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The Future of Residence Life and Student Affairs in Christian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The future of Christian higher education is not certain, and faith-based institutions will need to continue to convince prospective students that the experiences they offer are worth the investment. What is missing in the discussion of what makes Christian higher education special is the transformational experience provided outside of the classroom. To this end, residential life and student affairs in Christian higher education is an area of untapped potential critical to the future of these campuses. When taking into account the lost role of service in the professoriate, the research on the impact of living on campus on student success, and the research on the importance of student-faculty interaction, it becomes evident that residential communities can be transformed into environments that offer an integrated, holistic education that is vital to the mission of Christian institutions.

In his assessment of Christian higher education at the start of the 21st century, Johnstone's (2015) question, "What makes a Christian college so special?" (p. 177), resonates with those concerned with the present challenges and future possibilities facing Christian colleges. The question is appropriate because the future of Christian higher education is not certain, and faith-based institutions will need to continue to convince prospective students that the experiences they offer are worth the investment. Johnstone reviews and critiques three scholarly works that seek to address the distinctive nature and value of Christian higher education. All three vary in the topics covered, the specific audience addressed, and in their thesis. One focuses on adult students, another on traditional undergraduates and the liberal education they need, and the third addresses how to integrate faith and learning within various disciplines of the academy. What is missing in the discussion of what makes Christian higher education special is the transformational experience provided outside of the classroom on these campuses. To some extent, the future of Christian higher education will depend on the future of residential life and student affairs in Christian higher education.

Tagg (2004) has admonished that learning in higher education focuses more on time spent sitting in classes and credits earned than on forming engaged communities of practice in which students negotiate the ongoing meaning of their lives in relation to what they are learning. As Holmes (1987) once boldly stated:

The fact is that too many young people attend college or university, and their parents encourage them, without any gripping sense of what college is all about beyond tentative vocational goals or questionable social aspirations. Many attend Christian colleges for reasons that are so secondary, if not altogether inadequate, that they will end up frustrated unless they can find other meaning to their education, a meaning that is large enough to carry the weight of all that college involves. (p. 3)

As tuition costs continue to rise above the cost of inflation, students are asked to make a relatively larger investment in college. Two major trends threaten private colleges without large endowments (Selingo, 2012; Supplee, 2014). The first trend is that recruitment is becoming more difficult and more expensive as the number of high school graduates is declining and such graduates are becoming more diverse (Prescott & Bransberger, 2012). The second trend is that rising college costs compel students to find more affordable options. Christian institutions must achieve an integration of programmatic elements within this broader cultural picture (Smith, 2011).

In an increasingly competitive market targeting a diverse array of students, what do Christian universities offer that sets them apart from other universities? Holmes (1987) warned that the Christian college cannot compartmentalize religion, but instead “brings it to bear in understanding and participating in the various arts and sciences, as well as nonacademic aspects of campus life” (p. 9). The non-academic aspects of campus life, primarily known as student affairs, offer untapped potential for not only providing a transformative education to students, but also for presenting an experience at Christian higher education institutions that is not offered by competitors. When taking into account the lost role of service in the professoriate, the research on the impact of living on campus on student success, and the research on the importance of student–faculty interaction, it becomes evident that the future of Christian higher education depends in part upon the future of residence life and student affairs within institutions of Christian higher education.

The Lost Role of Service in The Professoriate

During the 19th century, only a select group of higher education institutions thrived in the United States. This landscape changed, however, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thanks to what Thelin (2011) labeled “captains of industry and erudition” (p. 110). From 1880 to 1910, colleges became universities, and these institutions embodied a similar academic culture. Faculty became increasingly professionalized, becoming known experts in their fields. Disciplinary associations and publications were formed, leading to more national conferences, national journals, and faculty who were more cosmopolitans than locals (Birnbaum, 1988).

As Thelin (2011) noted, this new conception of academic professionalism helped to create the university professoriate. This professionalism included the gradations of rank (lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor) and opportunities for promotion and tenure. The professionalization of faculty influenced pedagogy, the development of professional schools, curriculum, student culture, facilities, and the overall dynamics of the academic enterprise. But the accompanying growth and specialization also created a need for more bureaucracy and an infrastructure leading to more departments and academic administrators to lead those departments. Faculty, consequentially, were treated as labor—a means to grow the university and turn inputs into outputs. Increased specialization of faculty, decentralization of administration, and more complicated administrative infrastructure all further emphasized the utilitarian needs of research and teaching while undermining the importance of faculty service and student–faculty interaction.

According to Schrecker (2010), faculty “were coming to identify themselves and their professional careers with their disciplines, not with the colleges and universities where they taught” (p. 189). Empirical support for this shift in faculty identity is evident in faculty responses to what is most important to them: In the mid-1990s, 77% of professors in one study said that their discipline was important to them, but only 40% said their campus was important (Schrecker, 2010). Meanwhile, colleges and universities increasingly relied upon part-time and adjunct faculty to teach courses (Hacker & Dreifus, 2010; Schrecker, 2010). In 1975, almost 60% of college professors were tenured or on the tenure track. That number is now down to 35% (DelBanco, 2012). Adjunct faculty may be competent educators, but such faculty rarely have sufficient office space on campus, often teach at several institutions in order to support themselves financially, and provide significantly less service to the university than tenured and tenure-track faculty. The resulting two-tiered system of academic appointment distributes teaching evenly, but assigns most other work activities (administrative responsibilities, research, and service) to a shrinking number of core, permanent faculty (Finkelstein, 2001).

These multiple trends in higher education converged to produce the same result: fewer faculty serving their local campuses and, more specifically, students outside of the classes they teach, and less value placed upon such activities by university leadership. As DelBanco (2012) admits, “college as a community of learning is, for many students, already an anachronism” (p. 151). This lack of student–faculty interaction outside of the classroom has become a liability for most universities, creating a potential area for Christian colleges and universities to gain a competitive advantage. Student affairs professionals hold the keys to reconnecting students and faculty in meaningful ways outside of the classroom and making student–faculty interaction a valued part of campus culture.

The Importance of the Cocurriculum in Christian Higher Education

Boyer (1990) sought to help academic leaders and faculty rethink scholarship in his classic book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*. He called for the restoration of teaching and service to their once-prominent position within the professoriate. Boyer created a four-part framework for conceptualizing scholarship, including discovery, integration, application, and teaching. However, Boyer’s work is both highly touted and largely ignored (Schrecker, 2010). Instead of rebalancing the faculty role toward service, higher education institutions have focused more heavily on research. Even liberal arts colleges have succumbed to the competition for resources and the desire to raise perceived prestige through grants and publications. Teaching in the academy has been undermined, while service in the academy has been forgotten.

Trudeau and Hermann (2013) examined selected works of Boyer in the context of curricular and cocurricular integration, arguing that Boyer advocated for a closer connection between the academic and student affairs programs on American college campuses. They further contended that this partnership between academic programs and student affairs is particularly important for Christian colleges and naturally aligns with the integrative climate, whole-person focus, and relatively small size of the average Christian campus. They observed:

Anecdotaly we can surmise that due to the collegial and nurturing climate rightly associated with Christian college campuses, faculty members and student affairs administrators do interact positively; but it is difficult to assert confidently that this engagement occurs at a meaningful level, a level where both partners are vitally engaged in a holistic educational endeavor. (p. 62)

Trudeau and Hermann noted that, although some progress has been made in collaboration between student and academic affairs in Christian higher education institutions, “the prevailing practice at most institutions is for the intellectual or cognitive development to be the domain of academic affairs while the social and/or affective development is the domain of student affairs educators” (p. 62). Christian campuses, however, are ideal places for student and academic affairs to better collaborate for student success.

Trudeau and Hermann (2013) provide five strategic considerations for campuses desiring to create more meaningful integration between the in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences of students. These strategies include: (a) acknowledge existing barriers, (b) adopt common values and language, (c) implement learning theory pedagogy, (d) examine current organizational structures, and (e) reward and celebrate collaboration and integration. These recommendations are helpful to institutions of higher education on an overarching, philosophical level, providing a theoretical framework for progress. They do not, however, offer specific recommendations on how Christian institutions of higher education can move forward to implement collaborations between student and academic affairs that will both improve the experiences of students and also help Christian colleges and universities to gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly difficult market. A primary facet of the cocurricular experience—students living on campus—provides Christian higher education institutions the most potential to positively impact student success, increase student–faculty interaction, and develop students morally and spiritually.

The Impact of Living on Campus

In students' quest for meaning and purpose, it is important that they consider their own unique qualities and characteristics in relation to the people, places, and programs that surround them. In an article examining learning partnerships, Cardone, Turton, Olson, and Baxter Magolda (2013) ask, "How could residence life staff more intentionally help students be better and different human beings as a result of living on campus?" (p. 7). Residence halls have the potential to be a powerful venue through which students can explore these important relationships. Moreover, residential communities have the potential to promote a sense of self-understanding within students that urges them to consider their unique purpose in the world.

In their in-depth analysis of college students' moral and civic development, Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens (2003) highlighted opportunities provided to students who live on campus, including "community building within the residential unit, residence-based service programs, links with the curriculum, and theme-oriented residences that focus on diversity, community service, leadership, active citizenship, or particular social issues" (p. 283). Shushok, Scales, Sriram, and Kidd (2011) noted that student benefits of living on campus involve more participation in extracurricular activities, more frequent interactions with peers and faculty members, more positive perceptions of the campus climate, higher satisfaction with the college experience, greater personal growth and development, more effort and involvement in both the academic and social experiences of the college, and a higher rate of persistence and degree completion. When institutions embrace residence life as an opportunity for cocurricular learning, residence halls become transformative communities for the students who live within them. They become a unique space in which students can wrestle with thoughts and feelings that conflict with their own in an environment that is familiar and safe. In order for this potential to be realized, however, it is imperative that academic and student affairs educators work together to create cocurricular opportunities within residential spaces. This imperative means creating residence halls that are more than just places where students eat and sleep.

Shushok et al. (2011) contrasted three prominent philosophies of residence life: (a) the Sleep and Eat Model, which suggests that residence halls are merely a reprieve from the rigorous learning that happens inside the classroom; (b) the Market Model, which offers students the amenities they desire, but fails to provide any opportunities for faculty and staff involvement in facilitating cocurricular learning opportunities; and (c) the Learning Model, which consists of communities led by both faculty and student affairs professionals with the primary goal of promoting student learning. The Learning Model embodies what residential communities can be at their best and should be at Christian institutions: a place where students can not only reflect on what they are learning in the classroom, but where they can also explore their beliefs and ideas in a diverse community of peers, staff, and faculty.

In the Learning Model of residence life, residence halls are often governed by at least one professional student affairs staff member, known as a residence hall director, and sometimes by a faculty-in-residence as well. Residence hall directors and faculty-in-residence have the opportunity to act as coaches and mentors to students when they live in residence with them (Glanzer, 2013). Not only does this model encourage a level of comfort among students, staff, and faculty, but it also allows students to feel as though staff and faculty are in their domain, rather than the other way around. Shushok, Henry, Blalock, and Sriram (2009) advised, "engaging students in cocurricular activities and settings is a way to model the ideal of a community of learners in which students, faculty, and student affairs educators engage in serious inquiry, learning with and from one another" (p. 13). Baker and Griffin (2010) added, "Given that learning is a social process, relationships—especially those with faculty—are powerful tools that aid in students' personal and professional development" (p. 3). In the Learning Model of residence life, students have the opportunity to "become better and different human beings as a result of living on campus" (Cardone et al., 2013, p. 7). Residence life holds potential for Christian higher education institutions to transform lives through significantly increasing student–faculty interaction on campus.

The Importance of Student–Faculty Interaction

As higher education faces increased criticism from the public, the government, and even scholars in the academy (Hacker & Dreifus, 2010), costs are not the only target of criticism. Another growing concern is the role of faculty on college campuses. For example, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is commonly used on campuses to measure effective educational practices. Findings from this survey indicate that student–faculty interaction occurs the least frequently of all 10 engagement indicators (NSSE, 2014). As Hacker and Dreifus (2010) lamented, “lost on the Professorial Campus is the primacy of students” among the responsibilities of a faculty member (p. 15).

When faculty, staff, and students feel a sense of ownership, residential communities are well suited to promote the development of student–faculty relationships. However, much research suggests that out-of-class student–faculty interaction is lacking. Cotten and Wilson (2006) interviewed 49 undergraduate students of all classifications to better understand their contact with faculty members outside of the classroom and their interest in forming relationships with faculty members. They found that student–faculty interaction occurs infrequently outside of the classroom and that students most often initiate contact with faculty in regard to class content. Further, they found that students were often unaware of the positive benefits of forming relationships with faculty until their junior or senior year, at which point they were uncertain of the appropriate ways to initiate contact with faculty outside of the classroom. In the current paradigm of student–faculty interaction, many students see their relationship with faculty members as a potential risk in which a stronger relationship with a faculty member equates to heightened pressure to perform academically in that faculty member’s class, rather than an opportunity to form a relationship with a person who is invested in their overall learning and their quest to negotiate life’s big questions.

Campus leaders also face demands to improve student success on their campuses, whether in terms of retention, engagement, achievement, or learning. Instead of blaming faculty for the problems preventing the attainment of student success, some campuses turn to faculty for help with the solution. Rigorous studies demonstrate that increasing student–faculty interaction will positively and meaningfully increase student satisfaction, engagement, learning, the effort students put forth in their education, and the effort expended on cocurricular involvement (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2004). Student–faculty interaction influences increased academic motivation (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010), cooperation among peers (Garrett & Zabriskie, 2003), commitment to the institution (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011), openness to diversity (Reason, Cox, Quaye, & Terenzini, 2010), and self-concept and self-worth (Cotten & Wilson, 2006).

Because of the positive relationship between student–faculty interaction and student learning outcomes, colleges now invest in high-impact educational practices that serve to bring students and faculty together in intentional ways. Kuh (2008) defined high-impact educational practices as those that have been widely shown to benefit college students from an array of diverse backgrounds. Examples of high-impact educational practices include first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, undergraduate research opportunities, internships, and learning communities (Kuh, 2008). Each of these examples highlights an opportunity for students and faculty to interact with one another outside of the traditional classroom setting.

Potential of Partnerships Between Academic and Student Affairs

One example of such programs to improve student–faculty interaction is a growing movement to place faculty members and their families in student residential communities (Brower & Inkelas, 2010). Shushok et al. (2009) have offered three observations concerning the relationship between faculty and student affairs professionals in contemporary higher education: (a) faculty are not engaged in the cocurricular, (b) faculty and student affairs collaboration has been shown to support student learning, and (c) by working together, faculty and student affairs educators have the power to protect and promote the values inherent within a liberal education. Institutions that embrace the Learning Model of residence life (Shushok et al., 2011) create opportunities for collaboration among academic and student

affairs professionals in an effort to ultimately promote student–faculty interaction and subsequent student learning outcomes.

Faculty-in-residence programs offer select faculty members the unique opportunity to live and learn with students in student residential communities. They represent a specific opportunity for faculty service that both challenges student perceptions of faculty and increases the likelihood that faculty will develop meaningful and substantive relationships with students (Sriram, Shushok, Scales, & Perkins, 2011). Alongside their duties as faculty, faculty-in-residence take on extra responsibilities associated with life in a student residential community. They live full-time with their families in a home within the residence hall, where they provide both intellectual and social programming for students in the community as well as serve on the professional leadership team that governs the residence hall. In order for faculty-in-residence programs to make a substantial impact on learning outcomes, students must not only experience high-quality, frequent interactions with faculty members, but these interactions must also change the way that students perceive the faculty role (Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Mara & Mara, 2010; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

Cox and Orehovec (2007) studied student–faculty interaction in a residential college in which student–faculty interaction was a stated learning outcome. They found that even the students who were most involved in the community, however, were unlikely to have meaningful relationships with the faculty in the community. The majority of students in the community had no contact with faculty at all. The culture that stems from the mission of Christian institutions can potentially lead to more benefits from faculty in residential communities than what is experienced on secular campuses. For instance, although Cox and Orehovec’s study provides a helpful framework for describing the nature and frequency of student–faculty interaction in residential communities, it does not attempt to describe how student–faculty interaction actually occurs. To that end, a recent quantitative study by Sriram and McLevain (*in press*) provides a framework for understanding student–faculty interaction within faculty-in-residence programs. Sriram and McLevain surveyed more than 400 students in five residential colleges across the United States in an effort to develop a conceptual framework that conveys how student–faculty interaction occurs within faculty-in-residence programs. Their final framework suggests student–faculty interaction within faculty-in-residence programs is best described best through five factors: knowledge of the faculty-in-residence position, value of the faculty-in-residence position, academic interaction, social interaction, and deeper life interaction.

In their framework, Sriram and McLevain (*in press*) found that knowledge of the faculty-in-residence position leads to social and academic interaction between the student and faculty-in-residence. Social and academic interactions then lead the student to value the faculty-in-residence position, which ultimately leads the student and faculty-in-residence to engage in deeper life interactions. Sriram and McLevain’s research is noteworthy for two reasons: (a) it fills a gap in the literature, which currently lacks a model that describes how student–faculty interaction happens within faculty-in-residence programs; and (b) it introduces the concept of deeper life interaction. Deeper life interactions occur around life’s big questions and reflect a relationship on a more personal level (e.g., conversations about relationships, family, spirituality, and meaning-making). Deeper life interaction builds upon existing two-factor models of student–faculty interaction that suggest that student–faculty interaction occurs dichotomously as either academic or social (Kuh & Hu, 2001). Deeper life interaction is an empirically valid construct that reimagines student–faculty interaction as a forum for engaging students in conversations and experiences that help them better understand their meaning and purpose in life. Deeper life interaction is the type of interaction for which Christian institutions of higher education should be known, and the future of residence life on these campuses would benefit from a more intentional focus on cultivating these kinds of relationships between students and faculty.

Discussion

In his classic, *Beyond the Ivory Tower*, Bok (1984) discussed the critical role that institutions of higher education play in helping students become more thoughtful and perceptive about societal problems. He noted that the declining influence of families, churches, and grade schools coincides with the

potentially increasing influence of colleges and universities on the moral development of students. In the 19th century, colleges devoted themselves to the mission of developing students morally, giving meaning and purpose to students in addition to career advancement (Bok, 1984). Such devotion is no longer the case in higher education, and this loss is not just a loss for students. It is a loss for society.

Christian institutions are charged with helping their students better understand what it means to live out Christian values in their everyday lives. What makes Christian higher education unique in comparison to secular higher education? The answer extends beyond the classroom and into students' relationships with those around them. Higher education must not only teach students academic disciplines, but also give them the tools to navigate the meaning of their lives in relation to what they are learning (Tagg, 2004). The Christian narrative inherently provides a framework for what it means to live with meaning and purpose, and the future of residential programming can use that framework to create a uniquely Christian higher education experience for students.

Christian Higher Education as a Gateway to Moral and Spiritual Development

Ream and Glanzer (2013) have asserted that the differences between faith-based higher education and secular higher education can be discerned only when the preeminent question of how colleges hope to change students has been answered. Similar to secular institutions, Christian institutions desire to graduate hardworking citizens capable of contributing to a global world. In addition to producing successful, employed graduates, however, Christian colleges and universities endeavor to transform the lives of students in such a way that the higher education experience moves beyond the sphere of the intellect and into the realm of personal and spiritual development. Ream and Glanzer (2013) have suggested that, in Christian institutions, "the story guiding education should answer a number of fundamental questions about existence, history, knowledge, truth, meaning, and the good life that then informs an educational institution's purpose" (p. 2). A Christian institution seeks to help students realize their unique role in God's greater plan.

A foundational component of the Christian faith is a community that can help persons find their larger purpose within God's kingdom. For example, in Matthew 18:20, Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them" (English Standard Version), and Acts 2:42 documents that the early church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (English Standard Version). Residential communities on Christian college campuses can model the biblical ideal of community by presenting students with the opportunity to better know Christ through the experience of living among and knowing other students, faculty, and staff. When considered in the context of a Christian institution, the research documenting the effects of living on campus and student-faculty interaction offers important implications for how residential communities might provide a transformative experience for the students who live within them. When students develop authentic relationships with the faculty, staff, and other students in their residence hall, they can come to better know God and better understand His plan for their lives.

Christian institutions are distinguished from their secular counterparts by their support of a model of higher education that provides students an understanding of the world stretching beyond academic values and professional excellence. Christian colleges and universities seek to help students understand themselves within the context of the people, places, and programs that surround them (Glanzer, 2013). Perhaps most importantly, Christian higher education provides an overarching narrative upon which students can base their moral and spiritual development.

Palmer and Zajonc (2010) have argued that cultivating humanity is at the heart of higher education. As colleges and universities have become too pragmatic, they have lost sight of loftier and more meaningful ends of higher education: "Beyond academic and research excellence, universities have forgotten their main purpose, which is to help students learn who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives, and to leave college as better human beings" (p. 3). They have articulated a vision of higher

education that integrates all of the disciplines, with the ultimate end being not the achievement of academic mastery, but the becoming of more fully developed human beings through their experiences learning in community with those around them. Integrating the disciplines must also include integration between the curricular and cocurricular.

The Impact of Emerging Adulthood on the Future of Christian Higher Education

Despite a guiding narrative and the good intentions of faculty and administrators at Christian institutions, successfully facilitating moral and spiritual development within students presents an ongoing challenge. Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson, and Herzog (2011) have observed, “Few emerging adults talk about the value of a broad education for shaping people into informed and responsible citizens in civic life, for producing members and leaders of society who can work together toward the common good” (p. 102). In their five-year study of how students develop during college, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) suggested:

While higher education continues to put a lot of emphasis on test scores, grades, credits, and degrees, it has increasingly come to neglect its students’ “inner” development—the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and of self-understanding. (p. 2)

Successful efforts to cultivate meaning and purpose within students are a campus-wide effort. Spiritual development does not occur solely in the classroom or solely outside of it. Fostering students’ spiritual development is an opportunity throughout all levels of a student’s collegiate experience.

The role of mentors in this important process of spiritual development among emerging adults has been highlighted by Parks (2000), who acknowledges that the term *mentor* has been overused. Instead, Parks advocates that the term “is best reserved for a distinctive role in the story of human becoming” (p. 128). Mentorship involves recognizing the value of a particular student, supporting the development of the student’s potential, challenging the student to improve, inspiring the student that improvement is worth the hard work, and dialoguing with the student in such a way that, over time, the two become colleagues. The quality of individual young adult lives, as well as our collective future as a culture, depends upon the capacity to recognize the emerging competence of young adults, to introduce them to the big questions of life, and to give them access to worthy dreams (Parks, 2000).

As Parks (2000) outlined seven key environments where good mentorship can and should occur, the higher education environment was notable for the way in which it could provide multiple, smaller mentoring communities. The faculty member is not the only mentoring role on a college campus, but the student–faculty relationship is central to the educational experience of college students. Professors give more than their knowledge; they give their very selves. This giving of self can be acknowledged and embraced, or it can be denied and rejected. The critical problem with denial is that emerging adults desire mentorship, even if they may not convey that desire well.

Smith and Snell (2009) conducted what they believe to be the most comprehensive and reliable study of the lives of emerging adults in the United States today. Their research reaffirms the notion of *emerging adulthood* as a new life phase. Emerging adulthood is more than an in-between phase book-ended by high school and the “real world.” Rather, it is an independent stage of life characterized by “intense identity exploration, instability, a focus on self. . . and unparalleled hope” (p. 6). Smith and Snell described how four macro changes in American society led to the creation of emerging adulthood: (a) the rapid growth of enrollment in higher education, (b) the delay of marriage for young adults, (c) low job security and subsequent frequent job changes, and (d) the extension of parental financial support to children at older ages. These societal changes will continue to impact the future of higher education as they provide emerging adults with unprecedented freedom from traditional social expectations. Indeed, Smith and Snell noted that emerging adults “are determined to be free. But they do not know what is worth doing with their freedom” (p. 294). Christian higher education institutions are best equipped to help students determine what is worth doing with their freedom.

Research demonstrates that the way emerging adults make meaning affects decisions for many important aspects of life (Smith & Snell, 2009). Although many emerging adults may not take initiative

in their own meaning-making, they are surprisingly open to interest and investment by others. Through direct mentorship and the creation of opportunities to explore meaning and purpose, residential communities can help emerging adults develop in ways that fit the context and mission of any Christian campus. Preserving, or reclaiming, the transformative education possible in college must come from a concerted effort of Christian higher education institutions to encourage students and faculty to connect in deeper ways. Leadership within Christian colleges and universities cannot easily or quickly undo a century of change in higher education, but residential programs, including faculty-in-residence programs, can serve as a catalyst for needed change.

Recommendations for Reimagining the Residential Experience within Christian Higher Education

What makes a Christian college so special? Part of the answer lies in the future of residence life on Christian campuses. The positive impact of living on campus for college students is impressive both in terms of breadth and depth (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Therefore, institutions of Christian higher education would be wise to invest resources into residential communities, harness the potential of the peer resident assistant (RA) position, and implement faculty-in-residence programs.

Invest Resources into Residential Communities

Viewing residence life as the gateway to holistic learning and development can enable Christian higher education institutions to invest more intentionally in this transformational experience and require it of their students. Transformation takes time, and residential learning communities amplify the opportunities for transformation by increasing the amount of time students experience campus interventions. These communities, however, must be places that are designed for more than sleeping and eating (Shushok et al., 2011). To be most effective, they must become communities of learning (Shushok et al., 2009). Learning as the primary goal of residence life in Christian higher education would lead to the creation of living-learning programs that focus on common themes of interest or residential colleges that focus on interdisciplinary, multigenerational environments led by a live-in faculty member (O'Hara, 2001).

Attracting students to live on campus in places that emphasize learning may indeed require institutional investment in residential facilities. For most Christian institutions, fiscal resources are not readily available for significant remodeling of existing facilities or the building of new ones. Residential communities, however, are perhaps the only college facilities for which students directly pay. For example, students and their families do not directly pay for the use of a new academic building; the cost of building such facilities must come through tuition and other indirect revenues such as fees. Yet students and their families expect to pay for the places students live, allowing for residential communities to become more affordable for institutions to build than any other facility. In fact, residential communities will eventually bring in positive net revenue to the institution (Stoner & Cavins, 2003). The future of residence life on Christian campuses should include residence hall spaces that are designed primarily for learning and secondarily for sleeping and eating.

Harness the Potential of Peer Influence

Although extant research focuses on the positive benefits of student-faculty interaction (Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Komarraju et al., 2010; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2004), it is important to note that anyone within the university can have deeper life interactions with students. Of primary importance is the fact that students simply need to have deeper life interactions with someone. If an institution is to offer a truly transformative experience for its students, it is imperative that students engage in conversation about relationships, family, spirituality, and life's big questions. Such an endeavor requires support and guidance. Faculty, student affairs administrators, and peers can support students through deeper life interactions.

Resident assistants (RA) have a unique opportunity to engage their peers in deeper life interactions. Inherent within the RA role is the assumption that RAs will seek to help their residents know and be known. The role is powerful because it encourages RAs to develop strong relationships with their peers and provides them the training to do so effectively. Cardone et al. (2013) described how RAs might facilitate deeper life interactions with their residents using a residential curriculum as a framework. The framework asks RAs to have one-on-one conversations with each of their residents surrounding the four learning outcomes of the residential curriculum: academic success, interpersonal development, effective community engagement, and cultural competency. Frameworks such as this one set the stage for RAs to engage their residents in conversation surrounding life's big questions. Cardone et al. (2013) suggested that "each of these conversations situates learning in students' experiences, respects their thoughts and feelings, challenges them to think about who they are *in the moment*, and challenges them to entertain increased complexity" (p. 8). Residence life programming that more effectively utilizes the mentorship potential of experienced students on campus can help students navigate the adjustment to college and can provide opportunities for dialogue around the deeper issues of life.

Subsequently, part of the investment in residential communities that is critical to the future of Christian higher education is a reenvisioning of non-RA peer influence. Currently, many residence life programs at Christian higher education institutions follow the residential philosophy of their secular counterparts by separating first-year students from sophomores, juniors, and seniors. First-year students are often placed in unappealing dorms before moving into isolated apartments as sophomores or juniors. There is no research that demonstrates any positive benefits to segregating students residentially based upon classification. Such a structure may impede mentorship between students because students from different classifications do not have as many opportunities to interact informally. The future of residence life on Christian campuses should include multigenerational communities that harness the potential of peer influence and mentorship.

Create Faculty-in-Residence Programs

Just as peer mentoring can assist students in navigating the demands of college life, faculty-in-residence programs have the potential to directly impact students in positive ways while also sending a broader message about the importance of student-faculty interaction and mentorship. These interactions alone are likely not enough to significantly impact student learning outcomes, however, despite providing faculty with a venue for repeated formal and informal interaction with students. In order for faculty-in-residence programs to make a significant impact on learning outcomes, students must not only experience high-quality, frequent interactions with faculty members, but these interactions must also change the way that students perceive the faculty role. For example, Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) have noted from their research that students are unlikely to seek support or guidance from faculty in their traditional role as instructor. Yet when students perceive faculty as mentors who intentionally and actively engage in students' academic and social environments, faculty have greater opportunity to significantly influence the student experience (Garrett & Zabriskie, 2003).

As faculty seek to meet students where they are, both in their social and academic environments, these environments become less compartmentalized, allowing for social integration to occur in the classroom and academic integration to occur in residential communities. Incidental contact is likely to occur with high frequency, thus opening the door to functional interactions that can ultimately lead to the development of personal, mentor-mentee relationships (Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Mara & Mara, 2010). When faculty repeatedly initiate contact within the student environment (e.g., the residence hall or dining hall), students report that student-faculty barriers decrease as students are able to imagine the faculty member as a more relatable person outside of the formal structure of the classroom (Mara & Mara, 2010). This perception allows the faculty member to more readily adopt the role of mentor instead of instructor (Garrett & Zabriskie, 2003).

Parks (2000) found that students' most valued learning occurs with a teacher and a small group of students. Faculty-in-residence programs create a type of mentoring environment that communicates availability and intentionality even to those students who may not take advantage of the faculty

member's availability. Students are not the only ones to gain from such interactions, however. Faculty themselves report meaningful reflections upon their role as professors and numerous benefits from serving as faculty-in-residence (Sriram et al., 2011). They therefore become the strongest advocates for more opportunities on campus to bring students and faculty together in meaningful, natural ways. In consideration of this literature, faculty-in-residence programs are a means to significantly and positively impact the student experience, while also reconceptualizing the faculty role on campus. The future of residence life on Christian campuses should include meaningful faculty involvement within the residence hall, particularly through faculty-in-residence programs.

Conclusion

The future of Christian higher education is not certain, and faith-based institutions will need to continue to convince prospective students that the experiences they offer are worth the investment. What is missing in the discussion of what makes Christian higher education special is the transformational experience provided outside of the classroom. To this end, residential life and student affairs in Christian higher education is an area of untapped potential critical to the future of these campuses. When taking into account the lost role of service in the professoriate, the impact of living on campus on student success, and the importance of student–faculty interaction, it becomes evident that residential communities can be transformed into environments that offer an integrated, holistic education that is vital to the mission of Christian institutions.

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