music, which [are] two different things.

Matthew, a faculty member and administrator, expanded upon the academic and spiritual reasons students tended to depart from his Bible college:
One is lack of academic preparation. . . . But, it's still college and they’ve got to perform, and they don't have much preparation. That's within my responsibility to try to address that, too. Those are the things I'm trying to address. But then the second one is just lack of being on the same page with us on matters of Christian mission and spirituality. A large hunk of our students are here for sports. And as we're expanding our programs, and we're offering business, then the more we're getting students who say, ‘I have to take 30 hours of Bible?’

Too much Jesus. For some students, a Bible college can have too much of a spiritual orientation, as shared by Irene:

For orientation week we broke up into groups by [an assigned] color, so there’s like, I think there was twelve different groups or something. So, they were small. And, there’s actually a girl in my color group that she only stayed for, like, a week and a half. And she said that there was just too much Jesus here. I’m not judging her, but at the same time . . . you knew what you were signing up for when you came here.

Hermes witnessed the same type of behavior – failure to fit because of the Christian ethos – from students at his Bible college:

I know a lot of people they didn’t really like the fit. And because it’s, it’s a Bible university. I guess they didn’t really expect it to be as much of a Bible university because the schoolwork is very hard.

Some students did appreciate a Bible college’s allegiance to, well, the Bible. This phenomenon occurred at Luke’s Bible college when he recounted:
Now, we’ve had some adult students that have been here for the semester and then they de-select themselves. And, it was really interesting, one person said, ‘I knew that this was a Bible school, but I didn’t know how Bible it was.’

Samuel knew of students who were attracted by his Bible college’s athletic program but were chagrined by the theological requirements:

And I think that people tend to be [enticed] by the program but then they see that the work, you know, in the college itself – all of the theology classes, the Bible classes – and then they’re like thrown off by that.

Chapel activities. “Man, if chapel was no longer mandatory, that would be a huge red flag,” was how Judith described her hypothetical reason for departure. Judith went on to say, “Because if chapel was no longer mandatory, a lot of people wouldn’t go because it’s early in the morning and they just want to sleep. So it’s, the fact that chapel is mandatory here is, like, huge because that forces people to show up.” When asked why chapel is so important Judith continued, “As a Freshman, you come in and you’re probably, like, ‘I don’t want to go to chapel, I just want to sleep.” So, once you actually go to chapel a full semester you realize how important chapel truly is.” A Bible college’s chapel activities were also important to Hermes. Chapel services at the Christian College where Hermes was a student were mandatory, according to the college’s academic catalog, where all resident and commuter students were allowed to miss only 20% of chapel services. I asked Hermes, regarding the spiritual aspects of his college, what would have caused him to leave, and he responded:

I was kind of contemplating leaving because we had lost our chaplain and the, the spiritual side of school kind of felt like a halt. . . . But as far as just getting personal, like, messages fed into us – and the Bible studies – it kind of took a halt. And um, it seemed
like the school came more geared towards picking up enrollment because we were really struggling. And we kind of lost sight of our identity, in a sense. So that really affected me.

Eventually another chaplain took over and the college’s spiritual life, according to Hermes, returned to normal.

Lack of interaction. The lack of interaction with peers, or a perception of being left out of a group, would have prompted some students to depart. Inclusion, especially when new to a college, was important enough for Judith to consider departing had she experienced any isolation:

If no one really talked to me when I first got here, I probably would have left. Uh, just because no one wants to come to college and not have friends and not talk to anyone and not do anything. And, see everyone else having fun and no one talks to you.

Sarah, an older student who completed most of her learning online and then became a campus student, would have departed had her peers treated her differently:

If I wasn’t approached. I think if when I came in I felt different, knowing I was different.

If when I came in I was treated different, like if all the kids would huddle and then I would be ‘here.’ That would have made me feel that same anxiety that I felt the first time I went to college.

Hannah mentioned how she would not want to be far away from home and contend with an unapproachable faculty, “I wouldn’t want to be so far away from home coming to people who greet me with, I guess, not negativity, but just not very approachable . . . if that makes sense.”

Negative behavior by faculty. According to many students, negative faculty behavior would have caused them to depart their Bible college. Bible college students expected their
faculty to treat their students in a fair and unbiased manner. This was evident in the College of the Bible’s Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory where 87% of the students thought that the statement “Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students” was important to them and that 78% were satisfied that the statement was a reflection of their experience at the college (Noel-Levitz, 2015).

Denominational bias could have caused some students to depart, as when Karen remarked how a specific faculty behavior would be concerning, “Any sort of like grading or different treatment for people who were of a different denomination.” Felix said that he would leave his college if instructors were too concerned about pleasing everyone:

If I felt like the instructors were, were only tip-toeing through the class to figure out who’s what denomination and only teach what everybody agreed on – I absolutely would not come here and would quit in a nano second.

Quartus would have considered leaving his college if their bias turned toward a sort of spiritual arrogance, when he said, “… if, um, the college as a whole, I guess, made any kind of a statement of, ‘We’re right and other people are wrong.’” A sentiment that Irene agreed with when she would have departed if faculty mandated that students believe what they believe, “I’d be, like, turned off to it, if it was, ‘You have to conform to every single thing that we say.’” Instructors who forced beliefs on their students was also mentioned as a reason for departure by Thomas, when he said, “I think if they were to kind of put their foot down and say, ‘No, this is the way it is and you have to believe this to pass my class,’ or anything, that definitely would have turned me away.” Likewise, Noah would have departed had his Bible college pushed a less literal translation of the Bible and described his stance on Bible teaching like this:
It's truth. It's not allegorical, although there are allegories in it, it is not metaphorical, although there are metaphors in it – it is to be taken as the literal Word of God. If they’re like, ‘Oh, you know, this is just a good story, it’s metaphorical . . .’ No. No. That would be like, ‘All right, peace, I'm out.’”

**Applying the analyses to the spiritual integration process.** The following explains the role of spiritual integration in the persistence of undergraduate Bible college students. The explanation involves applying the preceding analyses of Bible college students’ persistence and *reasons for departure* to the spiritual integration process. Table 7 provides a tabular representation of *The Spiritual Integration Model* with the categories expanded and the elements of a spiritual nature in bold and italics to better illustrate the spiritual concepts within the model. For the purposes of this illustration, I identified “spiritual nature” as those concepts where students referred to God, the Holy Bible, Christian issues, faith, or other spiritual-related topics.

The concepts within the model that I deemed were of a spiritual nature are shown in bold and italicized. The reason for separating the spiritual elements of the process from the more secular is to identify the spiritual concepts and categories that emerged during the analysis as well as the indicators covered in Chapter Two that influenced the students’ decisions to persist at their Bible college. In other words, I separated those influencers attributed mostly to academic, social, familial, and economic integration as well as religious and institutional fit from the more spiritual concepts. This was not to say that readers should begin to assess *The Spiritual Integration Model’s* secular and spiritual concepts to determine which is of greater value than the other regarding integration or persistence. It was done to increase understanding of how spirituality, or spiritual concepts, impacted undergraduate students during their attendance at Bible colleges.
### Table 7

**Tabular Representation of the Spiritual Integration Process with Spiritual Elements in Bold and Italics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seeking God</th>
<th>Discovering</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Applying</th>
<th>Accepting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seeking God</strong></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Building Relationships with:</td>
<td>Participating</td>
<td><strong>Spirituality Status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Knowing God - Calling</td>
<td>-Caring Faculty - Devoted Faculty - Caring Peers</td>
<td>-Building Relationships with: - God - Faculty - Peers</td>
<td>-Give and Take - I speak at his/her Church - Study Groups</td>
<td>College Fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seeking a Spiritual Education</strong></td>
<td>College Environment</td>
<td><strong>Growing Spiritually</strong></td>
<td><strong>Contributing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Religious Fit**
As for persistence, students mentioned how their relationships with faculty and their peers were factors in their continued enrollment. Most of the faculty- and peer-related persistence data is of a more secular nature, but it can be difficult to separate the secular from the spiritual in this context. In other words, faculty who show genuine care for students can arguably do so due to their Christian ethos, but this can also be attributed to instructors who exhibit a spirituality that is not tied to any religion or the Christian faith.

Students encountered the beginning of these relationships under the major category of *discovering* and the sub-category of *family*, both of which were mostly secular in nature. However, under *developing*, students begin to build their relationships with their faculty. The concept of *building a relationship with faculty* becomes more evident in the role of spiritual integration when we list the spiritual concepts of *loving Christians, professors as pastors*, and *discipleship* that fall under this category. As *loving Christians* and *professors as pastors* faculty do bring a spiritual dimension to the role of spiritual integration as when Esther mentioned faculty members being “founded in their religion” and when Irene shared how faculty were “pouring into my life.”

Also under *discovering* were the *family relationships* and *Bible college environment* that students found at their Bible colleges. The faculty family-like relationships were key to Hannah’s persistence while Gideon kept coming back owing to what he called the “family environment.” Bernice referred to being “geared more toward eternity” due to the college environment whereas Ethan and David witnessed students returning to the college after a hiatus due to finances or because they missed the Bible college. Perhaps it was the concept of *focusing on God*, which fell under the sub-category of *college environment*, that commanded the spiritual
pull necessary to keep students enrolled. It is within focusing on God that students referred to solid truth and experiencing God, which could have accounted for Bernice’s eternal perspective or may have pulled back to college those students who left, as witnessed by Ethan.

Even tenacity, more a personality trait than a spiritual concept, could find its spiritual roots in the growing spiritually sub-category. Under that sub-category, the concept of challenge was where we found Omar’s spiritual perseverance to “develop and mature as a Christian.”

As for reasons for departure, undergraduate Bible college students provided anecdotes of their peers who departed Bible college due to the academic rigor – a concept that was mostly secular in nature. The next reason was the spiritual, or Christian, orientation of a Bible college. Again, this pointed toward the concept of focusing on God, which was part of the college environment. It was evident from anecdotes shared by Irene and Luke regarding students who departed because there was “too much Jesus” that students whose spirituality status did not align with their Bible college’s spiritual environment would decide to leave, especially considering that a Bible college would be the ideal learning institution for students who desire a profoundly Christ-centered spiritual environment.

Apparently, owing from the statements by Hermes and Judith, the religious practices that occurred in and around chapel activities would have prompted students to leave if they ceased being part of the college environment. These activities fell under the religious fit sub-category where students embraced a Bible college nondenominational approach to biblical studies and religious practices.

The next two reasons for departure concepts of lack of interaction and negative behavior by faculty were those that fell under the condition of disapproval of a situation that did not exist but would be anathema to a student’s continued enrollment. Interactions with faculty and peers
were very important to students and their spiritual integration into a Bible college. However, if the positive nature of human interaction in a Bible college were to disappear, or if the interactions became negative, many students stated their decision to remain would probably have been in jeopardy. Being treated differently because of being an older student, a type of negative interaction, would have been a deciding factor in Sarah’s decision to depart, for example. Since many students throughout the data collection phase of my study were very appreciative of positive faculty behavior, it came as no surprise that they mentioned how negative behavior by faculty would have facilitated their departure. This concept also included elements from *discovering* where students began to see the positive behavior exhibited by their instructors and in the *developing* phase where they formed relationships with faculty once they understood the benefits of doing so.

It is interesting that most of the reasons students persisted and most of the reasons they may have departed fell under the phases of *discovering* and *developing*. While interesting, however, it was also logical in that most students would have departed once they were familiar enough with the Bible college’s *family*, with a focus on faculty, and the *college environment* to decide it was not for them. The same was true for *building relationships* under *developing* – if students were not able to build satisfactory relationships with faculty and/or peers, not to mention a relationship with God, they would probably have experienced a sense of isolation and departed. Bible college students who were not aligned with the *spiritual environment* of their college would most likely have been unconcerned about *growing spiritually* and would then not have benefited from an environment conducive to Christian challenges and changes that led to growth – leading to their decisions to depart. Conversely, Bible college students whose *spirituality status* aligned with their college’s *spiritual environment* would have been more likely
to remain and continue the process of spiritual integration. This would have been due to their perceived comfort with the college’s *family* and the *college environment* as well as their ability to build relationships with God, their faculty and peers.

**Results**

The problem this study attempted to address was that there was no theory explaining how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in United States. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States and discern the role spiritual integration plays in persistence. This endeavor gathered data from 35 participant interviews, three focus groups, questionnaires, document analyses, and the collection of researcher observations annotated in the research journal. The interview data was collected from 28 student participants and seven faculty participants from three different ABHE-accredited Bible colleges located in the Southeastern and Midwestern United States. Tinto’s (1975, 1993) interactionist theory of student persistence as well as Schreiner’s (2000) indicators of student spiritual integration were the main theories used to direct this research effort. Tinto’s (1975, 1993) theory provided a model of student persistence that has become one of the standards by which other persistence research endeavors have been measured while Schreiner’s (2000) work was the lens through which my efforts to ascertain students’ perceptions of their spirituality were envisioned. I employed Corbin and Strauss’s (2015) techniques and methods of systematic grounded theory analysis, including the constant comparative analysis method, when developing *The Spiritual Integration Model* (see Figure 2).
RQ1: How do undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States?

The depiction of The Spiritual Integration Model, summarized here, answers the first research question. Students who described themselves as spiritually integrated into their Bible colleges found an educational institution where they studied about God and the Holy Bible. They also acquired the knowledge and skills needed to fulfill their calling. They discovered a family within a Bible college environment that was appealing, focused on God, and, religiously speaking, comfortable. They developed as students when they joined the Bible college family through building relationships with God, faculty, and their peers. They were able to grow spiritually through positive and rewarding challenges and changes. These students, more adept in their Christian pursuits due to learning in a spiritual environment, were then able to apply what they learned through participation in the classroom, church, and study groups. Contributions to God, their peers, college, and community were undertaken through their efforts in their Bible college’s service learning programs and personal ministry efforts. Finally, their spirituality, whether possessed by them upon their enrollment and/or formed during their attendance, aligned with the spiritual environment of their college, persuading them to accept their place in that environment. Understanding more about the spiritual integration process illustrates how it is a factor in undergraduate students’ decisions to remain at their Bible colleges.

RQ2: What is the role of spiritual integration in the persistence of undergraduate Bible college students in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States?

The application of the preceding analysis of Bible college student persistence and reasons for departure to The Spiritual Integration Model provides an explanation of the role of spiritual integration in Bible college students’ persistence. The following is a summary of the reasons
students persisted in their Bible colleges, the reasons why students they knew left their Bible college, and some hypothetical reasons for departure. Students persisted at their Bible colleges mostly due to the relationships they developed and maintained with both faculty and their peers. Students also persisted due to the positive Bible college environment as well as their tenacity to continue their path to a Christian, or spiritual, education. Students saw their peers depart due to the academic rigor they encountered at their Bible college and the fealty exhibited by both faculty and students to a Christian ethos they did not share. Students shared various reasons why they believed they would have left their Bible colleges. These reasons included a lack of emphasis on chapel activities, insufficient interactions with peers and faculty, and negative behavior exhibited by faculty.

My research showed that students’ persistence would have depended on the student’s spirituality status and their ultimate responses to the Bible college’s spiritual environment. When students progressed through the spiritual integration process, their decisions to depart appeared to have been made during the discovering and developing phases. When students’ spirituality status aligned with their Bible college’s spiritual environment, once they were able to perceive the spiritual environment, they would most likely have persisted in their studies and developed no reasons for departure. If their spirituality status was such that they lacked the motivation to become a part of the spiritual environment, then they would most likely have contemplated reasons for departure. In the case of students whose spirituality status was malleable, or subject to persuasion toward alignment with the college’s spiritual environment, I believe they would have stood a greater chance to persist due to the aligning effects of faculty and peer interactions as well as a Bible college’s allegiance to focusing on God.
Summary

This chapter contained definitions of terms vital to the understanding of undergraduate students who spiritually integrated into their Bible colleges. Also included was a brief description of each of the 35 participants interviewed for the study. The Spiritual Integration Model offered a visual representation of the spiritual integration process to increase readers’ understanding of students’ spiritual and integrative experiences. An explanation of the process included the major categories, concepts, and processes that students experienced as they moved from seeking a spiritual education to accepting their place in a Bible college’s spiritual environment. Also presented were answers to both of the study’s research questions.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States and discern the role spiritual integration plays in persistence. This chapter contains a brief review of the findings for each of the study’s research questions. A discussion of how the study’s findings relate to the theoretical and empirical literature occurs next. Also explored in this chapter are The Spiritual Integration Model’s theoretical implications regarding Tinto’s (1975, 1993) interactionist theory of student departure and Schreiner’s (2000) spiritual indicators as well as its empirical and practical implications in educational and faith-based settings. The delimitations used to establish boundaries for the study and the study’s limitations are also elements found in this chapter. Finally, a discussion of the future qualitative and quantitative research opportunities that touch on this grounded theory study of spiritual integration occurs at the end of this chapter.

Summary of Findings

During this study, I developed definitions to aid the in the comprehension of spiritual integration. First, the definition of spirituality is where an individual responds to situations exhibiting Christ-like behavior, demonstrates love and encouragement in his or her speech and actions, constantly shows an interest in cultivating a knowledge of God’s word, and behaves the same way when around fellow Christians or unbelievers. Next, the definition of a Bible college’s spiritual environment consists of the integral Christ focus of the college’s curriculum, faculty, staff, and students. This environment encourages Christian discipleship, Bible-centered instruction, spiritual growth, and authentic Christian behavior by all persons attached to the
Lastly, the phenomenon of spiritual integration for Bible college students was defined by me as when students’ perceptions of their spirituality, whether possessed by them upon their enrollment and/or formed during their attendance, has aligned with the spiritual environment of their college and therefore have accepted their place in that environment.

**RQ1: How do undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States?**

Tinto (1975, 1993) developed the interactionist theory of student departure to explain why traditional undergraduate students departed from their colleges and universities. Later, Schreiner’s (2000) research regarding the concept of spiritual fit, or spiritual integration, established spiritual indicators that increased the understanding of the role of spirituality in student departure. However, there was still no clear process that explained how students integrated into their college’s spiritual environment. This grounded theory study provides an explanation of how Bible college students spiritually integrate into their Bible colleges. The model that I developed of the spiritual integration process was fully explained in Chapter Four. The graphical representation, referred to as *The Spiritual Integration Model*, Figure 2, has five major categories of seeking, discovering, developing, applying, and accepting. The following is a synopsis of spiritual integration process.

**Seeking.** Prospective students want to know more about God and were directed by God to attend a Bible College. They express a desire to attain an education, even a formal degree, with a spiritual or biblical foundation that will equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to share what they learned with others. These students want a Bible-based education that will provide them the biblical knowledge necessary to lead people to Christ. They believe that learning God’s word in a formal setting is a key factor in this skill. They want this knowledge
and skill because there are so many lost people, to better teach the Word, and to assist those who need spiritual help.

Students’ spiritual needs compel them to enroll into a Bible college. They also want to attend college with caring peers and faculty who devote themselves to their vocation. These students end their search when they enroll in a Bible college and soon discover how the college can fit their spiritual, educational, and relational aspirations.

**Discovering.** Students enroll in a Bible college because it best satisfies their search for godly knowledge and a Christ-centered academic degree. They soon discover a family atmosphere, an appealing college environment, and agreeable religious doctrines and practices. Working or learning at a Bible college is like being in a family. Caring faculty actively look to meet the needs of their students, increase the academic challenge but temper this with grace, endeavor to fully explain concepts to students even when it may be an inconvenience to the instructor, and demonstrate care for their students through their actions. Devoted faculty members love what they do and teach with their hearts and not just with their heads. Students in Bible college demonstrate care for each other through their actions and attitudes, sharing abilities, life stories, and testimonies with each other, and enrich their lives by connecting spiritually with one another.

Bible colleges’ small, intimate settings appeal to students and influence them in a positive manner but can limit the activities that occur on and off campus – even though students appreciate the activities they do host. Students also find Bible colleges’ affordability and availability to non-academically inclined students appealing. Collaboration among faculty and students enhances the college environment when everyone has the freedom to ask questions,
discussions remain in the classroom, and everyone takes the time to display a loving care for one another.

A Bible college’s focus on God facilitates the incorporation of a spiritual component into the curriculum and centers academics on biblical truth. This focus increases students’ knowledge and sensitivity to experiencing God in their lives and provides both a link students need to learn God’s word as well as a foundation of trust in the Holy Bible. Indeed, I was impressed with the College of the Bible’s faculty members’ devotion to teaching directly from the Bible. The profoundly positive attitude of the students regarding the college’s focus on the primacy and supremacy of the Holy Bible as God’s word became apparent early in the interview collection process. Interviewees continuously referred to the college’s stance that God’s word outweighs all decrees emanating from denominational authorities.

When the Bible is taught, not denominational dogma, students from various Christian traditions fit into the religious environment. Students respond favorably to the nondenominational approach to religious practices in chapel services and biblically-sound doctrine taught by faculty. These students then realize a desire to join the family through building relationships with God, faculty, and their peers. They want to begin growing spiritually through the challenges offered by inspirational faculty and curriculum as well as change as a result of the Bible college environment.

**Developing.** Students who find the college environment favorable and want to be part of the Bible college family are able to build relationships and grow as they develop into more mature Christians. These students begin to understand who God is and build a relationship with him. Students build relationships with faculty members when their instructors take the time to build friendly relationships with students, students begin to see their instructors as friends, and
faculty demonstrate their Christian love through their actions. These relationships are also built through faculty who employ their skills as pastors in the college environment, offer their vision of what it means to serve God, and display their love of teaching the Bible. Students who attend Bible colleges make and maintain friendships with each other, enjoy more success and sense they are part of a family when they support one another, and enjoy spending time together outside of classroom hours.

Students learn about God and experience spiritual growth as they face external and internal challenges, wrestle with issues of faith, and question what they learned in the past in light of what they are learning in Bible college. Bible college students may have no worldview or have only a rudimentary knowledge of the concept and therefore must face the challenge of developing their own biblical or Christian worldview. Bible college students experience personal change, which leads to growth, when God molds them into being better servants and they incorporate faith into their lives. Students’ identities change when they respond to faculty who model authentic Christianity through biblical instruction and begin to tie their identity to Christ because of what He did and what He will do in their lives.

As students develop, they begin to apply what they have learned and explore how they can refine their relationships and serve others. They want to participate in spiritual and collegiate activities because they want to share their newly-earned knowledge and offer their unique perspectives. They also want to serve God and their communities using their new skills.

**Applying.** As students develop through relationship building and grow through challenge and change, they begin to find ways to apply what they learned through participating in and contributing to college and peer-related activities. Faculty empower students to participate, through questions and interjections of personal experience, in their teaching. Peers
support one another by participating in church events – sometimes even speaking to or leading a

group or by taking part in study groups that allow them to learn and help others to learn.

Students learn to enhance ministry and/or help the unsaved and then actually apply what they

learned to help others. Students are also able to serve God and contribute to both their

community and Bible college while taking part in the Bible college's service learning program.

At this point in the spiritual integration process, students will have a fully formed

perception of the Bible college’s spiritual environment and realize they need to make a decision
to stay or depart. This would depend on how well their spirituality status aligns with the Bible

college’s spiritual environment and whether their college experience has been favorable.

Accepting. Students who arrive at this category in the spiritual integration process have

discovered the attributes of family and a favorable environment at their Bible college, have

become a part of the family through relationship building, have experienced growth through

challenges and changes, and then applied what they learned in their Bible colleges and

communities. Now students’ own spirituality status may determine whether they will accept, or

fit into, the Bible college's spiritual environment. Although students may see the Bible college’s

overall environment in a favorable light, they will acknowledge their place in it when they accept

it is a positive influence in their lives. The result of accepting their place at the Bible college

encourages students to remain enrolled and ultimately graduate.

Re-integrating loop. The re-integrating loop that appears along the bottom of the model

allows students to exit a major category within the model and re-enter in a preceding major

category. The idea for this aspect of The Spiritual Integration Model unfolded during a

conversation with a student participant, Noah, after we finished his interview. While Noah

voiced his appreciation of the model, his body language told a different story. Noah remarked
that there was no way for students to re-enter at a previous position in the model when they encountered a problem. In other words, the model lacked a method for students to exit and re-enter at a previous area where they would be better able to address the difficulty. For example, this would allow students who encounter a problem within the major category of **applying**, perhaps a failure to find a meaningful way to apply what they learned through participation, to depart there and re-enter at **developing** in order to engage in **building relationships with peers**. Once relationships have progressed, students would be able to continue along the model to **applying** to join **study groups** that would include their newfound peers with whom they would be more comfortable.

**Core category.** The core category of **desire to honor God** emerged only after considering and subsequently rejecting other concepts during the study’s data collection and analysis phase. To be viable, the core category had to touch every participant in the study and be present within each of the emerging major categories. The first attempt at developing a core category involved the concept of **family**. While extremely important, this concept did not enhance the explanatory power of the model as a whole. The next concept that I considered early in the analytical process was relationships, again very important to the model within the major category of **developing**, but not prominent enough within the other major categories to be the core category.

It was not until I reflected on a conversation with the College of the Bible’s president that the role of **desire to honor God** gained prominence in my mind as a possible core category. This conversation took place long before I settled on my research study’s topic. While discussing the resilience of adult learners in higher education, especially those older students absent from a formal classroom environment for years and even decades, I asked my friend what it was that
motivated these students. I wondered because they were taking courses, sometimes in the evening following work, in algebra and writing when they yearned for deeper learning regarding God’s word. His answer was simple and profound: “Why, it’s the Lord!” Indeed, the Creator as the Great Motivator was the most obvious answer and the most satisfying for a Christian and novice researcher such as myself. As I studied the emerging spiritual integration model, the presence of God’s influence literally jumped out at me. Table 7, which highlights the spiritual elements within *The Spiritual Integration Model*, provides a visual representation of what my friend was talking about. The spiritual elements, coupled with participants’ frequent references to how God influenced their educational aspirations, convinced me that students’ *desire to honor God* was the concept that occurred in each category, explained how each category related to one other, was logical, and lent explanatory power to the model (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

**RQ2: What is the role of spiritual integration in the persistence of undergraduate Bible college students in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States?**

An adjunct to the spiritual integration process was discerning the role of spiritual integration in the persistence of Bible college students. The ultimate expression of a student’s integration in a college may be their decision to remain in the college beyond their first year. The spiritual integration process assists in the understanding of how students’ *spirituality status* determines their response to their college’s *spiritual environment* as well as their acceptance of the college as an institution where they are willing to spend their time and intellectual energies.

The alignment of students’ spirituality with a Bible college’s *spiritual environment* as well as their acceptance or refusal of their place in the college may influence their decisions to persist. If a students’ spirituality aligns perfectly with their college’s *spiritual environment*, then they are more likely to accept their place in that college and decide to stay. If students enroll in a
Bible college and their *spirituality status* does not align with the prevailing *spiritual environment*, they will most likely relinquish their place in that college. This will occur due to the difficulties they will face while attempting to integrate into an environment they do not fully understand or appreciate.

**Discussion**

One of the challenges I encountered during this study was finding a simple model of integration that would not only provide a foundation for the spiritual integration process but would also lend support to its role in persistence. Van Gennep’s (1960) model of integration (see Figure 3), the process that met the needs of the study, contained three stages of (a) separation from the original group, (b) transition into the new group, and (c) incorporation of the new group’s expectations and norms (Van Gennep, 1960). The problem was defining the “new group” and the “expectations and norms” in a manner that remained true to Van Gennep’s (1960) model while meeting the needs of the research effort. For example, would family define the new group or was family the glue that held the new group together? It later became apparent that the new group had to be the people at the Bible college – not too large a group as to be overly abstract but small enough in size and specific enough to be an appropriate “new group” for the study. As for the “expectations and norms” – every Bible college I visited certainly had unique environments. These environments were based at least partly on the Christian values and moral behavior one would expect at a Christian school. Students at these colleges constantly spoke of witnessing faculty and peers, the Bible college *family*, live these values and exhibit moral behavior in the *college environment*. When students began to build relationships in the *developing* major category, they would emulate the behavior of their faculty and peers. It was not until the Bible college’s *spiritual environment* concept fully emerged from the analysis –
with its encouragement of Christian discipleship, Bible-centered instruction, spiritual growth, and authentic Christian behavior by all persons attached to the college – did I feel comfortable incorporating Van Gennep’s (1960) model, including the concepts of “new group” and “expectations and norms,” into the spiritual integration process.

Bible college students depart their original group, which is the large group of individuals who are not associated with a Bible college, and transition to a new group, which in these cases would be the people associated with a specific Bible college. If the students successfully transition into the “new group,” it is because they incorporated the expectations and norms associated with the Bible college. For the purposes of this study, the spiritual environment of the Bible college would supplant Van Gennep’s (1960) “expectations and norms.” Therefore, when a student’s spirituality status aligns with the college’s spiritual environment they have effectively accepted their place – or incorporated the expectations and norms – in their Bible college.

Tinto’s (1975, 1993) interactionist theory of student departure may be the most famous of the models that attempted to explain why students depart from college. I found the model to be elegant in its description of the academic and social systems that students navigated successfully in order to properly integrate into their college environments. Indeed, it was Tinto’s (1975, 1993) model that convinced me to create a spiritual integration model that was complex enough to thoroughly describe the subtle spiritual influences that affect Bible college students yet simple enough that a student could benefit from its explanatory power. However, Tinto’s (1975, 1993) theory did not adequately explain the spiritual nature of integration and how this may have affected persistence. It was not until Schreiner (2000) developed spiritual indicators that it became apparent how important students’ spirituality was to their decision to continue their
studies. This systematic grounded theory study incorporated many of the elements of both Tinto’s (1975, 1993) and Schreiner’s (2000) theories to develop a process of spiritual integration.

The spiritual integration process was an integrative process for undergraduate Bible college students with an emphasis on Christian spirituality that provided insight into their motivations to attend a Bible college as well as those factors that compelled them to persist at the college. *The Spiritual Integration Model* followed prospective students (a) from their desire to attend a college that fulfilled their need for a Christian based education; (b) to their discovery of an attractive college family, environment and religious culture; (c) to their spiritual and relational development; (d) to the application of their recently acquired knowledge and skills in the classroom, church, and Christian service arenas; and (e) their acceptance of their place in a spiritual environment that aligned with their own spirituality status.

*The Spiritual Integration Model* shed light on the spiritual aspects of students who experienced the academic and social milieu which Tinto’s (1993, 1993) interactionist theory of student departure explained so well. While it may not be suitable to plug *The Spiritual Integration Model* into Tinto’s model, it could add descriptive and explanatory information to persistence. A review of Table 6 provides a better understanding of how the elements of Tinto’s (1975, 1993) model influenced *The Spiritual Integration Model*. Under **seeking** was the sub-category of *seeking a spiritual education*, which described the intentions of students as well as their goals regarding a Christian education. Tinto’s (1975, 1993) model also discussed students’ intentions and goals and how their intentions drove their educational decisions. Under the **discovering** category the sub-category of **family** included *caring faculty, devoted faculty, and caring peers*. Faculty and peers also played a major role in *The Spiritual Integration Model* under **developing** regarding building relationships with both faculty and peers. Faculty and staff
interactions were a major component in Tinto’s (1975, 1993) description of a college’s academic system. Likewise, peer relationships were a key piece of the social system in Tinto’s (1975, 1993) model. According to both models, the success or failure to integrate into a college may very well hinge on a student’s ability to build relationships.

The inclusion of faculty and peer relationships in both models also offered distinct contrasts. While Tinto’s (1975, 1993) model described a collateral relationship between the academic and social systems in a college, the former which focused on faculty and the latter which focused on peers, The Spiritual Integration Model illustrated a synergistic relationship among faculty and peers that created a family. Indeed, it was the subcategory of family that students entering a Bible college found so attractive; so much so that they were compelled to build relationships with faculty and peers to become part of that family. This process, based in action-interaction, moved these students from discovering to developing along The Spiritual Integration Model continuum.

Schreiner (2000) examined student persistence at Christian universities and found that students who perceived themselves as being spiritually integrated into their institutions reported that this was due to the indicators of (a) their Christian worldview development, (b) the formation of their identities as well as their spiritual growth, (c) their ability to interact with their faculty about their faith while successfully integrating faith and learning, and (d) their satisfaction with available ministry opportunities. The second and third indicators were split into the two additional indicators of spiritual growth and integration of faith and learning. The following addresses each indicator, albeit at times worded differently when using participant descriptions, as they appeared in The Spiritual Integration Model.
The first indicator was *infusing God*, which mirrored Schreiner’s “integrating faith and learning.” The concept of *infusing God* fell under *focusing on God* – a part of the *college environment*. It was in the *discovering* category of the student’s spiritual integration process where he or she encountered a Bible college’s deliberate incorporation of biblical precepts, Scripture, and faith into the curriculum. This was of great spiritual value because students found they wanted to learn about God, not just gain knowledge from books, and they began to realize that God was the center of everything.

The second element in the spiritual integration process was *building relationships with faculty*, which was very similar to Schreiner’s (2000) indicator of “interacting with faculty regarding issues of faith.” The spiritual concepts of *loving Christians, professors as pastors, teachers are amazing, and discipleship* all fell under *building relationships with faculty*. The first three concepts allowed students to witness faculty express their Christian faith through their actions. The final concept of *discipleship* was the purposeful effort on the part of faculty to pour into students the knowledge and skills they learned through study and experience. Bible college students rarely encountered obstacles to discussing their faith or spiritual struggles with instructors who had dedicated all or part of their professional lives to teaching and living out their own faith. It was this environment, consisting in a large part of instructor spiritual qualities mentioned by the study’s participants, that facilitated students’ comfort and trust in their faculty.

“Spiritual growth” was the next of Schreiner’s (2000) spiritual indicators to appear in *The Spiritual Integration Model*. Schreiner’s (2000) concept of “spiritual growth” was labeled *growing spiritually* in my model. This sub-category, located under *developing*, was where Bible college students experienced growth as a result of their encounters with *challenge* and *change*. This complex sub-category was also where students encountered the next two of Schreiner’s
(2000) spiritual indicators, *worldview development* and *Christian identity*, under *challenge* and *change*, respectively.

Students developed their Christian worldview in Bible college and began to rely on it during their decision-making processes and used it as a lens through which they filtered information each day. Students also grew spiritually due to the influence of a Christian worldview when they saw more clearly their responsibility toward God in their emerging worldview and were better able to see others’ needs.

Students experienced growth through the development or alteration of their *Christian identity*. Bible college students described themselves as children of God, sensed that their identities strengthened their ability to share God’s word, and thrived in Bible college when they saw their Christian identities facilitated their investment in the Christ-centered curriculum. Faculty were key in the *Christian identity* development as they modeled servant leadership and facilitated the understanding of the Christian aspect of personal identity.

The spiritual indicator of “satisfaction with available mission opportunities” was the final of Schreiner’s (2000) concepts to appear and was well represented as a key process in *The Spiritual Integration Model*. This concept, which I called *not just coming to school*, fell under the *applying* sub-category of *contributing* – the part of the spiritual integration process that focused on how students’ knowledge and skills learned at Bible college allowed them to contribute in various ways to the college and community. *Not just coming to school* was where students were able to serve God and contribute to both their community and Bible college by taking part in the Bible college's service learning program. This concept allowed students to experience service as an uplifting endeavor, branch out into their own personal ministry, engage
in the real-world as opposed to the idealistic surroundings of a Bible college, and also facilitated their sense of being a part of the Bible college.

Schreiner’s (2000) spiritual indicators were integral in the development of *The Spiritual Integration Model* and most definitely contributed to students’ overall spiritual integration into their Bible colleges. For the most part, these indicators fell under *The Spiritual Integration Model*’s major category of *developing*, where students engaged in relationship building and spiritual growth activities. Also, the concept of *not just coming to school*, which focused mainly on the contributory benefits of students’ service learning efforts, was key in providing students the opportunity to apply their recently-acquired knowledge and skills in the spiritually rich Christian service environment.

Both economic integration (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011) and familial integration (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014) were examined in the study. The financial aspects of Bible college enrollment, which was a concept that fell under *appealing college* in the study, were very positive owing to the low cost of tuition at the Bible colleges that I visited for the study. I considered this a component of economic integration as students are more likely to feel a part of a college that takes the extra effort to ensure an affordable tuition. The importance of familial integration was mentioned by student and faculty participants mostly in the form of encouragement or family members’ mentioning positive changes in Bible college students. However, although familial integration did emerge in these respects, I was unable to place familial integration or something similar within the spiritual integration process as a stand-alone sub-category or concept.

The results of this study also touched on the concept of institutional fit. While the term institutional fit was not included in *The Spiritual Integration Model*, it may be synonymous with
students’ perceptions of their place in the *spiritual environment* as well as their approval of the *college environment* and subsequent *college fit*. Although Tinto (1993) saw a student’s academic and social integration as the major components of their perception of institutional fit, in this study it appeared that students – especially the older nontraditional students – were not as concerned with fitting in as they were with finding and accepting their place, on their own terms, within the Bible college.

The results of this study were similar to Morris et al.’s (2004) study of Christian institutions of higher education. In their study, Morris et al. (2004) found that these schools attracted students who desired curriculum infused with religious values delivered by instructors who shared their worldview. Although this study’s results did not uncover the same level of specificity regarding students’ attraction to faculty worldviews, it did find that students were attracted to the *college environment* due to their *need for spiritual education* and the Bible college’s commitment to students’ spiritual growth.

Alleman et al.’s (2016) concept of students’ *religious fit* was a sub-category of the same name under *discovering*. In the current study, *religious fit* was evident in students when the Bible was taught, not denominational dogma, which allowed students from various Christian traditions to be more comfortable within the religious environment. This occurred soon after students arrived at their colleges, a phenomenon that Alleman et al. (2016) discovered in their study as well. Alleman et al.’s (2016) study found that students made a conscious effort to fit into the environment to attain a measure of congruity with the religious culture. However, the recent study found that students’ experiences with *religious fit* resulted in an increase in learning God’s word. This was due to their Bible colleges’ lack of denominational bias that may have, if
not controlled by excellent instructors, resulted in turning some of these students from various denominations away.

The rather vague nature of spirituality was addressed in the present study since the concept of spirituality was very central to *The Spiritual Integration Model*. In this study, the concept of spirituality was narrowly defined within a Bible college context: A person who exhibits spirituality in regards to Christianity, responds to situations exhibiting Christ-like behavior, demonstrates love and encouragement in his or her speech and actions, constantly shows an interest in cultivating a knowledge of God’s word, and behaves the same way when around fellow Christians or non-Christians. Interestingly, Astin et al.’s (2011b) account of how students exhibit spirituality – their concept was not confined to Christianity – included many of the elements of *The Spiritual Integration Model* and the present study’s definition of spirituality. For example, Astin et al. (2011b) stated that: (a) students’ spiritual quest was their active search for meaning and purpose, which aligned with the major category of seeking; (b) spiritual students adopted a worldview that transcended themselves, which aligned with worldview development; (c) their lifestyles included care and compassion for others, which aligned with helping and not just coming to school; and (d) students were able to maintain a sense of calm even when exposed to stressful situations, which aligned with the study’s definition of Christian spirituality in that spiritual Christians respond to situations exhibiting Christ-like behavior and demonstrate love and encouragement in their speech and actions.

Adult learners, a type of nontraditional student, in the current study did tend to rely less on their peers for integration purposes and more on faculty. Adult learners tended to include their families in their academic lives and saw them more as reasons to attend rather than depart their Bible colleges. Older students in this study experienced anxiety before attending their
Bible college due to the age difference with younger students, a situation reported by Tinto (1993), but happily discovered their fears were unfounded soon after their arrival. This mix of older students with younger traditional students did not produce the issues of enhanced faculty interactions with older students at the expense of younger students as reported by Scott and Lewis (2012), nor did adult learners report any deficit in age-appropriate instruction as mentioned by Chen (2015) as well as Kenner and Weinerman (2011).

Student race did not appear to influence students’ spiritual integration into Bible colleges even for African American students enrolled in Bible colleges with predominately Caucasian faculty. In fact, there were no discernible differences within the spiritual integration process between students of color and their Caucasian counterparts. Spiritual integration may have mitigated the absence of academic or social integrative opportunities, a factor found significant for African American persistence (Flowers, 2006), for these students when their spirituality aligned with the Bible college’s *spiritual environment*.

Student gender did not appear to influence students’ spiritual integration into Bible colleges. Male student participants did mention how their participation in sports was a factor in their social integration. Interestingly, some female student participants also mentioned sports as a social integration factor. While not exactly contrary to Ewert’s (2012) assertion that participation in sports offered men a greater likelihood of persistence, it was a factor deemed important to some female students as well.

**Implications Regarding the Spiritual Integration Model**

This study’s product, *The Spiritual Integration Model*, has the potential to provide various educational and faith-related entities with assistance regarding persistence. The theoretical implications involve incorporating *The Spiritual Integration Model* into existing
theories of persistence. The empirical implications include the model’s significance as a real-world process of student integration into Bible colleges that may be transferable, in a limited way, to other faith-based organizations. Lastly, the model may have practical applications for Bible colleges, and perhaps Christian colleges and universities, administrators, faculty, and students. When I refer to The Spiritual Integration Model, this also includes the Tabular Representation of the Spiritual Integration Process (see Table 6) and the explanation of The Spiritual Integration Model found in Chapter Four.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study incorporated Tinto’s (1975, 1993) concepts of social and academic integration and Schreiner’s (2000) concept of spiritual integration to see how students spiritually integrated into their Bible colleges. This included Bible college students’ initial impressions of their religious fit (Alleman et al., 2016) soon after their arrival. For institutions of learning with a spiritual focus such as colleges and universities that profess a Christian worldview, this model may provide the spiritual piece of the persistence puzzle that has been absent from Tinto’s (1975, 1993) interactionist theory of student persistence. The Spiritual Integration Model provides Tinto’s (1975, 1993) theory, with its academic and social systems, with the additional component of spirituality that may be of use in secular institutions of higher learning. However, this would require students’ immersion in a spiritual environment to some degree within either the educational milieu or in some manner apart from their college.

As for Schreiner’s (2000) concept of spiritual integration, this study provided definitions for spirituality, the spiritual environment, and spiritual integration useful when applying this concept toward Bible colleges or other Christian institutions of higher learning. Also, The Spiritual Integration Model offers validity to Schreiner’s (2000) spiritual indicators as major
spiritual integration factors for undergraduate students in a Bible college environment and perhaps in other similar educational venues.

Alleman et al.’s (2016) concept of the usefulness of religious fit as a gauge of students’ perception of their comfort in and acceptance of a spiritual institution of higher learning’s religious culture was examined in the present study. Alleman et al.’s (2016) assertion that students’ perceptions of their fit in the religious culture normally occurred during their initial foray into their college or university was borne out by the students’ responses to questions regarding their acceptance of a Bible college’s religious practices and doctrine – components of Bible college’s religious culture.

**Empirical Implications**

*The Spiritual Integration Model* describes the process undergraduate Bible college students undergo from their initial decision to seek a spiritual education, their discovery of a Bible college’s unique environment, their spiritual and relational development, their application of newly acquired knowledge and skills toward Christian service, and their acceptance of the college’s *spiritual environment*. While applicable to a Bible college, this model may also be useful for other faith-based organizations when leaders require greater insight into members’ persistence. Although the scope was relatively small at a Bible college, the major categories represented in *The Spiritual Integration Model* of *seeking, discovering, developing, applying,* and *accepting* may apply to a Christian college with a larger student population.

*The Spiritual Integration Model* may also apply to faith-based organizations that have significantly different missions than Bible colleges. A faith-based organization such as a church, with a mission to equip all church members with the necessary knowledge to serve Christ, may employ the model for their own purposes. A church that has experienced a large turnover in
congregants may find use for *The Spiritual Integration Model* as a church model to gauge whether members have spiritually integrated into the church’s *spiritual environment*.

**Practical Implications**

Schreiner (2000) examined student persistence at Christian universities and found that the spiritual indicators they encountered, already covered in this chapter, assisted their spiritual integration into their institutions. These indicators – along with extant research regarding other types of integration such as academic, social (Tinto, 1993), familial (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014), and economic (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011) were incorporated into the present study to examine how students spiritually integrated into their Bible colleges and how this process may have influenced their persistence. The principle result of this study, *The Spiritual Integration Model*, offers practical guidance to administrators, faculty, and students in faith-based education. It may also assist leaders in other faith-based organizations, such as Christian churches, where membership departure is an issue.

**Administrators.** Administrators of Christian institutions of higher education can use *The Spiritual Integration Model* to assess problems associated with student persistence. Since faith-based colleges and universities would have a *spiritual environment* it may be appropriate to use the model when attempting to ascertain where students have made their decisions to depart – and why. For example, if students depart because they disagree with the college’s position on a specific point of faith, administrators can use the model to see if that disagreement occurred due to a *religious fit* issue or the student’s inability to overcome doubt while *wrestling with faith*. If the disagreement stems from *religious fit*, then administrators can look at how their institution presents doctrine regarding religious beliefs and practices. If the student’s disagreement is an
unresolved question of faith, the administrator can to look to both curriculum and faculty interaction to see if the problem lies in one of those areas.

**Faculty.** According to both Tinto (1975, 1993) and Schreiner (2000), student interactions with faculty have a pronounced influence on students’ decisions to persist. *The Spiritual Integration Model* specifically addresses faculty interactions under the category of *discovering* (family – caring faculty, devoted faculty) and developing (*building relationships with faculty*). According to the ABHE, Bible college faculty are expected to be spiritually mature, capable of mentoring and modeling relationships with students, and must be able to contribute to students’ biblical worldview development (Institutional Accreditation Standards, 2014). Although these criteria should describe a member of faculty at a Bible college, it is still possible for them to experience issues when interacting with students. When this occurs, faculty can refer to *The Spiritual Integration Model* to locate the areas where they believe the interactional breakdown occurred. When they discover the problem area they can engage in critical self-reflection to ascertain where their behavior did not align with the category, sub-category, or concepts expounded upon in this study.

Faculty who teach at Christian universities may not have to meet the stringent spiritually-oriented criteria as Bible college faculty. It is safe to assume they may not identify with some of the concepts found in *The Spiritual Integration Model* such as *loving Christians, professors as pastors, or discipleship*. However, they may be able to discover where their behavior fails to align with the model and make necessary adjustments appropriate to their personality and experience.

**Students.** Undergraduate students who may have faced spiritual incongruities could refer to *The Spiritual Integration Model* to see where these originated. In other words, the model
may offer students a visual representation of their spiritual integration process making the task of locating any difficulties with the process easier. If they experience a significant spiritual issue they will see how the re-integrating loop can take them back to a point that is most amenable to solving their problem and continue on with the process of spiritual integration. For example, a student who resides in the accepting category – who has already accepted their place in the spiritual environment – and then develops a spiritually debilitating doubt with Scripture can drop from accepting and begin the re-integration process at discovering where the concept focusing on God resides under the sub-category of college environment. While movement along the re-integrating loop does not solve the problem, it may provide students with an enhanced understanding of where their problem lies. This provides a starting point to begin the re-integration process presumably with assistance from peers, faculty, or staff.

**Faith-based organizations.** The Spiritual Integration Model could assist leaders of faith-based organizations in increasing member persistence. Church leaders could alter the concepts in the model to better fit a church environment. Seeking could change to represent individuals who are looking for a church home. Discovering would still keep the family sub-category but would refer to the church family made up of caring/devoted pastors and caring congregants. The college environment would become the church environment. Under developing, members of the congregation would build relationships with God, pastors and staff as well as their fellow members. Under applying, church leaders could view participating as a placeholder for Bible study groups while contributing could include monetary giving and/or members volunteering to work in church ministries. Once a church member has engaged successfully with these categories, they would most likely have experienced a measure of spiritual integration and accepted their place in the church’s spiritual environment. Church
leaders could survey those leaning toward departing their church to ascertain where in the spiritual integration continuum they have experienced problems. Once located, leaders can work with the church member to mitigate the problem area.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Joyner et al. (2013) stated that delimitations provide “boundaries of the study and ways in which the findings may lack generalizability” (p. 209). In order for this study to be successful, delimitations were required that facilitated the selection of a presumably spiritually-integrated undergraduate student population who would become willing participants. Although spiritual integration was not guaranteed for any student population, it was necessary to locate venues that attracted a certain kind of student. This was why I selected only Bible colleges. Bible colleges in the United States have a reputation for being Christ-centered institutions of higher education that attract students who want to learn in a Christian environment. The study was further delimited by requiring each of the three Bible colleges to have earned accreditation from the ABHE. This was done to ensure each site was uniform in their educational, spiritual, and personnel standards. Also, student participants were required to (a) be at least 18 years old, (b) be a Bible college student for at least one year, and (c) complete a questionnaire including demographic and spiritual integration assessment sections. Faculty participants had to have worked at least part-time and must have been instructors for at least one year.

This grounded theory study resulted in an explanation of the spiritual integration process, graphically represented by *The Spiritual Integration Model*, of undergraduate students enrolled in Bible colleges in the Southeastern and Midwestern United States. While this study offers value to any investigation of persistence that occurs within a spiritual environment, it did have limitations. Although geographically dispersed, this study was limited to only three Bible
colleges accredited by the ABHE. There are other accrediting agencies for Bible colleges within the U.S. and many more Bible colleges that deserve to be subjects of similar research. This study was also limited to only students who reported their enrollment status as full time - there were no part-time student participants interviewed for the study. The Spiritual Integration Model was also limited in female and minority faculty representation as well as a lack of a useable timeline of students’ movements from one major category to the next. One final limitation was the absence of interview data from former Bible college students who departed their colleges. In this study, spiritually-integrated participants were asked to share hypothetical circumstance that would have caused them to depart as well as anecdotes of former students with whom they were acquainted who departed and their reasons for leaving.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The Spiritual Integration Model answered the question of how undergraduate students spiritually integrate into their Bible colleges, but it may also have opened up a new avenue of inquiry into student persistence in faith-based educational institutions and other organizations. Future research could focus on multiple Bible colleges in geographical locations different from those used in this study. Researchers could examine Christian-based colleges or other educational institutions from various religious orientations to assess whether students in these institutions experience spiritual integration in accordance with the model. The present study collected interview data from student participants of both genders, a variety of ethnicities, multiple ages, commuters, traditional students, from various marriage statuses, and from second year students to graduates. Future qualitative studies could focus on one ethnic group, selective genders, specific age groups, or specifically traditional or nontraditional students to study how these characteristics affect their spiritual integration, and subsequently, their persistence.
Researchers could conduct quantitative inquiries into spiritual integration or its influences on student persistence. One study could be the development and validation of a spiritual integration survey based on The Spiritual Integration Model. This would include developing variables from the present study’s concepts and operationalizing them. According to Rummel (1988), before operationalizing data, the researcher must define the phenomenon, which was done in this study, determine how to measure the phenomenon, select an appropriate sample, and then develop the research design. The researcher would administer the resultant survey to the appropriate sample and then conduct an analysis of the data to ensure the validity of the survey. Future quantitative research could employ the survey in diverse educational venues and faith-based organizations focusing on the various student characteristics mentioned earlier.

Summary

This study endeavored to explain the process of undergraduate student spiritual integration into Bible colleges and discover what role spiritual integration played in their persistence. Tinto (1975, 1993) developed a theory of student persistence that explained how students’ integrated into a college’s academic and social systems taking into account their interactional abilities with their peers and faculty. Schreiner (2000) explored the spiritual aspect of college attendance and uncovered spiritual indicators that influenced students’ persistence. The results of this systematic grounded theory study attempted to fill the gaps left by the two aforementioned theoretical constructs by developing The Spiritual Integration Model. This model provided a spiritual dimension to undergraduate student integration into Bible colleges, a facet of persistence not covered by Tinto’s (1975, 1993) theory, while demonstrating the efficacy of Schreiner’s (2000) spiritual indicators in students’ spiritual integration.
The first research question answered by the study was: How do undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States? The Spiritual Integration Model provided the answer to this question. The model, a visual representation of the spiritual integration process, illustrates how students moved from considering attendance at a Bible college to their acceptance of their place in that college.

The spiritual integration process begins with prospective students seeking a spiritual education that could fulfill their calling. This leads to students’ enrolling in a Bible college and discovering a family and appealing college environment. Students then begin developing as they start building relationships to join the college family and embrace the change and challenge from Bible college attendance that leads to growing spiritually. Students then want to begin applying their accumulated knowledge and skills through participating in the classroom and their peers’ ministries. They also commence contributing to God and their community through helping others and taking part in service learning opportunities. The final major category or theme in the spiritual integration process involves students accepting their place in the Bible college when they perceive their spirituality status has aligned with the Bible college’s spiritual environment.

While The Spiritual Integration Model was developed to explain a spiritual phenomenon, it did contain rather secular aspects that, if removed from the model, would have impacted its viability. Indeed, since the study’s interview protocol was based in large part on Tinto’s (1975, 1993) academic and social integration constructs and Schreiner’s (2000) spiritual indicators there were areas within the model that defied identification as spiritual or secular. Table 7, a tabular representation of the model, was my attempt to show the elements within the model that were of a spiritual nature. For the purposes of this illustration I defined spiritual nature as those
concepts where students referred to God, the Holy Bible, Christian issues, faith, or other spiritual-related topics. Identifying the spiritual and secular elements was done to increase understanding of how spirituality or spiritual concepts impacted undergraduate students during their attendance at Bible colleges.

The second research question answered by the study was: What is the role of spiritual integration in the persistence of undergraduate Bible college students in the Midwestern and Southeastern United States? The alignment of students’ spirituality with a Bible college’s spiritual environment as well as their acceptance or refusal of their place in the college influenced their decisions to persist. If a student’s spirituality aligned perfectly with the college’s spiritual environment, then that student was more likely to accept his or her place in that college and their subsequent decision to remain. If students enrolled in a Bible college and their spirituality status did not align with the prevailing spiritual environment, they would most likely have refused to accept their place in that college’s spiritual environment. This occurred due to the difficulties they would surely have faced while attempting to integrate into a spiritual environment they would not have fully understood or appreciated.

Incorporating The Spiritual Integration Model into existing theories of persistence may be the most valuable use of this study’s findings. While Tinto’s (1975, 1993) interactionist theory of student departure has become a standard in education, it has also been the subject of numerous investigations of student persistence. The Spiritual Integration Model added a unique facet to this literature in that it incorporated Schreiner’s (2000) spiritual indicators while offering a spiritual integration process for students who learned within a Bible college’s spiritual environment.
The study’s product, *The Spiritual Integration Model*, also has the potential to provide various educational and faith-related leaders with a process they can leverage to assess, then perhaps enhance, the persistence of students and personnel within a *spiritual environment*. In educational venues with spiritual environments, the model could assist administrators in their assessment of problems associated with persistence. Faculty who encounter issues when interacting with students could also assess these issues using the model. Students could find that the model offers a visual representation of their spiritual integration process easing the task of locating any difficulties they may have experienced with the process and perhaps a solution. For example, a student who resides in the *accepting* category – who has already accepted their place in the *spiritual environment* – and then develops a spiritually debilitating doubt with Scripture can drop from *accepting* and begin the re-integration process at *discovering* where the concept *focusing on God* resides under the sub-category of *college environment*.

**Epilogue**

The following anecdote may offer some insight as to the usefulness of *The Spiritual Integration Model* outside of higher education. Immediately after making the final revisions regarding the model, I decided to share it with my pastor. To provide context about our discussion, our church attendance is between 700 and 800 congregants on any given Sunday. The size of the church precluded our distribution of church bulletins due to the large expense associated with this weekly practice. Instead, we decided to distribute a small card with room to write notes and information about our church for new arrivals. The top of the card where members can write their notes contained a diagram called “Take Your Next Step.” This included a growth strategy with the four steps of discover, connect, serve, and go. Each of these four steps had the various church programs listed under them in which members could choose to
participate. For example, under the discover heading were listed the class our pastor teaches every two weeks for new members and a class that taught the foundational beliefs of our church – a way for congregants to ‘discover’ more about our church. These four steps actually constituted a process of sorts which members could leverage in order to fully participate in the church’s mission to connect the unconnected to Christ and together grow to full devotion to Him.

After a church meeting, the pastor and I went into his office to discuss the model I developed. I wanted his opinion on the usefulness of the model in a church setting and also wanted his overall estimation of the model’s face validity since he was an unbiased observer with a professional knowledge of a church environment as well as a someone who understood education. After walking him through the model he asked me some very good questions. He also remarked, much to my relief, that the model was very easy to understand and appeared to be applicable to a church setting, albeit with modifications to match the church’s spiritual environment as opposed to a Bible college.

I share this anecdote because of what happened next. Laying on the pastor’s desk was one of the cards with the “Take Your Next Step” process. Interestingly, we were able to plug each of the four steps into The Spiritual Integration Model. For example, the ‘discover’ step would fall under the seeking major category since members would be seeking a spiritual education. The ‘connect’ step would fall under the major category of applying since church members would effectively be participating in group learning. The ‘serve’ step would fall under the same major category of applying when members would begin contributing by serving in one or more of the many ministries hosted by our church. The final step of ‘go’ could very well represent the church member’s decision to accept the spiritual environment within the church and call it their spiritual home. I say this because this final step represents a church member’s
decision to begin helping others in the community outside of the church environment –
effectively becoming a church ambassador.

While this anecdote does not prove the viability of *The Spiritual Integration Model* as a
panacea for all faith-based organizational persistence issues, it does offer a glimpse into its
flexibility to encompass a church’s process to facilitate the spiritual growth of its members.
Perhaps after modifying the sub-categories to fit an organization’s *spiritual environment*, leaders
could use this model to assess or expand upon their own internal developmental processes.
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APPENDIX A

STUDENT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

[Date], 2017

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Education. The purpose of my research is to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the United States. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are an undergraduate student who has persisted beyond the first year at your Bible college and are willing to participate, you will complete an online questionnaire that contains questions about your background and spirituality, provide your contact information (optional), and then sit for an interview and maybe a focus group session. The interviews and focus groups, which will occur on different days, should take approximately one to two hours for you to complete. During this study all personal, identifying information that you provide will remain confidential.

To participate go to [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6SYJ72W] and read the consent document, which contains additional information about my research. If you agree to participate in this research project, please click on the questionnaire link at the end of the informed consent document to indicate that you have read it and would like to complete the questionnaire. If you would like to participate in an interview and possibly a focus group session, please provide your contact information at the end of the questionnaire.

If you choose to participate, you will receive an Amazon gift card worth $25.00 upon completion of your interview.

Sincerely,

Brett A. Blount
Liberty University
Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX B

FACULTY RECRUITMENT EMAIL

[Date], 2017

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Education. The purpose of my research is to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the United States. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are a member of faculty who has taught for at least one year at your Bible college and are willing to participate you will be asked to sit for an interview and maybe a focus group session. The interview and focus group, which will occur on different days, should take approximately one to two hours for you to complete. During this study, all personal, identifying information that you provide will remain confidential.

To participate please reply to this email, using the address below, stating that you are able to set aside your valuable time for an interview – I will contact you immediately.

If you choose to participate, you will receive an Amazon gift card worth $25.00 upon completion of your interview.

Sincerely,

Brett A. Blount
Liberty University
Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM
Students’ Spiritual Integration into Bible Colleges: A Grounded Theory Study
Brett A. Blount
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study that will help explain undergraduate students’ spiritual integration into their Bible colleges. You were selected as a possible participant because you are either a persistent undergraduate student with one or more years of enrollment at your Bible college, or are a member of faculty with at least one year of teaching at your Bible college. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Brett A. Blount, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the United States.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Sit for a scheduled one–on-one interview that will last up to two hours. This interview will be recorded and your participation in this part of the study will be confidential.
2. If able, join one or more of your colleagues in a focus group that will last up to two hours. The focus group will be recorded and your participation in this part of the study will be confidential within the context of the study.
3. Conduct a review of your interview/focus group data to ensure accuracy – this may take up to 30 minutes.
4. If needed, participate in a 30-minute follow-up interview in person or over the telephone.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life. However, some of the questions will touch on potentially emotional subjects, such as your spirituality and faith, and will require very frank responses.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. If you choose to participate, you will receive an Amazon gift card worth $25.00 upon completion of your interview.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.
Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. We may share the data we collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if we share the data that we collect about you, we will remove any information that could identify you before we share it.

- All information provided to the researcher will be strictly confidential. You will be able to review and approve your transcript prior to any formal analysis.
- All information will be stored as data on my personal computer with password protection. Interview and focus group transcripts will be retained for three years upon completion of the study per federal regulations.
- Recordings of interviews and focus groups will be maintained on my personal computer, with password protection, for the duration of the study. They will be erased/deleted upon the conclusion of the study.
- Participants’ personal information will be strictly confidential. This confidentiality is limited during focus groups only because the researcher cannot guarantee that other focus group participants will honor the confidentiality of the group’s proceedings.
- This study will not publish actual names of participants for any reason. Pseudonyms, where the researcher substitutes a ‘fake’ name for a participant’s actual name in the body of the study, will be used to protect the identity of participants.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your Bible college or Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Brett A. Blount. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at (910) 514-1677 or bblount5@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher’s dissertation chair, Dr. Fred Milacci, at fmlacci@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or his chair, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

__________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Participant                               Date

__________________________________________
Signature of Investigator
APPENDIX D

STUDENT SPIRITUAL INTEGRATION QUESTIONNAIRE AND CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM
Students’ Spiritual Integration into Bible Colleges:
A Grounded Theory Study

Brett A. Blount
Liberty
University School
of Education

You are invited to be part of a research study that will examine how undergraduate students spiritually integrate into their Bible colleges. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a persistent undergraduate student with one or more years of enrollment at your Bible college. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

I, Brett A. Blount, will conduct this study as part of the requirements to earn a Doctorate in Education from Liberty University.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the United States.

Procedures: You are being asked to complete an online questionnaire. The length of time needed to complete the online questionnaire is less than 5 minutes. At the end of the online questionnaire, you will be asked to provide your contact information. The researcher will use the questionnaire results and contact information to select participants for interviews and focus groups.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life. However, some of the questions will touch on potentially emotional subjects, such as your spirituality and faith, and will require very frank responses. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Students who complete the questionnaire will not receive any compensation.

Confidentiality: The researcher will take precautions to protect participant identity. The questionnaire will be located on a web-based survey system, which is on a server kept in a password-protected database and not shared with anyone. The information will be downloaded from the survey system and stored on this site and the researcher’s password protected computer for the duration of three years then deleted from the computer database.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study’s questionnaire is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your Bible college or Liberty University.
How to Withdraw from the Questionnaire: You may withdraw at any time prior to submitting your questionnaire by selecting the “cancel” button at the end of the questionnaire or simply closing your Internet browser.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Brett A. Blount. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at (910) 514-1677 or bblount5@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher’s dissertation chair, Dr. Fred Milacci, at fmilacci@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or his chair, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understand the description of the study and contents of this document. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this study. I understand that I must be 18 years or older to consent and participate in this study.

By clicking yes, I agree to the statement above and agree to complete the questionnaire.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your age?

17 or younger  (If the student chooses this response they will be courteously removed from the process)
18-20
21-29
30-39
40-49
50-59
60 or older

2. What is your attendance status at your present Bible college?

In my first year  (If the student chooses this response they will be courteously removed from the process)
Between my first and second year
In my second year
Between my second and third year
In my third year
Between my third and fourth year
In my fourth year
Beyond my fourth year
I have graduated from my Bible college
I am in graduate school at my Bible college

3. Are you male or female?

Male
Female

4. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

Married
Widowed
Divorced
Separated
In a domestic partnership or civil union
Single, but cohabiting with a significant other
Single, never married

5. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

Employed, working full-time
Employed, working part-time
Not employed, looking for work
Not employed, NOT looking for work
Retired
Disabled, not able to work

6. Are you White, Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or some other race?

White
Black or African-American
American Indian or Alaskan Native
Asian
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
From multiple races
Some other race (please specify)

7. How many children are you parent or guardian for and live in your household (aged 17 or younger only)?

None
1
2
3
8. Did your mother or father graduate from college?
   Yes
   No

9. Do you live on campus?
   Yes
   No

10. Do you live off campus and commute to and from classes?
    Yes
    No

11. What type of secondary school did you attend?
    Public school
    Private school
    Private Christian school
    Homeschool
    Other type of school

12. Are you a full-time or part-time student?
    Full-time
    Part-time

13. Being at this school is contributing to my spiritual growth.
    Strongly disagree
    Disagree
    Neither agree nor disagree
    Agree
    Strongly agree

14. My understanding of God is being strengthened by classroom and/or campus experiences.
    Strongly disagree
    Disagree
    Neither agree nor disagree
    Agree
15. Faculty, administrators, and/or staff are helpful to me in processing issues related to my faith.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

16. This school provides adequate opportunities for involvement in ministry.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

17. Given where I am spiritually right now, this school is a good fit for me.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. The next step involves participating in an individual interview with the study’s researcher.

1. Are you interested in participating in a qualitative research study that may explain how undergraduate students spiritually integrate into their Bible colleges?
   a. Yes
   b. No (if “no” is selected questionnaire closes and participant receives the following message – “Thank you for your Participation!”)

If yes,

2. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Please complete the following so a researcher can contact you with additional information:
   a. Name (First, Last):
   b. Email address:
   c. Phone number:
   d. Best days/times to schedule a 1 – 2 hour interview:

Thank you so much for your participation! The researcher will be in touch shortly!
APPENDIX E

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 11, 2017

Brett Blount
IRB Approval 2860.051117: Students’ Spiritual Integration into Bible Colleges: A Grounded Theory Study

Dear Brett Blount,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971
APPENDIX F

STUDENT FOLLOW UP EMAIL

[Date], 2017

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Education. The purpose of my research is to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the United States. Recently an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to complete the questionnaire if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

If you choose to participate, you will complete an online questionnaire that contains questions about your background and spirituality, provide your contact information (optional), and then sit for an interview and maybe later, a focus group session. Each interview and focus group session should take up to two hours to complete. During this study, all personal, identifying information that you provide will remain confidential.

To participate go to [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6SYJ72W] and read the consent document which contains additional information about my research. If you agree to participate in this research project, please click on the survey link at the end of the informed consent document to indicate that you have read it and would like to complete the questionnaire. If you would like to participate in an interview and possibly a focus group session, please provide your contact information at the end of the questionnaire.

If you participate in the interview process you will receive an Amazon gift card worth $25.00 upon completion of your interview.

Sincerely,

Brett A. Blount
Liberty University
Doctoral Candidate
[Date], 2017

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Education. The purpose of my research is to explain how undergraduate students integrate spiritually into Bible colleges in the United States. Recently an email was sent to you requesting your participation in this research study - your participation is very important. If you are able to set aside some of your valuable time to participate, please reply to this email using my address below – I will contact you immediately.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sit for an interview and maybe later, a focus group session. Each interview and focus group session should take up to two hours to complete. During this study, all personal, identifying information that you provide will remain confidential.

If you participate in this study you will receive an Amazon gift card worth $25.00 upon completion of your interview.

Sincerely,

Brett A. Blount
Liberty University
Doctoral Candidate

bblount5@liberty.edu
APPENDIX H

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION EXAMPLE

Interviewer: Okay, It’s 26 September at 3:05 P.M. and I’m talking to Irene and we have a rapport going so I’m going to go ahead and start asking questions. Why did you decide to attend the Bible college?

Irene: When I started the whole process of like choosing where I would want to go and everything, I, I didn’t even consider going to a secular university or anything. Because I went to public high school and I just did not have that community of believers at all. Like at all. It was just not something that I had in my life not even in my church because it was like mostly older people and so I like you know I didn’t have a youth group, I didn’t have that, so I wanted that community, I wanted that obviously not everyone at Bible college isn’t a Christian but at least everyone is here for the same reasons, mostly though.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, so what’s decision-making, it’s not like your decision-making process, that you decided that you wanted to go to a school where you’re going to be with like-minded people, or believers if you will. Okay. Um, what made you commit to this particular Bible college?

Irene: Well, I was planning on going to a university in Wisconsin and my Junior year in high school, like I was dead-set, like ready to go, was on-board had all the swag and everything. Um, in my Junior year of high school they like closed, like their Government funding or whatever, I don’t know all the details, but they closed and so I was kind of like, okay God, like I don’t know what to do from here. And my mom like signed me up to get all these like packages in the mail from different colleges and stuff. And, we just kept getting the ones from [Northern Bible College], and I wasn’t really considering [Northern Bible College], but my mom was like really interested so she opened up the little like envelope or whatever and we came and visited. And this was the only college application I actually completed. I started a couple others, but this was the only one I completed and I just knew once I was here.

Interviewer: And, where are you from?
Irene: I’m from the [northern part of state].
Interviewer: Okay.
Irene: So, it was quite a drive. Coming down here and everything but…
Um, please tell me about your childhood and what role faith and Christianity played in it.
APPENDIX I

DOCUMENT LIST BY SITE

Site One (College of the Bible)

1) College of the Bible website (link not provided to protect anonymity)

2) Academic catalog (2016-2017)

3) Board Meeting Minutes (College of the Bible) 2014 – 2016
   a. 2014 – months of February, May, August and November
   b. 2015 – months of February, May, August and December
   c. 2016 – months of February, May, August and November

4) Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory “A Summary of the Results of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory” (Administered Spring – 2015 with Comparative Demographics 2009 – 2015)

Site Two (Christian College)

1) Christian College website (link not provided to protect anonymity)

2) Academic catalog (2017-2018) (Downloaded from website)

Site Three (Northern Bible College)

1) Northern Bible College website (link not provided to protect anonymity)

2) Academic catalog (link not provided to protect anonymity)
APPENDIX J

DOCUMENT AUDIT TRAIL EXAMPLE

1) In Chapter Four under the major category of *discovering*, under the sub-category of *family*, I mentioned the College of the Bible’s Noel-Levitz *Student Satisfaction Inventory’s* score of 91% for the question “Faculty care about me as an individual.” This was mentioned under the concept of *authentic concern* which triangulated with a quote from Samuel, Abigail and the Noel-Levitz survey.

2) The 6th version of the Conditional Relationship Guide (second iteration) has the following sequence of major category (*discovering*), sub-category (*family*), and the concept of *caring faculty* – which is one of four concepts.

3) The next level of audit would be the Nodes Analysis document. Here we find the sub-category of *family* where the concept of *caring faculty* resides. Under *caring faculty* are the concepts which constitute this specific concept (*accommodating faculty, grace and rigor, stop and explain*, and *authentic concern*). Under the concept of *authentic concern* we have the code/node of *they genuinely care (faculty)*.

4) From the Nodes Analysis document we go to the NVivo qualitative management program where we find the quote from Abigail and the Noel-Levitz survey under the code/node of *they genuinely care (faculty)*.

5) The excerpt below was from the NVivo qualitative management program which shows both the quote from Abigail and the verbiage from the Noel-Levitz survey that I coded for the code/node *they genuinely care (faculty)*. To conserve space I removed the other quotes from that particular code/node.

    Internals\Interview Transcriptions\Abigail - § 1 reference coded [0.61% Coverage]
    Reference 1 - 0.61% Coverage
    Well, with (professor), obviously, because we have a working relationship as well he knows what’s going on in my world, checks in on my son, things of that nature. (Professor) also, just a caring man. He always asks about things that are going on, never intrusive. I don’t ever feel like any of my professors are intrusive with information, but they genuinely care about, what’s going on in your life. How can we pray for you? How can we encourage you, depending on if you’re charismatic or non-charismatic?
    Interviewer: Alright. How do faculty react if you miss class due to work or sports or something?
    Memos\Document Search\College of the Bible Document - § 1 reference coded [1.33% Coverage]
    Reference 1 - 1.33% Coverage
    Faculty care about me as an individual 89% 91
APPENDIX K

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTION SAMPLE

Interviewer: Okay, if everybody would just be quiet (laughter). Oh, no, I guess I don't have to say that. It's 18 October, about two what? 2:10 in the afternoon. I have [[Judith], I'm not going to use your pseudonym, since this is a focus group, so I've got [Judith] and [Michael], and we have [Omar] on the way.

Judith: [Omar] on the way.
Interviewer: So, I'm just going to go ahead and start. You guys know what this is all about. I've already interviewed you. What I'm going to do is just ask you questions to discuss, I'm trying to get some synergy from having more than one person in the room. So, the first question I'm going to ask you all is: What is the difference between a Bible college and a secular college that offers a Bible degree? So, you can go to probably [local university], you could probably go to [another local university] and get a degree in the Bible, a theological degree or something like that, so what's the difference between getting one there and getting one here?

Judith: A lot.
Michael: I would say the fact that out of Bible college, it's going to be the spiritual emphasis, it’s going to permeate outside of the classroom into, or it should at least, into the entire campus.

Interviewer: Okay.
Michael: Rather than it just being, “Oh I'm going for a Bible degree, but the rest of the campus doesn't talk about” ... It's not just a classroom, academic-type setting.

Interviewer: Right. Okay, so you say spirituality should permeate the whole campus at a Bible college, as opposed to somewhere ... What do you think, [Judith]?

Judith: I believe that at a Bible college, the Bible is more or less the influence on everything, rather than just Bible-specific classes, because with you being with Worship Arts and stuff and me being Human Services, which is considered more or less a secular field, because you can do that without Bible influence, but yet our classes are still richly involved in Bible teachings. We discuss the Bible in every single class that I'm in, whether that be English or Psychology or Sociology, we discuss the Bible and that affects our entire curricular world view and just the whole entire point of, more or less, that yes, a lot of colleges do offer that, but we actually take it a step further and we integrate it into everything, rather than just one specific major.

Interviewer: Okay, so not only does spiritual- ... I can't say spirituality today. Not only does spirituality permeate the campus, but you're also saying that there is an effort in the Bible college to put the Bible into every class, is what it sounds like you're saying.

Judith: Yeah.
APPENDIX L

JOURNAL ENTRY EXAMPLE

8/25/2017

I feel I have enough data to begin the concept and category memoing and diagramming process. Before I had at least 350 coded items it seemed too soon to begin – I just didn't have the data.

The Christian College had so far provided 5 participants, but it has been three weeks since I started. Certainly the time of year, the beginning of the Fall semester, has made it difficult. I also have people completing the questionnaires without leaving their contact information. No faculty have thus far volunteered to participate.

I asked three interviewees to recommend students who may want to interview. We'll see if the "snowball" technique garners more participation.

NOTE: The snowball technique did not work as well as asking the gatekeeper to assist in selection of the participants.

Process - I am beginning to see how I may be able to adopt Van Genepps' (1960) integration model into my dissertation. Van Gennep’s (1960) process states that an individual departs from one group and joins another through three stages. These stages were (a) separation from the original group, (b) transition into the new group, and (c) incorporation of the new group’s expectations and norms (Van Gennep, 1960).

The difficulty is developing the "new group." Is this group represented by the people (faculty, administrative staff, and peers) who are already at a Bible college? How does the concept of family enter into this? Does family define the new group or is it the glue that binds the new group? This is exciting in that once I figure out the "new group" I can look at how a student incorporates the "norms and expectations" of the new group. These may be where I can plug in the all-important "understanding the Word of God" and "service learning" concepts - but that remains to be seen.
APPENDIX M

NODES LIST EXAMPLE

705. Validate my beliefs  Student came to BC to validate her beliefs.

706. Very helpful and knowledgeable (faculty)  Faculty are very helpful and very knowledgeable - there is no “I’m better than you” attitude.

707. Very supportive classroom  Classrooms are safe and very supportive

708. Veteran's benefits  Military students can avoid financial strife thorough veteran’s benefits

709. Visited peers’ churches  Student visited peers’ churches and also went to a couple of ordinations of peers in their church.

710. Walk out on faith  Student knew she was incorporating faith into her life when she walked out in faith and began looking for an apartment near the college.

711. Walking in faith  Trusting in God

712. Walks of life  Faculty come from various walks of life - and you learn about life, not just the professional

713. Way the Word was taught  Student liked the way the Word was taught in the first course (How to Study the Bible) - the Bible became more interesting

714. We all enjoy asking questions  The classroom environment is safe for questions, we don’t make fun of questions, we enjoy asking question.

715. We always chime in  Classroom environment is one where students are free to chime in, ask questions, or give their opinions.

716. We are a family  The environment at the College of the Bible is one of family

717. We are ecumenical  The College of the Bible is not Baptist or charismatic - it is ecumenical

718. We are to serve  We are the Body of Christ and are supposed to serve
APPENDIX N

NODES ANALYSIS EXAMPLE

2. College Environment

a. Appealing College

1) Small, Intimate Setting

a. A small college (9) A small college can respond to certain student situations better - such as personal issues

b. Small college (11) Size of college creates intimacy

c. Close-knit community (small college) (6) A student mentioned how students she knows attended other larger Christian universities in the area - but they were not as close-knit as her Bible college.

d. Community here is amazing (Appealing College) (2) Student said that within two months she knew everyone and already had friends.

e. Everyone loves everyone (College size) (2) The sense of community is strong at the college upon arrival - everyone cares for one another.

f. Main purpose for being (Small College) (2) A small Bible college may not be able to compete with other, larger colleges - but its students do go into ministry. No one teaches at a Bible college for the money.

g. You're not going to feel connected (3) Parents took their son to a large university - they knew he would not feel connected

h. Teaches you to work with people The smallness of a Bible college forces students to get along with peers they do not like. Although peers must love one another, they may not especially like someone – but they must get along with them – unlike students at a large university where it is easier to avoid their peers.

i. Low student-to-teacher ratio (3) Low Student-to-teacher ratio facilitates the relationships

j. Relaxed environment (2) Small classes and good facilitation make for a relaxed atmosphere

k. Size and living in proximity Faculty member stated that the interactions
between faculty and students at his small Bible college was “about as good as it gets” due to the small size and proximity of faculty to the college

2) Activities at small colleges

a. **There is a social environment outside** (3) Students do hold activities outside of the campus environment - one was for a graduation party.

b. **Student Senate events** Student senate will hold social activities, such as Spirit Week

c. **Open House** Students will hold appreciation banquets and the college does an open house as social activities.

d. **It’s just like church** The social environment has improved at the College of the Bible with functions held to introduce freshmen to the higher class levels. This can be like church where you may meet someone that is familiar and you realize they go to your college.

e. **It's intentional (Activities at small colleges)** (4) College efforts to get students involved socially is intentional

f. **I love being engaged and being here** (2) Student lives at home near the college, but wishes he could stay on campus

g. **Commuters** (2) For them, especially at a small college, they have “their classes and that’s it.”
APPENDIX O

MEMOING EXAMPLES

6 September 17

Academics and Learning (Context)

Bible college students learn in an academic milieu that includes both the sacred and the secular. It is here where students receive solid truth, engage faculty and their peers while learning to help those in need, and are taken from here to there – from people who need an education to work in their respective fields to Bible college graduates.

The concept of “solid truth” is where academics focus on biblical truth – which depends on a thorough understanding of Scripture. Students need to know that what they are learning is truth-based which motivates them to retain it and pass it on. Students feel that true learning has taken place when they fully receive the instruction as opposed to rote memorization or learning only what is on the surface. In some cases, the truth learned at a Bible college can cause students to leave their church when they encounter erroneous teaching.

‘Learning to help’ describes students’ desire to learn as much as they can at Bible college in order to use their knowledge when ministering to others. This concept allows students to, generally, learn as much as possible to prepare themselves for whatever may occur in their ministry and, specifically, to choose classes based on how they can better influence their ministry. This may also help students to guide people back to their faith or plant a seed for someone else to water.

I define the concept of ‘from here to there’ as where learning provides non-academically inclined students with the knowledge they believe they need for life. Bible colleges may not be concerned with a student’s past academic performance, but these institutions do want to take students from their present state to an earned degree. Students, especially older nontraditional students who may not have another educational avenue open to them, appreciate this and enjoy their increased understanding of the Word of God. Many find that when students put forth the effort, even when they are long past their high school days, that they will receive a benefit. This includes students who make many mistakes – but learn from them.

29 September, 2017

Spiritual Growth

The concept of ‘challenge’ is where students can learn more about God as they experience spiritual and academic challenges. Students find these challenges within a Bible college’s curriculum when it encourages Bible study, when they feel driven to seek God, or find themselves experiencing discomfort when confronted with a biblical precept they have failed to follow. Students can challenge themselves by questioning their own beliefs, embracing the
pruning and chiseling required to bring them closer to Christ’s image, and showing themselves approved through the study of God’s word.

Students learn to grow spiritually in a Bible college from curriculum, instruction and Bible study. This concept of ‘learning to grow’ describes students’ growth due to the faculty and curriculum, increasing knowledge of the Holy Spirit, what it means to be a disciple, their spiritual maturation evident in papers and lifestyle, and their admission that they need to more about the Bible. Students come by this growth through sound Bible college teaching that encourages study, gaining an understanding of salvation and God’s word, and learning how to study the Bible. ‘Learning to grow’ allows students to experience spiritual growth through the curriculum and instruction found in a Bible college.

Bible college students undergo change that comes from exposure to a Christ-centered educational environment. This concept of ‘change’ occurs within students because they want people to see Jesus in them, they have identified the presence of pride in themselves, and they want to avoid being a carnal Christian by devoting their college years to study in a Bible college. These change manifestations occur by students being more loving, dealing head-on with sin and life’s problems, through constant study of God’s word, embracing the renewal of mind and spirit, walking the spiritual talk and accepting God’s grace in their lives. The result appears to be others seeing Jesus in the one who has undergone ‘change.’
APPENDIX P

DIAGRAMMING EXAMPLES

Spiritual Integration
We are Family

- We care for each other
- Check on students’ well-being
- Families attend together
- Not friends – brothers/sisters
- Rather be here than home
- People check on me

FAMILY

Student/Faculty Integration

Faculty

Classroom
Offices
Hallways
Activities

Positive Interactions

Student Integration
# APPENDIX Q

## CONDITIONAL RELATIONSHIP GUIDE EXAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Why</th>
<th>How</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowing God</td>
<td>Students want to know God better</td>
<td>Childhood Recent adulthood</td>
<td>Personal life</td>
<td>Lack of knowledge concerning God and the Bible, Want to know more about God, Believe they were called by God</td>
<td>Desire to know the Bible, Divine guidance, God opens and closes doors,</td>
<td>Motivated to find a spiritual college to learn more about God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling</td>
<td>Students feel led by God to attend the Bible college</td>
<td>Recent adulthood (Godly Devotion)</td>
<td>Personal life</td>
<td>Holy Spirit prompted me to learn, God clearly told me as I drove by college, God’s call to ministry, Need to be equipped</td>
<td>Praying for guidance, Loved ones who told them to listen to God, Holy Spirit’s guidance when visiting, Formal learning</td>
<td>Attend Bible college, Knowledge of God, Follow God’s plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX R

### SECOND CONDITIONAL RELATIONSHIP GUIDE EXAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Category</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Why</th>
<th>How</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
<th>Sub-category concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEEKING: Prospective students want to know more about God and feel led by God, or experience a calling, to attend a Bible College. They express a desire to attain an education, even a formal degree, with a spiritual or biblical foundation that will equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to share what they learned with others.</td>
<td>Prospective students want to know more about God and believe they are led by God to attend a Bible College.</td>
<td>Childhood, Recent adulthood</td>
<td>Personal life</td>
<td>Lack of knowledge concerning God and the Bible,</td>
<td>Desire to know the Bible, Divine guidance,</td>
<td>Motivated to find a spiritual college to learn more about God</td>
<td>Knowing God Calling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SEEKING God

<p>| Prospective students want to know more about God and believe they are led by God to attend a Bible College. | Childhood, Recent adulthood | Personal life | Lack of knowledge concerning God and the Bible, | Desire to know the Bible, Divine guidance, | Motivated to find a spiritual college to learn more about God | Knowing God Calling |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Seeking an Education</strong></th>
<th>Students express a desire to attain an education with a spiritual basis that will also assist equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to share with others.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruction, Student/faculty interactions, Recent adulthood, Childhood</strong></td>
<td>Teach God's word, Gain useful knowledge to help others, Education with a purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom, Personal, Family</strong></td>
<td>Formal biblical education, Christ-centered curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desire to attend a Christ-centered learning institution</strong></td>
<td>Bible college students Lead people to Christ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX S

### REFLECTIVE CODING MATRIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Category</th>
<th>Desire to honor God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Processes</strong></td>
<td>Seeking God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(action/interaction)</em></td>
<td>Discovering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Applying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Properties</strong></td>
<td>Spiritual desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(characteristics of category)</em></td>
<td>Appeals to student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building and growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dimensions</strong></td>
<td>Knowing God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(property location on continuum)</em></td>
<td>Focusing on God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship with God, Change, Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I speak at his/her church, Learning to help, Helping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual status, Acknowledge their place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contexts</strong></td>
<td>Desire to follow God's call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participating and contributing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fit/Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modes for understanding the consequences</strong></td>
<td>Motivated to find a spiritual college to learn more about God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(process outcome)</em></td>
<td>Understand God more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal relationship with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students equipped for service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Growth, Live saved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX T

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK (MEMBER CHECK OF FIRST DRAFT OF CHAPTER FOUR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>I read and reviewed your dissertation and have no questions for you right now. All the blessings for your hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartholomew</td>
<td>Good Evening Dr. Brett Blount, Thanks for letting me be a part of your focus group for your dissertation. I have reviewed the transcript and found it true to form. I thank God for you setting the example for me and others to follow. Keep up the good work. God Speed my Brother...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>Dear Mr. Blount, This looks great. I enjoyed reading through your dissertation. I am glad to say you took our conversation and expressed the thoughts well. I have no questions and thank you for allowing me to be a part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernice</td>
<td>NO RESPONSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyrus</td>
<td>Acknowledgement without any feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Hello Sir, I am pleased with your dissertation. I enjoyed reading it very much. I pray for the best as you submit your final copy. I have no problem with the part I played in it other than the filler words… ie, uh, ummm, etc. May God continue to bless you. Thank you for your time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>Sorry for not responding earlier, I liked everything. The Spiritual Integration I like very much. Hope all is well with you and your family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>Hi Brett, I apologize for the late response. Graduation is a few weeks away, so I'm focusing intently on classes and graduation requirements. I couldn't figure out how to sort by name to find my quotes, but as I scanned through, I only found one quote. Can you tell me if there are more? Or how to sort through myself? According to the list, I am the only one with my demographics. I didn't realize I would be so easily identifiable to others on the list. You have put huge effort into your dissertation! I'm sure it will be worth the effort! Please advise. MY RESPONSE: You only have one quote and it is on pages 34 - 35. I have to list the demographics according to the APA standards. I hope that is not a problem for you. If it is please let me know. DEBORAH’S ANSWER: Brett, That is okay. Thanks for following up. Hope all goes well for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>I am so sorry, for taking so long to respond to your message. Everything looks fine to me. I thoroughly enjoyed your presentation. This was a new thing for me to see how your study progressed from beginning to end. I wish you well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew (Faculty)</td>
<td>Brett, I’ve reviewed both documents. While parts are unfamiliar to my recollection, I do recall much of the remaining parts! Quick question: are you using a pseudonym for the school as well? Throughout, you refer to us at College of the Bible instead of [redacted]. If you’re using a pseudonym, great. If not, you’ll want to change that. Thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>Brett, you are very welcome! It was nice to be able to contribute and concur. Thank you for the gift card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (Faculty)</td>
<td>NO RESPONSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John (Faculty)</td>
<td>concur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gideon</td>
<td>NO RESPONSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermes</td>
<td>Hi everything looks fine to me!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>Yes I was able to look at it! It looked good!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Thanks everything looks good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>NO RESPONSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenan</td>
<td>Got it! Everything looks good, hope all is well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke (Faculty)</td>
<td>Yes, I looked, It seemed fine to me. It has been just long enough ago that I couldn’t remember exactly what I said – so, I looked at all of it. Go ahead and do what you need to do to finish this up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene</td>
<td>NO RESPONSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>I will look at again at page nine, and it looks great I give my permission to use whatever you need and thank you for allowing me to take part (sorry for the delay end of term closing fast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>Hello, I am so sorry that I did not respond to this email! Everything in your paper looks great and I like the changes you made to your spiritual integration model on page nine. I feel that you portrayed what I said in an effective way that represented what I was trying to get across. Congratulations of the finishing of this paper, as you have put much work into it. Let me know if you need anything else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>So sorry it took me a so long to respond. I was cleaning out my email today and I realized I missed your email!! I read most of the dissertation and I think it is pretty good! I re-read my transcripts and I think it is for the most part accurate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lois</td>
<td>Hello Brett, All the information is looking good to me. Thanks for your update.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quartus</td>
<td>My apologies for not getting back to you sooner! I just looked through all of the places where you mentioned my pseudonym, and it looks good! Thanks for checking in with me. I hope I didn’t slow things down for you. Thanks,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orpah (Faculty)</td>
<td>Hi, Dr. Brett, I have reviewed the document and everything looks fine. I can see you’ve invested lots of time into your study. Great work! I look forward to reading it when you're done. All Praise to Our Lord and Savior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuben (Faculty)</td>
<td>Brett- You have undertaken a significant study that was a pleasure to read! I approve the parts that I had a part in and wish you the best as you draw your studies to a (hopefully soon) closure. I look forward to hearing that you have successfully defended the finished work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Yes, I did, thank you. I'm terribly sorry for the late response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>NO RESPONSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew (Faculty)</td>
<td>On page 65, you wrote, &quot;while Matthew was leading a Bible study.&quot; Actually, the student was leading the Bible study. I was sitting in to grade his efforts. It was an assignment for a class. That's all I see. Keep up the good work. You're almost there. MY RESPONSE: Thanks for the correction and I appreciate the encouragement!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Hi Brett, Thanks for the email and I'm sorry that it took me so long to get back to you. I approve and I don't have any questions about it at this time. Thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>NO RESPONSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Looks great! Thanks again for allowing me to be a part of this! I pray your work continues to be a wonderful growth experience within your educational pursuit. Thank you again!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Good morning! My apologies for the delay. I believe the integration model is fantastic. In addition, I have reviewed my quotes and the only thing I feel might be an error is on page 40. I have copied and pasted it below, with the correction referenced in red. Please do not make any changes if it is not appropriate, but I may not have articulated clearly when we chatted. Thank you again for allowing my participation. “And sure enough, I mean, it was another hugely profound moment. I remember him talking about proof, the word proof and saying the only thing that's proof is a theological term. And that was huge to me. It's true. Everything with science we can always, you know, change. But God's proof is the only proof we have. So I feel like I look at everything from a more eternal perspective.” MY RESPONSE: I made the correction - it does make better sense now.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>