The Role of a Roman Catholic Organization in Undergraduate Student Psychosocial Development, Identity Formation and Graduation Rates

Jacob M. Larson

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by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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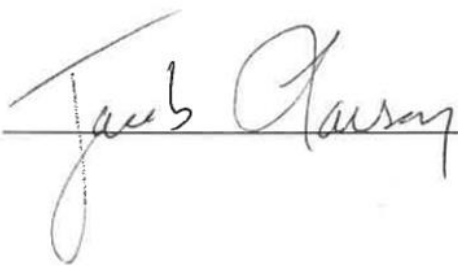
Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Jacob Michael Larson

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Abstract

The mixed-methods study investigated the psychosocial development, identity formation, and academic persistence of undergraduate students involved in a Roman Catholic student organization at a private, non-sectarian university. The research framed members' identity development in the context of Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory and Chickering and Reisser's Seven Vectors of Student Development. The qualitative research relied on interviews, a focus group, and field observations to gather data on members' psychosocial and identity development. Regarding psychosocial development, participants discussed that the organization helped them develop meaningful, intimate relationships. Participants also highlighted that the organization helped them to develop intellectual competence, discover purpose through religious participation, form identities structured in Catholic beliefs, and become tolerant in their relationships.

Additionally, the study investigated the graduation rates of Roman Catholic student organization members compared to other student religious organizations, the university's six-year graduate rate, and students who self-identified as Roman Catholic. The quantitative analysis used a test of homogeneity of proportions and a series of two-sample z-tests for difference in proportions to compare graduation rates. Based on the analysis, the graduation rates of members were significantly higher than the university's six-year graduation rate. However, graduation rates of members were not significantly different from students who self-identified as Roman Catholic. The statistical analysis also found mixed results for graduation rates of members compared to other religious groups.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Institutions in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape strive to remain financially viable, increase student retention rates, prepare students for a globalized economy, and improve student graduation outcomes. Although researchers have extensively studied the importance of students' engagement in retention (Astin, 1984/1999, 1993; Tinto; 1993, 2012a), students' psychosocial and identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and students' religious faith and spiritual development (Astin et al., 2011; Fowler, 1995; Parks, 1986), minimal research has considered how these components work together to improve students' development and graduation rates. This mixed-methods study investigated the role of students' social involvement in an on-campus religious organization on psychosocial and identity development. Also, the study aimed to learn if students' religious organization involvement contributed to students' academic persistence and how matriculation outcomes were affected by students' participation in religious-based organizations. Overall, the chapter explores the background of the study, the purpose of the study, the rationale of the study, essential definitions, and the study's research questions and hypotheses.

Background of Study

Undergraduate students' psychosocial and identity development are vital to the college student experience (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Martin, 2000; Prather et al., 2018). College provides students with the opportunity to explore their identities and transition into adulthood (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Erik Erikson (1964/1994c), the originator of Psychosocial Development Theory, described the monumental task adolescents face as they become adults:

> Like a trapeze artist, the young person in the middle of vigorous motion must let
> go of his safe hold on childhood, and reach out for a form grasp on adulthood,
> depending for a breathless interval on the relatedness between the past and the
> future, and the reliability of those he must let go of, and those who will receive
> him. (p. 90)

Like Erikson, Chickering and Reisser (1993) sought to understand the psychosocial development of college students. Chickering and Reisser created the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development Theory, a non-linear approach to understanding how college students construct their identity, integrate themselves into society, and engage in meaningful relationships with other people. Understanding college students' psychosocial and identity development is critical to developing a higher education environment that encourages student involvement and increases their sense of belonging on university campuses (Astin, 1984/1999; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Martin et al., 2000; Prather et al., 2018; Tinto, 1993).

In addition to creating an environment that supports students' development, higher educational institutions are concerned with retention, graduation rates, and academic persistence (Berger et al., 2012; Morrison & Silverman, 2012; Tinto, 1993, 2012a). Not only does student retention affect institutions' financial health and success, but successful student retention affects institutional programs, support structures, and accountability (Rebore, 2015; Tinto, 2012a). Recent research from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and the National Center for Education Statistics at the Institute of Education Sciences (2021a, 2021b) provides an overview of current retention and graduation rates in the United States. In 2018, 76% of first-time freshmen returned to

college for their sophomore year, consistent every year from 2015 to 2018 (National

Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020, p. 1). The persistence rate was higher at

private non-profit four-year institutions, which experienced an 87.2% persistence rate

between Fall 2018 and Fall 2019 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center,

2020, p. 10). Similarly, 63% of students at four-year institutions who started a bachelor's

degree program in Fall 2013 had graduated from the same institution within six years

(Irwin et al., 2021, p. 26). The graduation rate at private non-profit institutions was

slightly higher at 68% (Irwin et al., 2021, p. 26).

   Tinto (1993) proposed a model for institutional departure to understand why

students leave higher education. In the proposed model, Tinto highlighted the importance

of formal and informal social systems to keep students in school and help them persist to

graduation. Later, Tinto (2012a) discussed the need for institutions to create conditions,

including expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement to provide

students with an environment to aid persistence. Moreover, Tinto (2012a) identified the

importance of student engagement and participation in improving retention while helping

students find meaning and a sense of belonging on college campuses.

   Prior research has also examined the importance of college students' religious and

spiritual life (Astin et al., 2011). While some universities have embraced and encouraged

students' religious and spiritual nature, other institutions have intentionally or

unintentionally avoided encouraging students' spiritual and religious development (Miller

& Ryan, 2001). Researchers like Fowler (1995, 2000) and Parks (1986, 2000) have

created frameworks for understanding college students' faith development and their

search for meaning in life. Similarly, Chickering et al. (2006) emphasized the need for

institutions to increase support for students' spirituality and religiosity and provide an

academic, social, and structural environment that encourages students to investigate

religious and spiritual development. Later, Astin et al. (2011) and Lindholm et al. (2011)

encouraged higher education institutions to support college students' search for meaning

and purpose in life while also helping students engage in religious and spiritual pursuits.

However, minimal research has examined the practical applications of specific on-

campus religious groups and their role in students' psychosocial development and

academic persistence.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to research the perceived efficacy of undergraduate students'

religious organizational involvement on psychosocial development, identity

development, and academic persistence. Specifically, the study examined undergraduate

student involvement in a Roman Catholic student organization (RCSO) at a private, non-

sectarian university in the Midwestern United States. The study utilized a mixed-methods

approach that investigated the participants' experience using open-ended, semi-structured

interviews, a focus group, and observations of the RCSO (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

The qualitative research occurred during the Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 academic

terms. The study relied on participants' experiences to understand the applicability of

student identity development theories, including Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Seven

Vectors of Student Identity Development. The research allowed undergraduate students

to share their perspectives on their involvement in an undergraduate religious

organization and its effect on psychosocial and identity development. Audio-recorded

interviews and focus groups were transcribed and coded for thematic responses (Fraenkel

et al., 2015). Likewise, the researcher coded observation notes and looked for thematic responses based on participants' behaviors and conversations.

Additionally, the quantitative research compared the historical graduation rates of undergraduate students involved in campus religious organizations between 2012 and 2020. The researcher utilized a test of the homogeneity of proportions and a series of two-sample z-tests of proportions to compare graduation rates of students registered as members of the RCSO to members of other university-recognized student religious organizations, the general student population, and undergraduate students who self-identified as Roman Catholic. The researcher collected student rosters from the university's Office of Student Involvement, prepared the data, and submitted the data to Institutional Research to anonymize the data. Likewise, the university's Chaplain provided anonymized student religious self-identification data to incorporate into the statistical analysis.

The study aimed to provide a practical application of students' involvement in a religious-based student organization and the role students' religious engagement plays in psychosocial development and graduation rates. The study also aimed to allow students to share their perspectives while directly benefiting from participating in the qualitative research. Prior research has shown that research participants benefited from participating in one-to-one qualitative interviews, including direct benefits like catharsis, self-acknowledgment, self-awareness, empowerment, a sense of purpose, and healing (Hutchinson et al., 1994). Qualitative interviews also provided participants with a caring environment to share their experiences and feel heard (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The

study also offered participants a chance to engage in self-reflection while meaningfully

sharing their university experiences.

Additionally, the research aimed to provide an opportunity for student-run

campus religious organizations, religious governing bodies, higher education

administrators, and student affairs professionals to review the role of religious student

organizations on psychosocial development, identity development, and academic

persistence. The research allowed institutional stakeholders to learn from participants'

perceptions and experiences about a student religious organization's role in identity

development and academic persistence. Similarly, the study provided stakeholders with

data to evaluate the effectiveness and value of student participation in campus religious

organizations on graduation rates.

Rationale of the Study

Historically, religion played a significant role in the founding and expansion of

higher education in the United States (Thelin, 2019). Christianity, specifically

Protestantism, affected university hiring decisions, curriculum, and admissions decisions

(Thelin, 2019). Protestant-affiliated institutions provided a Christian-informed

educational experience and culture for college students. Private and public universities

emphasized a Christian-informed university experience (Grubiak, 2012). However, in the

1960s, American higher education began to mirror American society's increasing

religious pluralism and secularization. During this time, the United States experienced

increased immigration, multiculturalism, and the Civil Rights Movement (Stamm, 2003,

2006). Similarly, the judicial system expanded case law emphasizing the significance of

the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause as outlined in the First

Amendment (Walters, 2001). Universities responded to increased religious pluralism and secularization by emphasizing equal access to all religious organizations and focusing on students' spiritual development (Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001; Walters, 2001).

Today, religious campus organizations, including Christian organizations, the Muslim Student Association, and Hillel, have experienced revitalization and expansion (Schmalzbauer, 2013). The religious resurgence has increased student attendance, donations, and building development (Schmalzbauer, 2013). At the same time, student interest in spirituality has increased on college campuses (Greenway, 2006; Laurence & Kazanjian, 200l; Stamm, 2003). Research has shown that college students' religious and spiritual involvement positively affects students' academic work ethic, helps students develop a purpose in life, and contributes to students' leadership capacity (Black, 2017; De Soto et al., 2018; Greenway, 2006). Likewise, Chickering et al. (2006) evaluated the role of higher education in college students' religious and spiritual development and encouraged university administrators to embrace college students' religious and spiritual development to help students find meaning and purpose.

Students' journeys to finding meaning in life have expanded past a religious-focused interest into an unaffiliated spiritual interest or exploration of faith. For example, Fowler (1995; 2000) and Parks (1986; 2000) researched the importance of faith development and finding meaning in life. Later, Astin et al. (2011) extensively researched college students' religious involvement and spiritual growth. In *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives*, Astin et al. created a framework for understanding college students' religious and spiritual involvement. The longitudinal research created and utilized the College Student's Beliefs and Values (CSBV) Survey

and consisted of a multi-year study with more than 112,000 students (Astin et al., 2011, p. 19).

Based on participants' responses, Astin et al. summarized ten constructs from the outcome of their research. The first set of constructs measured students' spirituality, which included the "spiritual quest," "equanimity," "ethic of caring," "charitable involvement," and an "ecumenical worldview" (Astin et al., 2011, pp. 20-21). The second set of constructs measured the student's religiousness and included a student's "religious commitment," "religious engagement," "religious/social conservatism," "religious struggle," and "religious skepticism" (Astin et al., 2011, pp. 21-22). Together, these measures expressed the importance of students' spiritual and religious development throughout the college experience. Overall, spiritual and religious growth contribute to positive outcomes for college students, including a better understanding of oneself and finding meaning in life.

Institutional support of students' psychosocial development is imperative to student development and campus engagement. Initially, Erik Erikson's (1950/1993) Psychosocial Development Theory defined specific crises individuals encounter throughout their lifespan. Two crises, identity versus identity confusion and intimacy versus isolation, occur during late adolescence and early adulthood and coincide with traditional college-aged students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 22). Later, Chickering and Reisser (1993) adapted Erikson's (1950/1993) Psychosocial Development Theory to create the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development. Chickering and Reisser's framework thoroughly understood student identity development and higher education's role in supporting students' identity development. The seven non-linear areas, or vectors,

of student development, included "developing competence," "managing emotions," "moving through autonomy toward interdependence," "developing mature interpersonal relationships," "establishing identity," "developing purpose," and "developing integrity" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, pp. 38-39). Student communities, friendships, institutional size, faculty-student relationships, and curriculum significantly assist students' development through these vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Finally, comprehensive research has contributed to higher education's understanding of college students' persistence, retention, and completion rates (Astin 1984/1999; Morrison & Silverman, 2012; Spady, 1970; Summerskill, 1962; Tinto, 1993, 1997, 2012a). Existing research on student persistence has investigated several factors that affect persistence, including student involvement, student engagement, classroom learning communities, institutional programming, and student community support (Hu, 2010; Peltier et al., 1999; Tinto, 1997, 2012a). Tinto's (1993) Model of Institutional Departure and Astin's (1984/1999) Student Involvement Theory were critical in conceptualizing student involvement and engagement in student persistence and institutional retention. Although existing research demonstrates that social support benefits college students' persistence, minimal qualitative research is available on the social or academic support available to students from on-campus religious organizations or communities.

Definitions

Attrition

"Attrition is the diminution in numbers of students resulting from lower student retention" (Hagedorn, 2006, p. 6). Attrition reflects the number of students who

discontinue a program of study or leave a university before completing a program

(Crosling et al., 2008).

Campus religious organizations

For the purpose of this study, campus religious organizations are student-led

campus organizations that are religiously affiliated or supported. Campus religious

organizations support the religiousness and spiritual development of university students.

These organizations may or may not have a permanent physical location or meeting space

on campus.

Faith

Faith "is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relation to

transcendence . . . an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goals to one's

hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions" (Fowler, 1995, p. 14).

Persistence

Persistence is the students' measure and perspective of retention in higher

education (Hagedorn, 2006). Student persistence is the student's motivation to remain

enrolled to complete a program of study. In other words, "Persistence is a function of the

match between an individual's motivation and academic ability and the institution's

academic and social characteristics" (Cabrera et al., 1992, p. 144).

Private, non-sectarian higher educational institution

A private, non-sectarian higher educational institution is any private

postsecondary institution not directly affiliated with a specific religious organization.

Historically, religious organizations financially and structurally supported non-sectarian

institutions. However, the institutions' religious identity or heritage remains a part of the institutions' campus, either formally or informally (Crocker, 2009).

Psychosocial development

Psychosocial development is "the development of human being's cognitive, emotional, intellectual, and social capabilities and functioning over the course of a normal life span…" (Britannica, 2020, para. 1). Psychosocial development consists of eight crises an individual experiences throughout a lifespan, including trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and ego integrity versus despair (Erikson, 1950/1993).

Religiousness

Religiousness is the "adherence to a set of faith-based beliefs (and related practices) concerning both the origins of the world and the nature of the entity or being that is believed to have created and govern the world" (Astin et al., 2011, p. 5).

Retention

"Retention refers to the proportion of students who enroll and remain enrolled at a particular institution" (Crosling et al., 2008, p. 2). In other words, retention is the "continued enrollment (or degree completion) within the same higher education institution in the fall terms of a student's first and second year" (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020, p. 16).

Roman Catholic Student Organization

A Roman Catholic student organization (RCSO) is a campus-based student organization, like John Henry Neman Centers, that is religiously affiliated with the

Roman Catholic Church and financially and administratively supported by a local

Catholic diocese. Catholic student organizations provide college students with pastoral

and community support, religious education, evangelization opportunities, interfaith

dialogue, and leadership development (Day & Kawentel, 2020).

Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development

The Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development is a theoretical approach to

understanding students' psychosocial and identity development during a program of

study. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theoretical approach considers student

development through seven non-linear vectors, including "developing competence,"

"managing emotions," "moving through autonomy toward interdependence,"

"developing mature interpersonal relationships," "establishing identity," "developing

purpose," and "developing integrity" (pp. 38-39).

Spirituality

Spirituality is the "inner, subjective life" that is in contrast to the "objective

domain of observable behavior and material objects that [individuals] can point to and

measure directly" (Astin et al., 2011, p. 4). Astin et al. (2011) stated that spirituality is the

"values we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs

about why we are here." (p. 4).

Limitations

The mixed-methods study had several limitations, including a convenience

sample of participants, data collection interruptions, and the researcher's bias. First, the

qualitative methodology was limited to a convenience sample of college students

involved in an undergraduate student organization at a mid-sized, non-sectarian

university in the Midwest United States. During recruitment, the researcher required that participants be undergraduate students enrolled at the university, at least 18 years of age at the beginning of the study, and had participated in two or more activities with a Catholic student organization per semester.

The university's COVID-19 mitigation policies also limited the study's qualitative data collection. The COVID-19 mitigation policies impacted room availability, the maximum group size for in-person meetings, and the ability for participants to meet in person. COVID policies and related disruptions impacted the researcher's ability to schedule interviews and attend group observation. To accommodate these challenges, the researcher extended the anticipated time frame to gather qualitative data, rescheduled interviews, and met all participants in a standardized, socially distant room for interviews.

Finally, researcher bias potentially limited the study during data collection and analysis. To mitigate researcher bias, the researcher standardized the qualitative research methodology to minimize the effect of bias. For instance, the researcher standardized a form for observation field notes and created interview questions that relied on participants' perceptions and experiences. Likewise, the researcher triangulated data, including group observations, focus groups, and interviews, which improved the study's validity and credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cropley, 2019). The researcher also used reflexivity to acknowledge biases and personal experiences that potentially impacted qualitative data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Questions

Research Question 1

What role does undergraduate students' involvement in a Catholic student organization play in student psychosocial development?

Research Question 1a. What psychosocial crises are evident in undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization?

Research Question 1b. How do undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization experience the development of meaningful, intimate relationships?

Research Question 2

What is the perceived impact of undergraduate students' involvement in a Catholic student organization on student identity development?

Research Question 2a. How do undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization perceive identity development?

Research Question 2b. Which vectors of the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development Theory do undergraduate students perceive most influenced by participation in a Catholic student organization?

Research Question 2c. Which vectors of the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development Theory do undergraduate students perceive to be minimally influenced by participation in a Catholic student organization?

Research Question 3

What is the perceived role of undergraduate student involvement in a Catholic student organization on student academic persistence?

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is a difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to the overall undergraduate student graduation rate at the institution.

Hypothesis 2

There is a difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to undergraduate students who self-identify as Catholic but are not involved in the Catholic student organization.

Hypothesis 3

There is a difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to undergraduate students involved in other student religious organizations.

Summary

Overall, the mixed-methods study explored undergraduate students' perceptions of their identity development and academic persistence by conducting interviews, focus groups, and observations with students involved in a Roman Catholic organization at a private, non-sectarian university. Additionally, the study conducted an inferential statistical analysis of graduation data from students engaged in religious-based student organizations to determine if a relationship exists between graduation rates and religious participation. The ensuing chapter covers a detailed overview of the historical backgrounds, theoretical frameworks, and current discussions on students' identity development, religious involvement, and retention.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

The literature review aims to provide a thorough understanding and application of undergraduate students' psychosocial and identity development, students' spiritual and religious involvement, and retention in higher education. First, the review considers the theoretical framework and implementation of psychosocial and identity development of undergraduate students. Then, the literature review examines the historical perspective, theoretical frameworks, and practices of spirituality and religiosity in higher education in the United States. Finally, the review assesses the historical trends and current student retention issues in higher education.

Psychosocial and Identity Development

Students' psychosocial and identity development have played an integral role in higher education (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Josselson, 1987; Marcia, 1966; Sanford, 1968). Initially created by Erik Erikson (1950/1993), the Psychosocial Development Theory considered an individual's development and crisis resolution throughout their lifespan. Psychosocial development has essential applications for higher education to understand the identity growth and development of traditionally college-aged young adults during the university experience (Carruthers et al., 2010; Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Renn, 2020; Swanson et al., 2021). Through the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development, Chickering and Reisser (1993) refined Erikson's (1950/1993) Psychosocial Theory to understand how students form and refine their identities during college. Overall, psychosocial and identity development has played a vital role in student affairs practice and understanding student development in extra-curricular or co-curricular structures (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Prather et al., 2018; Wise, 2019).

Creation and Development of Psychosocial Development

Erik Eriksons' Psychosocial Theory. Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development

Theory is critical to understanding social and cognitive development throughout an

individual's lifespan. Based on Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and psychosexual stages,

Erikson outlined eight sequential stages that occur during an individual's life (Erikson,

1950/1993, 1959/1994a, 1968/1994b). Chickering and Reisser (1993) succinctly

summarized Erikson's Psychosocial Theory as a series of challenges that "are

systematically presented when physical growth and cognitive maturation converge with

environmental demands" (p. 22). During these stages, individuals face a developmental

crisis that "can lead to progress, regression, standstill or recurring bouts with the same

issue in a new context" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 22). Figure 1 lists the

developmental stages and psychosocial crises resolved during each step.

Figure 1

Erik Erikson's Stages Psychosocial of Development

Developmental Stage	Approximate Age	Psychosocial Crisis
Infancy	Birth to 1 year	Trust v. Mistrust
Early Childhood	1-3	Autonomy v. Shame/Doubt
Play Age	3-6	Initiative v. Guilt
School Age	6-12	Industry v. Inferiority
Adolescence	12-19	Identity v. Identity Diffusion (Role Confusion)
Young Adult	19-25	Intimacy v. Isolation
Adulthood	25-50	Generativity v. Self-Absorption
Mature Age	50+	Integrity v. Disgust/Despair

Note: Information adapted from Erikson, E. H. (1993). *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). W.W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1950)

The stages concerning identity versus identity diffusion and intimacy versus

isolation are prevalent in examining the identity development of traditional college-aged,

emerging adults (Arnett, 2000; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1950/1993). First,

Erikson (1950/1993) reasoned that identity versus identity diffusion occurs during

adolescence and is concerned with the individual developing identity and a sense of self.

Individuals form the virtue of fidelity as they solve the crisis and learn how their identity

relates to their various life roles and interactions with others.

Then, Erikson (1950/1993) discussed the importance of individuals developing

intimate relationships instead of settling in isolation. Erikson (1950/1993) defined

intimacy as more than sexual intimacy between partners. Instead, intimacy is "the

capacity to commit himself to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop the

ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant

sacrifices and compromises" (Erikson, 1950/1993, p. 263). Otherwise, an individual's

"fear of ego loss can lead to isolation and distantiation" (Erikson, 1950/1993, p. 264).

Individuals develop the virtue of love by resolving this crisis and creating meaningful

relationships with other people.

Application of Psychosocial Theory. Erikson's (1950/1993) Psychosocial

Theory has impacted various fields of study, including identity formation, faith

development, and feminist theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fowler, 1995; Josselson,

1987; Marcia, 1966; Orenstein & Lewis, 2021). Further, Sanford (1968) applied

Erikson's (1950/1993) Psychosocial Theory to college students. Sanford indicated that

sequential changes or stages of personality development were dependent on two factors.

First, the student must be ready for change, including attending college and engaging in

the classroom. Second, personality development occurs once an introduced stimulus

upsets the "existing equilibrium" (Sanford, 1968, p. 54). The individual adapts to the new

stimulus because of their existing state of readiness.

Two additional theorists, Marcia (1966) and Josselson (1987), further adapted Erikson's (1950/1993) Psychosocial Development Theory. First, Marcia operationalized Erikson's (1950/1993) theory as a process of crises and commitments. Marcia (1966) suggested that the identity development process included four identity formation outcomes: "identity diffusion," "foreclosure," "moratorium," and "identity achievement" (pp. 557-558). Of note, the "identity achievement" stage means that the individual has experienced a developmental crisis and made a meaningful commitment (Marcia, 1966, p. 557). Then, Josselson (1987) addressed the limitations of Erikson's (1950/1993) and Marcia's (1966) research and expanded the use of identity development theory to include women attending college. Josselson (1987) focused on women successfully achieving identity development through "anchoring," or connecting and attaching with others during and after college (p. 174). Josselson indicated that women anchored with the primary family, husband/children, career, or friendships. Josselson (1987) concluded, "Identity is an amalgamation and integration of these anchor points" (p. 178).

Arnett (2000) also adapted Erikson's (1950/1993) work and identified another stage in life, "emerging adulthood," which occurs between 18 and 25 years old (p. 469). Emerging adulthood is a distinct stage of development from adolescence and adulthood. During emerging adulthood, individuals develop self-sufficiency and continue to explore identity. Arnett (2000) suggested emerging adults explore identity in love, work, and worldviews. Arnett (2000) stated that for emerging adults, "Identity formation involves trying out various life possibilities and gradually moving toward making enduring decisions" (p. 473). Later, Weisskirch (2018) applied psychosocial theory using Arnett's definition of emerging adulthood and found that psychosocial intimacy positively impacts

emerging adults' well-being and self-esteem. Weisskirch (2018) summarized that not only did identity achievement predict intimacy, but young adults experienced "personal enhancement" and avoided "negative psychological outcomes" after developing intimate relationships (p. 3502).

Chickering and Reisser's Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development

Erikson's (1950/1993) Psychosocial Theory was further adapted and expanded by Chickering (1969) and later revised by Chickering and Reisser (1993) to understand the identity development of college-aged students. Chickering and Reisser (1993) identified seven vectors of student development, which the authors described as "major highways for journeying toward individuation—the discovery and refinement of one's unique way of being—and also toward communion with other individuals and groups" (p. 35). Instead of addressing age-specific crises or a sequential developmental pattern, Chickering and Reisser proposed a flexible, nonlinear developmental theory recognizing that college students' development occurs at variable rates and phases. Figure 2 provides an overview of the Seven Vectors of Identity Development.

Figure 2

Chickering and Reisser's Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development

Developing Competence
Managing Emotions
Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence
Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships
Establishing Identity
Developing Purpose
Developing Integrity

Note: Information adapted from Chickering, A.W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Developing Competence. Chickering and Reisser (1993) described competence as a "three-tined pitchfork" where "intellectual competence, physical and manual skills,

and interpersonal competence are the tines" (p. 53). Specifically, Chickering and Reisser

considered intellectual competence as a student's extent to "master content, acquiring

aesthetic appreciation and cultural interests, and . . . developing the ability to reason,

solve problems, weigh evidence, think originally, and engage in active learning" (pp. 53-

54). At the same time, physical competence involves mastery of the body for

performance and self-expression, and interpersonal competence involves gaining

communication skills to relate to and build relationships with others. Ultimately,

increased competence helps students to "take risks, try new things, and to take one's

place among peers as someone not perfect, but respectable as a work in progress"

(Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 82).

Managing Emotions. Next, Chickering and Reisser (1993) considered the

importance of students developing the ability to manage emotions appropriately. During

this vector, Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested that students must first learn to

acknowledge and become aware of their feelings while "learning flexible control and

appropriate means of expression or integration" (p. 88). Likewise, students must develop

the ability to balance negative and positive emotions. Chickering and Reisser (1993)

stated, "Developing balance, control, and appropriate expression involved practicing new

skills, learning coping techniques, directing feelings toward constructive action,

becoming more flexible and spontaneous, and seeking out rewarding and meaningful

experiences" (p. 88).

Moving through autonomy toward interdependence. Then, Chickering and

Reisser (1993) discussed the importance of students developing autonomy and

interdependent relationships. The movement toward autonomy and self-sufficiency

"requires both emotional and instrumental independence, and later recognition and acceptance of interdependence" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 47). Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated, "Developing autonomy culminates in the recognition that one cannot operate in a vacuum and that greater autonomy enables healthier forms of interdependence" (p. 47). Interdependence helps students to respect the autonomy of others while building relationships based on "reciprocal respect" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 145).

    Developing mature interpersonal relationships. In this vector, Chickering and Reisser (1993) described the vital role relationships have in students' lives. Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated that developing mature interpersonal relationships "involves rebalancing these needs for autonomy and attachment—moving from distance to closeness in some cases and from intimacy to separation in others" (p. 145). The vector also considered the "tolerance and appreciation of differences" and the "capacity for intimacy" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 146). As students move through this vector, they become more vulnerable in their relationships, develop greater tolerance of others, and learn to balance time between relationships and oneself appropriately. Developing mature relationships gives students the "ability to choose healthy relationships and make lasting commitments based on honesty, responsiveness, and unconditional regard" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48).

    Establishing Identity. Identity development is a critical convergence of the initial vectors for college students. Chickering and Reisser (1993) identified seven components for students to develop identity, including "comfort with body and appearance," "comfort with gender and sexual orientation," "sense of self in a social,

historical, and cultural context," "clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style," "sense of self in response to feedback from valued others," "self-acceptance and self-esteem," and "personal stability and integration" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 49). Additionally, Chickering and Reisser (1993) outlined that a student's journey to establish identity consisted of the student defining "self as part of a religious or cultural tradition" and finding roles in life that are "genuine expresses of self" (p. 49).

Developing Purpose. Next, Chickering and Reisser (1993) described the importance of students developing purpose in life, including "an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans, and to persist despite obstacles" (p. 209). When developing purpose, students focus on "vocational plans and aspirations, personal interests, and interpersonal and family commitments" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 212). The intentionality behind students' decision-making and pursuit of a vocation are hallmarks of students' development. Overall, students clarify purpose by finding "an anchoring set of assumptions about what is true, principles that define what is good, and beliefs that provide meaning" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 234).

Developing Integrity. Finally, Chickering and Reisser (1993) discussed the students developing integrity, which is related to establishing identity and developing purpose. Chickering and Reisser (1993) identified three sequential, overlapping steps to this vector, including "humanizing values," "personalizing values," and "developing congruence" (p. 51). Chickering and Reisser (1993) defined humanizing values as the shifting "from a literal belief in the absoluteness of rules to a more relative view, where connections are made between rules and the purpose they serve" (p. 51). At the same

time, the authors defined personalizing values as "consciously affirming core values and beliefs while respecting other points of view" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 51). Personalizing values leads to the development of congruence, where students' behaviors are consistent with personal values.

Previous research has investigated the application of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory to understand students' development, peer relationships, and neurobiological development. (Blimling, 2013, Holmes et al., 2004; Macari et al., 2005; Martin, 2000; Prather et al., 2018). Specifically, Prather et al. (2018) studied the psychosocial outcomes of students participating in a collegiate agricultural co-curricular activity. In the study, Prather et al. found that all seven vectors of development applied to students. However, the vectors of developing competence, mature interpersonal relationships, and purpose were most relevant for students.

Moreover, Martin (2000) highlighted a longitudinal study assessing the role of college experiences on students' psychosocial development, as outlined by Chickering and Reisser. The study examined students' self-reported psychosocial development measures during their first and senior years in college. Martin summarized that the study's results partially supported Chickering and Reisser's vectors of development. The study suggested a "clear relationship" existed between students' development of purpose and sense of competence, student-faculty interactions, and student communities formed through campus organizations (Martin, 2000, p. 299). Significantly, Martin suggested the study did not find support for the Chickering and Reisser's vector of developing mature interpersonal relationships.

Psychosocial and Identity Development Outcomes in Higher Education

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) developmental theory has also significantly influenced student affairs practice and program implementation (Patton et al., 2016; Wise, 2019). Institutions have applied Chickering and Reisser's vectors of development to student affairs practices, including first-year programs, advising programs, and mental health intervention support (Wise, 2019). Chickering and Reisser (1993) also suggested seven influences to help higher education promote student development: institutional objectives, institutional size, student-faculty relationships, curriculum, instruction, friendship and communities, and student development services. Moreover, Chickering and Reisser (1993) hypothesized that if student development professionals worked "collaboratively with faculty," institutional staff would "increase the direct and indirect impact of programs and services on students' movement along all vectors" (p. 277).

Although universities have limited financial resources for student development programming, students' psychosocial and identity development provides positive classroom outcomes through campus co-curricular engagement (Swanson et al., 2021). Previous research has shown that psychosocial development helps students academically, including improved cumulative GPA and academic persistence (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013; Swanson et al., 2021). Additional research has shown a positive outcome between students' psychosocial development and engagement in extracurricular organizations or peer groups (Carruthers et al., 2010; Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Renn, 2020). Finally, psychosocial and identity development have positively affected college student health and well-being (Hardy et al., 2021; Robino & Foster, 2018).

Since Chickering and Reisser's (1993) focus on the psychosocial development of students, further research has looked at students' social identity development and the

intersectionality of identity. Prior research has considered the social identity development of students, including their racial identity, disability identity, sexual orientation, and gender diversity (Castillo, 2017; Chan et al., 2017; Cisneros, 2017; Phipps, 2017). Increasingly, student identity development has emphasized a need for institutions to understand the intersectionality of student identity (Torres et al., 2009; Wijeyesinghe, 2019). Wijeyesinghe (2019) summarized that intersectionality is "a complex intertwining of socially constructed categories such as race, gender, age, gender identity, economic status, sexual orientation, ability, and nationality" (p. 27). Further, Torres et al. (2009) reviewed existing literature on the intersectionality of student identity and found that researchers have focused on students' perceptions of identity and the "greater fluidity within identity categories" (p. 591).

Spirituality and Religiosity in Higher Education

Higher educational institutions are integral in fostering students' spiritual and religious development (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering et al., 2006; Lindholm et al., 2011). Since their inception, universities have transformed from primarily sectarian, Protestant-affiliated institutions intended to provide Christian education (Sloan, 1994; Thelin, 2019). Today, universities are increasingly diverse, multicultural environments composed of students with various religious or spiritual backgrounds, beliefs, and practices (Bowman & Small, 2010; Schmalzbauer, 2013; Snipes & Manson, 2020). The religious plurality and secularization of higher educational institutions have led to the hesitancy of intuitions in supporting college students' spiritual development and religious involvement (Astin et al., 2011; Stamm, 2006; Walters, 2001).

However, universities have played a significant role in students' religious and spiritual formation and in supporting students' search for meaning and purpose in life (Astin et al., 2011; Parks, 2000). Astin et al. (2011) indicated that incoming first-year students expected to engage in spiritual development in college: "More than eight in ten report that 'to find my purpose in life' is at least 'somewhat' important reason for attending college" (p. 3). Likewise, Astin et al. (2011) reported, "Two-thirds of new freshmen say that it is either 'very important' or 'essential' that college 'helps you develop your personal values' and enhances your 'self-understanding'" (p. 3). Prior research has evaluated the challenge and opportunity for universities, administrators, and faculty to take actionable steps to support students' spirituality, religiosity, and faith development (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fowler, 1995; Parks, 2000).

History of Spirituality and Religiosity in Higher Education

Historically, university religious affiliation impacted students' spiritual development and religious involvement (Marsden, 1992; Thelin, 2019). Christian religious affiliation was foundational in creating higher educational institutions in the United States. In early Colonial America, Protestant affiliation affected the creation of colleges, university hiring decisions, curriculum, and admissions decisions (Thelin, 2019). Early, Protestant-affiliated colleges created an environment that provided students with a Christian-informed educational experience and culture. For example, Thelin (2019) described, "The Puritans as college-founders were committed to a rigorous, demanding education of young men who would become Christian gentlemen" (p. 24). The assumption that the university should provide a student formation and educational experience informed by Christian beliefs remained present in higher education through

the 18th century and into the late 19th century (Longfield, 1992a; Marsden, 1992; Sloan,

1994).

Marsden (1992) wrote, "Since higher education was usually thought of as a

religious enterprise as well as a public service, it seemed natural for church and state to

work hand in hand" (p. 10). While private and public universities supported student

religious development, the emphasis remained on providing a Christian-based education

(Grubiak, 2012; Marsden, 1992). Moreover, Grubiak (2012) detailed the findings of

President James B. Angell at the University of Michigan concerning the role of

Christianity in public and state institutions in the late 19th century. Grubiak (2012)

summarized, "Of the twenty-four state colleges and universities Angell surveyed in 1890,

he discovered that twenty-two provided daily chapel services and that an astounding half

of these instituted a mandatory chapel attendance policy" (p. 79). Angell also discovered

that 70% to 80% of public institution faculty were Christian church members (as cited in

Grubiak, 2012, p. 79). Similarly, state institutions throughout the Midwest United States

had extracurricular student groups that promoted various Christian denominations and

belief systems (Grubiak, 2012; Longfield, 1992a).

Despite a significant Judeo-Christian influence, the fundamental connection

between higher education and Christianity began transforming in the late 19th century

and early 20th century (Sloan, 1994; Stamm, 2006). The post-Civil War era ushered in a

cultural and educational change in American higher education (Evans, 1980; Longfield,

1992a). Compulsory chapel services, a staple of collegiate education, led to conflicts on

university campuses, like the University of Illinois and the Ohio State University

(Longfield, 1992a). Even private institutions with a strong Christian heritage, like Yale,

faced challenges from students over mandatory chapel services in the 1920s (Longfield, 1992b).

The movement toward secularization reached a pivotal juncture in the 1950s and 1960s (Stamm, 2003, 2006). In the 1960s, universities began to mirror American society's increasing religious pluralism and secularization. The Civil Rights movement, including the creation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and immigration policy changes significantly impacted higher education (Chickering, 2006; Stamm, 2006). Stamm (2003) discussed the increased diversity in American society and how higher educational institutions responded, "Colleges and universities responded with programs and policies to insure increased educational access for minority populations and to promote greater knowledge of the rich diversity of racial and ethnic cultural traditions in the United States" (paras. 23-24). Moreover, the social movement away from organized religion, specifically Christianity, was prevalent (Waggoner, 2016). Instead, society experienced a transition to morality and spirituality based on Eastern religious practices, New Age spirituality, and the human potential movement (Waggoner, 2016).

Additionally, the judicial system expanded case law, emphasizing the significance and application of the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause as outlined in the First Amendment (Chickering, 2006; Clark, 2001; Craft & Goodman, 2019; Stamm, 2003; Walters, 2001). Universities were increasingly concerned with the legality of encouraging religious involvement and discourse on campuses while providing equal access required under the First Amendment (Chickering, 2006; Clark, 2001). Further, Grubiak (2012) explained that public institutions had to balance adherence to state constitutions and the Establishment and Free Exercise Clause. As such, Grubiak (2012)

wrote, "Publicly funded colleges and universities were to be neutral to religion, accommodating all beliefs and discriminating against none" (p. 78).

As religious pluralism changed the cultural landscape of university campuses, the curriculum of religion in post-secondary education changed in the 1960s and 1970s (Marsden, 1992). Religion as an educational subject had changed from being a part of the "humanities with a moral purpose" to being part of the social sciences (Marsden, 1992, p. 35). At the same time, universities moved toward secularization with a growing emphasis that the scientific method and inquiry should drive the university experience (Smith, 2003). Smith (2003) described the overarching, historical trend of the secularization of college campuses as an educational revolution that "redefined religious concerns and perspectives as irrelevant if not detrimental to the mission of higher education" (p. 97). After the educational revolution, Smith (2003) suggested that "religion often lingered on the margins of campus in voluntary chapel services and campus ministries. But religion had little or nothing to do with the real work of university scholarship and teaching" (p. 97). However, Donnelly (2011) argued that religion should continue to have a place in the university classroom through a historical, interdisciplinary approach that encourages students to reflect on and analyze religion's role in their lives and society.

Today, higher education institutions have adapted to the increased religious pluralism and secularism on campus by focusing on students' spiritual exploration and interfaith engagement rather than solely their religious involvement (Allen & Kellom, 2001; Astin et al., 2011; Chickering et al., 2006; Lindholm et al., 2011). Public and private nonsectarian universities have taken various approaches to defining their role in encouraging student spiritual development and religious involvement (Lindholm et al.,

2011, Tisdell, 2003). Institutions have also considered the potential legal concerns

regarding institutional endorsement of religion (Clark, 2001; Walters, 2001).

Universities' cultural and historical backgrounds have influenced how they have

supported students' spiritual or religious development (Chickering, 2006; Crocker, 2009;

Gladstone, 2001).

Theoretical Perspectives of Student Spiritual, Religious, and Faith Development

Religious and spiritual developmental history in higher education has sparked a

growing field of study within student affairs and student development theory. Research

and practice have emphasized the importance of higher education's role in fostering

college students' spiritual and faith development (Astin et al., 2011; Fowler, 1995; Parks,

1986). Astin et al.'s (2011) research on students' spiritual and religious development and

Fowler's (1995) and Parks' (1986) research on students' faith development are critical

considerations in understanding student development and engagement on college

campuses.

Astin et al.'s Spiritual and Religious Measures

Astin et al.'s (2011) work at the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute's

Spirituality in Higher Education Project was foundational in understanding the essential

role of higher education in students' spiritual development and religious involvement.

Astin et al. (2011) published the seminal book, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can

Enhance Students' Inner Lives.* The research consisted of three studies and utilized the

College Student's Beliefs and Values Survey (CSBV) to explore the significance of

students' spiritual and religious involvement on college campuses. Astin et al. (2011)

used the CSBV in 2003 with 3,700 students (p. 9). Then in 2004, more than 112,000

students participated in the survey (Astin et al., 2011, p. 9). In 2007, Astin et al. (2011)

utilized the CSBV to follow-up with 15,000 students (p. 9).

Astin et al. (2011) determined 10 constructs from the outcome of their research.

The first set of constructs measured college students' spirituality. The spiritual measures

included the "spiritual quest," "equanimity," "ethic of caring," "charitable involvement,"

and "ecumenical worldview" (Astin et al., 2011, pp. 20-21). The second set of constructs

measured college students' religiousness, which included a student's "religious

commitment," "religious engagement," "religious/social conservatism,"

"religious struggle," and "religious skepticism" (Astin et al., 2011, pp. 21-22). Together,

these measures expressed the importance of students' spiritual and religious development

throughout the college experience. Spiritual and religious growth contributed to positive

outcomes for college students, including a better understanding of oneself and finding

meaning in life (Astin et al., 2011).

Spiritual Quest. The spiritual quest is internally directed and is concerned with

the student's "interest in meaning/purpose in life, finding answers to the mysteries of life,

attaining inner harmony, and developing a meaningful philosophy in life" (Astin et al.,

2011, p. 20).

Equanimity. Students' equanimity is also internally directed and considered the

"extent to which the student feels at peace or is centered, is able to find meaning in times

of hardship, sees each day as a gift, and feels good about the direction of his/her life"

(Astin et al., 2011, p. 20).

Ethic of Caring. The ethic of caring is externally focused and based on the

student's commitment to "helping others in difficulty, reducing pain and suffering in the

world, promoting racial understanding, trying to change things that are unfair in the world, and making the world a better place" (Astin et al., 2011, p. 20). Student-faculty relationships significantly influence students' ethic of care development (Fleming et al., 2013).

Charitable Involvement. Astin et al. (2011) outlined that students' charitable involvement included participation in community service, volunteer work, donating money, and helping others. Astin et al. also discovered that students' charitable involvement is the only spiritual measure that showed a decline during college.

Ecumenical Worldview. The final spiritual measure defined by Astin et al. (2011) was students' ecumenical worldview. Students with an ecumenical worldview value the interconnected nature of humanity, demonstrate an interest in learning about other cultures and religious backgrounds, and understand that "love is at the root of all the great religions" (Astin et al., 2011, p. 21). Bryant (2011) also found that students developed an ecumenical worldview by experiencing challenging co-curricular experiences and encountering religiosity and spirituality in an academic setting.

Religious Commitment. Astin et al. (2011) described students' religious commitment as an internal quality. Astin et al. (2011) stated that religious commitment is the "degree to which the student seeks to follow religious teachings in everyday life, finds religion to be personally helpful, and gains personal strength by trusting in a higher power" (p. 21). Scheitle (2011) found that students studying the arts and sciences decreased religious commitment compared to the general student population. Likewise, students who identified as Catholic or with no religious affiliation showed a decrease in religious commitment compared to students affiliated with a "moderate or conservative

Protestant denomination" (Scheitle, 2011, p. 130). The university's environment and students' social connections on campus also influence students' religious commitment (Small & Bowman, 2011).

Religious Engagement. Students' religious engagement is the "behavioral counterpart" to the student's religious commitment (Astin et al., 2011, p. 21). Astin et al. (2011) outlined a student's religious engagement as "attending religious services, praying, engaging in religious singing/chanting, and reading sacred texts" (p. 21). Bryant and Astin (2008) also found that "students who are religiously engaged also experience less spiritual struggle than the average student" (p. 21).

Religious/Social Conservatism. Astin et al. (2011) found that students' religious/social conservatism, or fundamentalism, was expressed through religious beliefs and their opinions on social and political issues. Astin et al. (2011) stated that students' conservatism reflects "positions on issues such as abortion, casual sex, and atheism, as well as an inclination to proselytize, and to see God as a father-figure" (p. 92). Additionally, Astin et al. highlighted the correlation between students' religious commitment, engagement, and conservatism. In the study, students who were highly committed to their religious beliefs and engaged in religious practices were also highly conservative (Astin et al., 2011).

Religious Skepticism. Religious skepticism is the opposite of religious commitment and engagement. Students express religious skepticism through disbelief or indifference to religious or spiritual participation. Astin et al. (2011) found that religiously skeptical students had no religious background, emphasized the role of

scientific discovery in answering existential questions, or had negative personal experiences with religion.

 Religious Struggle. Finally, Astin et al. (2011) described a student's religious struggle occurs when the student "feels unsettled about religious matters, disagrees with family about religious matters, feels distant from God, or has questioned her/his religious beliefs" (pp. 21-22). Unlike other measures, the concept of the religious struggle did not have any relationship with the other measures. Scheitle (2011) also found that students who were religiously unaffiliated or affiliated with Protestant denominations and non-Christian religious groups decreased their religious struggle during college.

 Overall, Astin et al. (2011) determined five assertions about the relationship between higher education, student religious involvement, and student spiritual development. These assertions included:

1. Students' religious engagement declines in college, but their spirituality increases.

2. Students grow in their connections to others and willingness to be more open-minded and accepting.

3. Growth in spirituality is linked to other positive college outcomes.

4. College environments are critical to the facilitation of spiritual growth.

5. Too much engagement in activities that hinder deep engagement with life of the campus can deter students' spiritual development. (pp. 135-136)

Astin et al.'s emphasis on spirituality reflects the historical trends of secularization on university campuses since the 1960s (as cited in Grubiak, 2012; Longfield, 1992a; Marsden, 1992). Moreover, the study's outcome validated the need to continue exploring

the role religiosity and spirituality play in undergraduate students' lives and the application of religious and spiritual support on university campuses.

Faith Development Theory

Fowler (1995, 2000) also explored the importance of faith development and finding meaning in an individual's life. Fowler created an approach to faith development divorced from religious principles or ideologies. Instead, Fowler (1995) described faith as "a universal feature of human living, recognizably similar everywhere despite the remarkable variety of forms and content of religious practice and belief" (p. 14). Likewise, Fowler (1995) suggested that faith was an "orientation of the total person, giving purpose to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions" (p. 14). Ultimately, Fowler identified six stages and one pre-stage of faith development.

Fowler indicated that the structural-developmental theories of Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget, as well as Erik Erikson's (1950/1993) Psychosocial Development Theory, influenced the development of the stages of faith. Specifically, Fowler described the importance of Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory to faith development. Fowler (1995) reasoned that Erikson's theory helped to "focus on the functional aspect of faith, the expected existential issues with which it must help people cope at whatever structural stage across the life cycle" (p. 109). Unlike Erikson's theory, Fowler (2000) indicated that the stages of faith were not guaranteed to occur throughout the lifespan. Also, the stages of faith were not steps on a ladder to transcend or an inevitable progression during the life cycle (Fowler, 2000). Figure 3 lists the stages of faith development.

Figure 3

Fowler's Stages of Faith Development

Stage	Faith Development
Pre-stage	Infancy and Undifferentiated Faith
Stage 1	Intuitive-Projective Faith
Stage 2	Mythic-Literal Faith
Stage 3	Synthetic-Conventional Faith
Stage 4	Individuative-Reflective Faith
Stage 5	Conjunctive Faith
Stage 6	Universalizing Faith

Note: The stages of faith development originated from Fowler, J.W. (1995). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning* (Rev. ed). HarperSanFrancisco.

Stage 3, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, and stage 4, Individuative-Reflective Faith, are essential to the development of traditional undergraduate students. Stage 3 emerges in adolescence and can be the "permanent place of equilibrium" for adults (Fowler, 1995, p. 172). During stage 3, Fowler (1995) indicated that "a person's experience of the world now extends beyond family" (p. 172). With the growing interaction and involvement of outside forces beyond the family, Fowler (1995) reasoned that "faith must provide a coherent orientation in the midst of that more complex and diverse range of involvements. Faith must synthesize values and information; it must provide a basis for identity and outlook" (p. 172). At the same time, a hallmark of stage 3 is the development of a personal myth. Fowler (1995) described the personal myth as "the myth of one's own becoming in identity and faith, incorporating one's past and

anticipated future in an image of the ultimate environment unified by characteristics of personality" (p. 173).

However, the transition from stage 3 to stage 4 can emerge in late adolescence and adulthood, as the individual "must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes" (Fowler, 1995, p. 182). The transition between stages 3 and 4 can occur as the individual leaves home or experiences conflict with "valued authority sources" (Fowler, 1995, p. 173). During stage 4, the individual meets "unavoidable tensions" related to individuality and reflection (Fowler, 1995, p. 182). Through this stage, the individual's identity is no longer defined by "one's roles or meanings to others" (Fowler, 1995, p. 182).

Although applicable to various higher education settings, researchers involved in understanding students' spirituality have criticized Fowler's work for its application and approach to human development (Parks, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). For instance, Tisdell (2003) offered that a "specific religious tradition" informs Fowler's definition of faith and that human development is not as linear as Fowler presents in faith development (pp. 98-99). Likewise, Parks (2000) highlighted that Fowler's theory had a cognitive and stage-structure bias and suggested that Fowler's work did not clearly define the young adult stage in development.

Although heavily influenced by Fowler's work, Parks (1986) explored the pursuit of faith development and focused on young adults finding meaning in life. Parks (1986) created a theory explicitly for young adults, or college-aged students, to "build upon and critically refine and elaborate Fowler's work" (p. 41). Parks proposed a four-stage model of faith development, including adolescent/conventional, young adult, tested adult, and

mature adult stages. The first stage of adolescent/conventional aligned with Fowler's

(1995) stage 3, and the young adult stage aligned with the transition between Fowler's

(1995) stages 3 and 4. Parks' model also identified distinct forms of knowing,

dependence, and community within each stage of development.

Additionally, Parks emphasized the importance of environment and mentoring

communities in young adults' faith development. Parks (2000) wrote, "Young adulthood

is nurtured into being, and its promise is most powerfully realized through participation

in a community" (p. 93). Parks recognized mentoring communities as an effective form

of community that offers a challenging and supportive environment where young adults

can develop inner dependence and ask questions about meaning and purpose in life. Parks

(2000) said mentoring communities help young adults "feel recognized as who they

really are, and as who they are becoming" (p. 95). Love (2001) cited that Parks' (2000)

theory and the emphasis on mentoring communities had practical applications for

supporting university students and creating an informed student affairs practice that

promoted students' spirituality. Jessup-Anger et al. (2016) also found the importance of

faculty and administrator mentoring in college students' Catholic faith development,

which helped students understand their religious traditions.

Student Religious and Spiritual Campus Organizations

History of Religious-based Student Organizations. Religious-based campus

organizations have provided religious development opportunities for college students at

sectarian and non-sectarian institutions (Cawthon & Jones, 2004; Schmalzbauer, 2013).

Cawthon and Jones (2004) described the evolution of campus ministry since the 1960s

and identified three primary ministry models: "presence," "networking-resource," and

"church-on-campus" (p. 158). The presence model was a "passive voice, interpreting and responding to the changes and development of the academic community" (p. 158). Then, the networking-resource model relied on campus organizations' relationships with local churches and focused on social justice and equality. Since the 1980s, the church on-campus model has been the predominant ministry model on university campuses (Cawthon & Jones, 2004; Schmalzbauer, 2013). The church on-campus model created religious study and worship groups overseen by a campus minister, without local church or denominational involvement (Cawthon & Jones, 2004).

At the same time, religious organizations have evolved into two modalities to appeal to college students, including traditional and contemporary ministries (Cawthon & Jones, 2004). Specific religious denominations or organizations were present on college campuses through traditional ministries, which included student groups like the Baptist Student Union, Catholic Newman Centers, and Hillel (Cawthon & Jones, 2004; Evans, 1980). On the other hand, contemporary campus ministries lacked affiliation with a specific denomination or religious organization (Cawthon & Jones, 2004). Contemporary organizations were ecumenical and included campus organizations like InterVaristy and Campus Crusade for Christ (Cathown & Jones, 2004; Schmalzbauer, 2013).

Roman Catholic Student Ministries. Roman Catholic student ministries have a long history and tradition on non-Catholic campuses and Catholic-affiliated institutions (Evans, 1980; Gray, 1963). The concept of providing Catholic ministry to students began with John Henry Newman, a Roman Catholic Archbishop, who wrote extensively about the nature and purpose of education. Newman (1852/1982) argued that religion and philosophy played a significant role in collegiate education. Newman also suggested that

Roman Catholic students should have access to spiritual support on secular campuses, even if students decide to pursue an education away from Catholic-affiliated institutions.

John Henry Newman became the namesake for Newman Clubs or Newman Centers in the United States because Newman argued for college students' religious development and support (Evans, 1980). Newman Centers have historically served as an educational and ministry program of the Roman Catholic Church on non-religious campuses (Evans, 1980; Gray, 1963). Although dated, Hodge et al. (2001) reported that 14% of non-Latino and 8% of Latino young adult Catholic college students had been active in Catholic college ministries or Newman Centers (p. 133). However, due to the decentralized nature of Newman Centers and similar campus ministries, statistical information is not available for the number of participating students or clubs.

According to Evans (1980), Catholic ministry on college campuses began as a grassroots movement spurred by members of local Catholic parishes. Evans outlined that the Newman Movement experienced three phases in its history. The first phase of the Newman Movement began in 1883 with the Melvin Club at the University of Wisconsin. Evans (1980) suggested the first phase of the Newman Movement was defined by "a strong educational and missionary as well as apologetical fervor," albeit at the local level not supported by Catholic Church officials (p. xiv). The University of Pennsylvania became the home of the first Newman Club in 1893 (Gray, 1963).

In April 1905, Pope Pius X emphasized the importance of creating religious instruction for Catholic students who attended secular or state schools (as cited in Gray, 1963). The second phase began in 1908 with the creation of the National Newman Club Federation, which consisted of students and clergy opposing secularism on college

campuses. The second phase saw an increase in national and Church support. However, Vatican II ushered in another era of decentralization (Evans, 1980). By 1969, the Newman Movement had entered a third stage focused on local leadership. Unlike the initial stage, Evans (1980) indicated that the third stage of the Newman Movement experienced robust diocesan and clergy support and expanded growth on college campuses. Newman Centers remain a source for Catholic students and the campus community at non-sectarian and public institutions (Brick et al., 2019).

Additionally, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) has developed an evangelical campus ministry model to support Catholic and non-Catholic students on university campuses. Started in 1998 at Benedictine College, FOCUS provides missionaries to college campuses worldwide (FOCUS, n.d.). FOCUS offers educational and mentorship opportunities to instruct college students about Catholicism and equip students to proselytize and mentor other students on campus. As of 2021, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students had 203 total locations, including 167 university campuses in the United States (FOCUS, 2021, p. 6). The organization has 793 missionaries, including 736 missionaries serving on university campuses in the United States (FOCUS, 2021, p. 6). Likewise, FOCUS held an annual conference in 2021 with 27,600 attendees, including 13,000 students from 358 college campuses (FOCUS, 2021, p. 14).

Growth on Campus. In addition to Roman Catholic student ministries, religious-based organizations and campus ministries have expanded on university campuses (Schmalzbauer, 2013). The expansion of religious student groups has encapsulated various religious traditions and denominational backgrounds. For instance, Schmalzbauer

(2013) reported that over 250,000 college students were involved in Protestant-affiliated

campus ministries, including parachurch ministries (p. 116). At the same time, campus

ministries have benefited from significant capital projects and philanthropy efforts in

recent years. For instance, Hillel completed a six-year philanthropy project called the

"Campaign for Jewish Renaissance," which raised over $200 million to support Jewish

campus ministry (Schmalzbauer, 2013, p. 119).

The Muslim Students' Association (MSA) exemplifies higher education's

transition from predominantly Christian student ministries on campus to a diverse,

multicultural plurality (Schmalzbauer, 2013). Since 1963, the MSA has established over

500 chapters throughout the United States and Canada (Schmalzbauer, 2013, p. 119).

Schmalzbauer (2013) discussed how universities had embraced the MSA, which included

the creation of an Islamic Chaplaincy Program at Hartford Seminary, the hiring of a "first

full-time Muslim chaplain" at Princeton, and establishing "special rooms for Muslim

prayer services" on over 75 college campuses (p. 121). Despite the immense challenge

faced after September 11, 2001, the MSA thrived in the higher educational environment

by strengthening religious ecumenism on campuses and encouraging other students'

development by engaging in interfaith dialogue (Schmalzbauer, 2013).

Supporting Spirituality on Campus. Additional research has investigated how

universities and institutions can support students' religious and spiritual development,

regardless of religious or denominational affiliation (Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001;

Lindholm et al., 2011). For example, the Education as Transformation Project at

Wellesley College is another example of higher education's efforts to address and support

student spirituality (Chickering, 2006; Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001; Schmalzbauer,

2013). The Education as Transformation Project "arose in response to a rapid increase in religious diversity among college students and the difficulty most institutions of higher learning faced adequately addressing the issue" (Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001, p. 56). The project addressed "spirituality as part of the educational process" instead of spirituality "confined to religious identity" (Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001, p. 58). The first Education as Transformation event was held at Wellesley College in 1998 and had 800 participants, with higher education administrators from sectarian and nonsectarian universities in attendance (Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001, pp. 59-60). The event aimed to "rethink the structure of religious life programs at American colleges and universities" (Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001, p. 61).

The Wellesley Religious and Spiritual Life Program became a model for universities nationwide to encourage interfaith relationships, develop student spirituality, and address religious diversity (Chickering, 2006; Schmalzbauer, 2013). Schmalzbauer (2013) stated, "[Wellesley] has also published a 'campus religious diversity kit,' complete with instructions for constructing multi-faith worship spaces. Similar initiatives can be found at Mount Holyoke, M.I.T., and Duke" (p. 121). The Wellesley Religious Spiritual Life Program implemented programming to encourage interfaith dialogue, host spirituality-focused workshops, sponsor multi-faith community celebrations, and provide chaplains and advisors to faith-based groups (Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001).

Similarly, the creation of Danforth Chapels provided an avenue for higher educational institutions to student spiritual development while respecting the religious plurality and secularism of the student body (Grubiak, 2012). The Danforth Chapel Program funded the creation of chapels or physical worship spaces on public university

campuses (Grubiak, 2012). Danforth chapels, like the interfaith spaces inspired by

Wellesley, were intended to promote spirituality on college campuses. Danforth chapels

were small facilities focused on non-denominational, interfaith traditions and provided

students with a physical space for meditation and reflection (Grubiak, 2012).

Interfaith Dialogue and Supporting non-majority faiths. Recently, researchers

have expressed the need for universities to encourage interfaith learning and engagement

in higher education (Carter et al., 2020; Giess et al., 2020; Mayhew & Rochenbach, 2021;

Mayhew et al., 2016). Giess et al. (2020) argued that interfaith leadership and

development through formal programs and informal student engagement are critical to

creating students' "democratic citizenship" (p. 87). In practice, universities have

addressed interfaith development through student organizations like the Interfaith Youth

Corp, which intended to build ecumenical dialogue among students of different belief

systems (Patel, 2018). Mayhew and Rochenbach (2021) also have advanced a model for

interfaith learning and development in college that would help students grow in

appreciation towards other religious and non-religious traditions.

Like the emphasis on the intersectionality of identity development, research has

focused on improving the campus experience for students from marginalized

backgrounds, those affiliated with non-major religious traditions, and students who are

non-religious (Bowman & Small, 2010; Bowman & Smeldey, 2013; Coley et al., 2022;

Kazanjian & Laurence, 2002). Students of non-major faith traditions make up a

significantly smaller student population on university campuses than their Christian

counterparts. Coley et al. (2022) estimated that only 25% of higher educational

institutions have a Muslim or Jewish student organization, while only 5% have a

Buddhist or Hindu student organization (p. 185).

Understanding Christian privilege on university campuses is essential in creating

a campus culture that welcomes students from diverse religious backgrounds and

supports students' needs (Bowman & Small, 2010). Bowman and Smeldey (2013) found

that student institutional satisfaction is related to religious affiliation and the social status

of one's religion. Students who identified as Protestant were more satisfied with their

institution than students not affiliated with an organized religion or underrepresented

religious groups (Bowman & Smeldey, 2013). In addition to institutional satisfaction,

students affiliated with "non-majority faiths" experienced greater spiritual struggle than

their Christian counterparts (Bryant & Astin, 2008, p. 21).

Research has also shown that advancing interfaith dialogue and cultural

engagement within higher education is critical in understanding the unique experiences,

subcultures, and challenges of students from non-Christian or secular backgrounds

(Magolda & Ebben, 2007; Snipes & Manson, 2020). For instance, Park and Bowman

(2015) found a positive relationship between students' general religiosity and cross-racial

interaction, which the researchers defined as a form of social capital. Students who

identified as Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, and Hindu had more cross-racial interaction than

students who were Protestant (Park & Bowman, 2015). Similarly, Cole and Ahmadi

(2010) found that Muslim students had higher levels of involvement in "diversity-related

activities" than other peers, including Jewish or Christian students (p. 134). However,

additional research is needed to understand the role of higher education and campus

cultures in properly supporting students who identify as non-Christian, non-religious, agnostic, or atheist (Hemming & Madge, 2017; Reisner & Mulvihill, 2020).

Impact of Religious and Spiritual Development on College Students

Generally, undergraduate student involvement in religious and spiritual behaviors has positively impacted students' development (Astin et al., 2011; Fowler, 1995; Parks, 1986). Additional research has explored the positive relationship between students' religious involvement, minimizing risky behaviors, and improved pro-social behaviors. However, existing research has found inconsistent results between the effects of students' religious participation on academic success and limitations to the effect on students' well-being. Overall, Maryl and Oeur (2009) contend that despite the extensive studies conducted on the impact of religiosity in students' lives and higher education, the literature needs more "synthetic research" with improved methodology and consistency (p. 268).

Significant research has investigated the role of college students' religion and spirituality as protective factors that promote safer behaviors related to alcohol consumption and sexual behaviors (Carmack & Lewis, 2016; Ellison et al., 2008, Harrell & Powell, 2013; Kathol & Sgoutas-Emch, 2017; Menagi et al., 2008; Moore et al., 2013). Burke et al. (2014) also discovered a difference between alcohol consumption in students who identified as religious and spiritual students. Students who identified as religious consumed less alcohol and reported less tobacco and marijuana usage than students who identified as spiritual or secular (Burke et al., 2012). Concerning students' spirituality, Nelms et al. (2007) found that spirituality had a positive relationship with students' self-reported health, including increased physical activity and higher levels of life satisfaction.

Moreover, Faigin (2013) reported that students who struggled spiritually during college had increased substance use, and students who were skeptical toward religion had a higher risk for substance use. Additionally, religious involvement influenced students' sexual attitudes and promoted safer sexual behaviors (Luquis et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2013)

Next, religious and spiritual involvement has improved students' emotional and mental well-being. Some prior research has found that religious and spiritual participation improved students' wellbeing (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant, 2007; Phillips & Henderson, 2006). For example, Phillips and Henderson (2006) found a "clear link between self-reported religiousness and symptoms of depression" (p. 169). Students who reported some religiousness had fewer depressive symptoms than students with no religious participation (Phillips & Henderson, 2006).

However, other researchers have found limitations to the role of religious and spiritual participation on students' wellbeing (Eliassen, 2013; Paine & Sandage, 2017). For example, Paine and Sandage (2017) found that "religious involvement predicted lower levels of depressive symptoms" among graduate students (p. 277). Paine and Sandage (2017) noted that students' "disappointment in God" and "spiritual instability" made students' religious involvement "non-significant" to students' depressive symptoms (p. 277). Similarly, Eliassen (2013) found a positive relationship between religious coping and depression in female, young adult participants who had "above-average stress exposure" and attended at least one religious service a week during pre-teenage years (p. 413).

Religious and spiritual involvement has inconsistently affected students' educational attainment, academic success, and participation (Bryant, 2007; De Soto et al., 2018; Erickson & Phillips, 2012; Greenway, 2006; Mooney, 2010). Religious involvement positively affected educational attainment before college, specifically with adolescents completing high school and enrolling in college (Erickson & Phillips, 2012). Erickson and Phillips (2012) also found that college enrollment was three times higher for students with religious mentors than those without mentors. Regarding academic involvement and performance, De Soto et al. (2018) found that college students' academic work ethic was positively associated with religious involvement and that students were "more deeply involved in their studies" than students with no religious involvement" (p. 201). However, De Soto et al. (2018) did not find any relationship between the students' religious participation with students' academic performance, academic honesty, or personal stress. Other research discovered that spirituality directly affected students' purpose in life but indirectly affected students' academic engagement and success (Greenway, 2006).

Moreover, Bryant (2007) found that students' involvement in religious organizations did not impact first-year academic success but found a positive relationship between first-year students' religious participation and social integration, emotional well-being, and spirituality. Bryant (2007) summarized, "Religious group involvement does not relate as strongly to academic success because . . . students who join these organizations tend to have been high achievers prior to college" (p. 14). On the other hand, Mooney (2010) found that college students' religiosity positively affected academic achievement, student satisfaction, and increased extracurricular involvement.

However, Mooney's work focused solely on religious attendance during the final year of high school, not students' religious attendance during college (as cited in Maryl & Oeur, 2009).

Finally, prior research has demonstrated the positive impact of student' spirituality and religious involvement on leadership development, community involvement, and prosocial behaviors (Astin, 2004; Black, 2017; Nolan-Aranez, 2020). Previous studies have shown that students' religious and spiritual participation positively impacts prosocial behaviors and social justice orientation (Bradenberger & Bowman, 2013; Chenot & Kim, 2013). Recently, Nolan-Aranez (2020) proposed an intergenerational mentoring program related to prosocial behaviors to further students' leadership and spiritual development. The intergenerational mentoring program encouraged students' social and community engagement (Nolan-Aranez, 2020).

Higher Education's Support of Spirituality and Religiosity

College students' spiritual and religious development has significant implications for higher education, student affairs, curriculum development, and campus initiatives (Allen & Kellom, 2001; Astin et al., 2011; Chickering et al., 2006; Lindholm et al., 2011; Love, 2001). Researchers and practitioners have also urged higher education institutions to address the necessity of student spiritual, religious, and faith development (Chickering et al., 2006). Current student affairs practice provides examples of ways universities and administrators can honor and support students' spirituality and interfaith engagement.

Overcoming Barriers to Support Students' Spirituality. Research has explored the necessity for higher education to support students' spirituality and faith development (Astin et al., 2011; Fowler, 1995; Parks, 1986, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). For instance, Tisdell

(2003) emphasized the need to grow students' spirituality and specified that spirituality

and religion are not the same, which was also evident in Astin et al.'s (2011) research on

spirituality and religiosity. Tisdell (2003) described spirituality as a topic that is "always

present . . . in the learning environment" and that spiritual development is a movement

toward a more "authentic self" (p. 29). Fowler (1995) and Parks (1986, 2000) also

suggested that higher education has a role in helping students in their faith development

and their search for meaning in life. Parks (2000) argued that young adults are searching

for their faith and higher education is vital in helping students develop that faith. Parks

(2000) wrote, "Since young adults are yet psychologically dependent upon competent

leadership for the formation, higher education—self-consciously or unselfconsciously—

serves the young adults as his or her primary community of imagination" (pp. 133-134).

  While some universities have encouraged student spiritual development, others

have attempted to entirely avoid students' spiritual or religious development. Astin et al.

(2011) argued that academics avoid discussing spirituality because "many faculty

members associate spirituality with religion . . . they assume that spirituality (religion)

has no place in the academic environment, except possibly as a subject to be taught or

studied by people in departments of religious studies" (p. 6). The hesitancy to provide a

university culture that fosters spiritual development in higher education was criticized by

Speck (as cited in Patton et al., 2016). Speck identified three reasons public universities

avoid spirituality, which included: "the erroneous belief that the constitutional

requirement of separation of church and state precludes any mention of matters that could

be construed as religious," "the emphasis in higher education on objectivity and

rationality," and "the lack of preparation that most educators have to address the topic of spirituality" (as cited in Patton et al., 2016, p. 197).

Both private and public institutions have implemented programs to support students' spirituality and religiosity inside the classroom and through extracurricular activities and support (Chickering et al., 2006; Lindholm et al., 2011). For example, the University of Michigan, a public, nonsectarian institution, has implemented university-wide changes to encourage student spiritual and religious development. Walters (2001) wrote about the tension the University of Michigan experienced in supporting student spirituality and religion yet not infringing on Constitutional rights. Walters (2001) explained that the University of Michigan's relationship with religious campus ministries "is not so unique in some of the tensions, difficulties, and misunderstandings experienced by faculty, student affairs staff, and students in managing religious pluralism on a public campus" (p. 33). Instead, Walters (2001) described the difficulty of the university upholding constitutional rights, "The path between supporting the development of the whole student and honoring the public university's obligation to constitutional principles governing free speech and the relationship between religion and the state is thorny" (p. 33).

Walters reviewed the difficulty the University of Michigan faced in not favoring one religion over another while encouraging student religious involvement. Walters (2001) found that "most of the student religious organizations without an independent religious professional simply do not know where to turn for guidance within the university" (p. 47). Walters (2001) recommended hiring a liaison "to create a system of accountability by orienting religious professionals to the University of Michigan's

policies, procedures, and community norms" (p. 48). Despite the hesitancy to hire for the position, Walters concluded that this liaison helped the students participate more fully in their religious organizations and with the university.

Promoting Spirituality and Religiosity in the Classroom. Prior research has assisted universities, administrators, and faculty with opportunities to understand students' spiritual and religious needs when implementing curriculum and student programming (Astin et al., 2011; Lindholm et al., 2011). For instance, Astin et al. (2011) found that "students' performance in the academic and intellectual realm is enhanced if their faculty employ 'student-centered' pedagogical practices and put a priority on students' personal and spiritual development" (p. 135). Similarly, Lindholm et al. (2011) discussed the potential methods and resources universities could use to support and encourage students' spiritual and religious development. These areas included curricular initiatives and teaching strategies, spiritual mentoring, dialogues about spirituality and religion, student leadership development, faculty and staff development, retreats, and physical space development. As a result of university support, students could incorporate their spiritual development into careers and develop meaningful relationships with faculty (Lindholm et al., 2011).

Lindholm et al. (2011) also highlighted curricula offered by Stanford University to support students' spiritual development and exploration. One course called *The Meaning of Life: Moral and Spiritual Inquiry through Literature* "combines traditional classroom work, field trips, weekend activities, and a living-learning experience in an intense three-week course" (Lindholm et al., 2011, p. 27). Another class at Stanford, *Spirituality and Nonviolent Urban and Social Transformation*, is "based on the notion

that a life of engagement in social transformation is often built on a foundation of spiritual and religious commitment" (Lindholm et al., 2011, p. 27). Other universities, including Carnegie Mellon, Brown University, and George Mason University, have developed similar curriculum initiatives (Lindholm et al., 2011).

Prioritizing Students' Spiritual and Religious Involvement. Researchers have also identified the essential role higher education and student affairs should take in prioritizing students' spiritual and religious involvement on campus (Allen & Kellom, 2001; Cathown & Jones, 2004; Chickering, 2009; Dalton, 2006; Love, 2001). Cathown and Jones (2004) recognized the significance of having religious ministry organizations on campus. Cathown and Jones (2004) argued that student affairs professionals must support religious organizations, be actively involved, and "be knowledgeable about and understand campus ministries" (p. 70). Cawthon & Jones (2004) also stated that "by merely understanding what is available in terms of local campus ministry, student affairs professionals can be a valuable resource for their students" (p. 170). Likewise, Allen and Kellom (2001) suggested that student affairs professionals develop an organizational culture that promotes spirituality and community. At the same time, student affairs should encourage staff to individually develop spirituality through reflection and intentional time spent on spiritual practices (Allen & Kellom, 2001).

Additionally, physical space on campus devoted to students' spirituality, religious practice, and interfaith engagement is important in promoting student development and campus engagement (Bowman & Small, 2010; Lindholm et al., 2011; Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001; Randolph, 2002). Lindholm et al. (2011) described the significance of universities investing in physical space for college students' spiritual and religious needs,

"The physical environment and space on campus impact students' ability to engage in spiritual exploration and dialogue" (p. 79). Lindholm et al. (2011) further suggested that "creating safe spaces where students of various faith traditions can freely practice is critical when promoting interfaith cooperation and religious pluralism on campus" (p. 79).

Bowman and Small (2010) and Lindholm et al. (2011) suggested that universities offer non-denomination spaces, unaffiliated with a specific religious tradition, where all students can learn, explore, and develop spiritually. The Education as Transformation project at Wellesley University, the multi-faith center at MIT, and the Danforth Chapel model are all examples of higher education investing in physical space for students (Grubiak, 2012; Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001; Randolph, 2002). Wellesley University actively encouraged universities to design and provide physical space to meet students' spiritual and religious needs, especially those not expressly religious (Laurence & Kazanjian, 2001).

Chickering (2006) also called for higher education institutions to address the need to prioritize student spiritual development and argued that college student spiritual development would benefit American society and democratic values. Chickering (2006) wrote, "From the perspective of various theories concerning human development, our political leaders, and our culture more generally are operating at the bottom levels of cognitive and affective complexity" (p. 4). Chickering (2006) continued to reason that higher education institutions "are those most significant resources for helping create the kind of citizenry required to sustain our highly diverse, globally interdependent democracy" (p. 5). Likewise, higher education helps students to develop "more complex

ways of thinking, to higher levels of emotional intelligence, and more broad-based,

inclusive, public policies and practices" (Chickering, 2006, p. 5).

Researchers have also considered tangible ways higher education can support

students' spirituality in the institutional decision-making process (Chickering, 2006;

Dalton, 2005; Judge, 2016). Dalton (2005) argued that higher education must support

students' spiritual development in the future and outlined 10 principles and practices for

strengthening moral and spiritual growth in college.

Figure 4

Dalton's Ten Principles and Practices for Strengthening Moral and Spiritual Growth

1. The institution makes a deliberate and comprehensive effort to communicate its core values, purposes, and moral commitments to students, faculty, staff, and other key constituents.
2. The institution models its mission and core values through its leadership and administrative operations.
3. The institution's mission and core values are integrated with academic programs.
4. The institution translates its vision and values into guidelines regarding conduct and the responsibilities of citizenship.
5. The institution promotes public dialogue and debate about its mission and core values.
6. The institution takes deliberate steps to help students critically examine and act on its mission and core values.
7. The institution promotes a purposeful, caring, and inclusive campus community.
8. The institution is committed to the holistic learning and development of students.
9. The institution assesses its efforts to strengthen authenticity, spiritual growth, meaning, and purpose.
10. The institution honors achievements of authenticity, spirituality, meaning, and moral purpose.

Note: Information adapted from Dalton, C. (2006). Principles and practices for strengthening moral and spiritual growth in college. In A. W. Chickering, J. C. Dalton, L. Stamm (Eds.), *Encouraging authenticity and spirituality in higher education* (pp. 272-282). Jossey-Bass.

Chickering (2006) later adopted the 10 principles and called them admonishments to

encourage higher education and administrators to implement practices to create an

environment that acknowledges and develops students' spirituality. Like Dalton (2005) and Chickering (2006), Judge (2016) highlighted the importance of administrators utilizing spirituality in decision-making, conflict resolution, and leadership. Figure 4 lists Dalton's 10 principles and practices for strengthening moral and spiritual growth.

Student Engagement, Academic Persistence, and Institutional Retention

Higher educational institutions and researchers have continuously sought to understand why students leave college and which institutional programs can help retain students (Berger et al., 2012). Retention research has become an international concern, with an increased focus on programs to retain students and the institutional financial constraints caused by low retention rates (Crosling et al., 2008; Yorke & Longden, 2004). Prior research has suggested various reasons students leave higher education before completing a degree, including financial constraints, external obligations, and lack of institutional support (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Research has also focused on ways universities can improve student retention, including programs to improve student engagement and to create a conducive environment that encourages students to develop through co-curricular involvement (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Kuh, 1995, Kuh et al., 2008; Sanford, 1968; Schlossberg et al., 1989; Tinto 1993, 2012b). Ultimately successful retention benefits graduation outcomes and improves institutional financial outcomes (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2012).

History of Student Retention in Higher Education

Historically, the study of students' retention and attrition has experienced nine developmental eras (Berger et al., 2012). Within each stage, Berger et al. (2012) described that retention consists of several contextual factors, including "students,

campuses, educator roles, socioeconomic conditions, policies, and interventions,

knowledge base and the conceptualization of retention" (p. 8). Berger et al. (2012)

highlighted that students' demand for higher education, diversity, and characteristics are

central to retention. Figure 5 lists the eras of retention and the years of occurrence

presented by Berger et al. (2012).

Figure 5

Eras of Student Retention in Higher Education

Era	Years
Retention Pre-History	1600s-Mid 1800s
Evolving Toward Retention	Mid 1800s-1900
Early Developments	1900-1950
Dealing with Expansion	1950s
Preventing Dropouts	1960s
Building Theory	1970s
Managing Enrollments	1980s
Broadening Horizons	1990s
Current and Future Trends	Early Twenty-First Century

Note: Information adapted from Berger, J. B., Ramirez, G. B., Lyons, S. (2012). Past to present: A historical look at retention. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (2nd ed., pp. 7-34). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

From the 1600s through the 1900s, Berger et al. (2012) described that institutions

were too busy fighting for survival to worry about student retention and persistence.

Institutions were small and constantly closing, while students did not pursue formal

degrees. Then, from 1900 to 1950, universities began to remain open and grow in

enrollments, which led to selective admissions and universities founded to serve specific

populations based on religious preferences (Berger et al., 2012). However, Berger et al.

(2012) identified the Great Depression and World War II as significant factors that

"turned the nation's resources and interests away from postsecondary education" (p. 19).

Following World War II, higher education expanded because of the GI Bill, students' desire for economic and social growth, the expansion of community college, and the passing of federal legislation, like the National Defense Education Act of 1958 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Berger et al., 2012). As higher education expanded, students became more diverse, including students from underrepresented populations or middle-to-low socioeconomic backgrounds. By the 1960s, institutions and researchers "focused on individual characteristics associated with academic failure, but the later part of the decade saw some initial efforts to understand the role of affective characteristics and social contexts in student departure" (Berger et al., 2012, p. 21). As institutions began losing students, researchers began investigating the problem of student attrition and determining factors that led to students dropping out of college (Astin, 1984/1999; Spady, 1970; Summerskill, 1962; Tinto, 1975).

The Beginning of Retention Research and Building Theory. Morrison and Silverman (2012) identified John N. McNelly's 1937 study on student mortality, or students leaving college, as one of the earliest studies of student attrition. Morrison and Silverman (2012) suggested that McNelly's research was prominent because it was "an early attempt to establish an empirical relationship between a number of institutional and noninstitutional factors and student retention" (p. 65). Later, McNelly's research became vital in Summerskill's investigation into institutional retention and attrition (as cited in Morrison & Silverman, 2012; Summerskill, 1962). Although Summerskill (1962) maintained an institutional perspective on retention, Morrison and Silverman (2012) argued that Summerskill (1962) had "realized that the reasons students withdrew from

college were complex and attributable to psychological, familial, social, and economic issues" (p. 65).

Summerskill (1962) argued that higher education had three reasons for interest in students' attrition. First, Summerskill (1962) suggested that institutions in the United States should focus on career training instead of intellectual training, with an increased focus on skill development. Second, colleges' "size and complexity" created intuitional interest in attrition (Summerskill, 1962, p. 628). Finally, Summerskill (1962) argued that the economic aspect of attrition, including money lost from students leaving colleges, significantly impacts the institution's financial success.

While reviewing prior literature, Summerskill (1962) also summarized several factors for students leaving college, including students' social background, academic preparedness, motivation, adjustment to college, illness and injury, and finances. Summerskill (1962) proposed, "The largest number of dropouts involve motivational forces—goals, interests, and satisfactions relative to college and other facets of the student's life" (p. 637). Later, Morrison and Silverman (2012) argued that Summerskill's (1962) motivational factors "grounded in psychological and sociological concepts and theories provided the impetus for subsequent theory-based research in student retention" (p. 66). Specifically, Summerskill's discussion regarding motivation was a "rudimentary paradigm" to Tinto's (1993) Model of Institutional Departure (as cited in Morrison & Silverman, 2012, p. 66).

Later, Spady (1970) considered the reason students dropped out of college and proposed a sociological model to understand student attrition. Spady (1970) suggested an "interdisciplinary approach involving an interaction between the individual student and

his particular college environment in which his attributes . . . are exposed to influences, expectations and demands from a variety of sources" (p. 77). Spady (1970) based the sociological model on Durkheim's theory of suicide, which considered social integration's significant impact on suicide (Mueller et al., 2021). Durkheim's theory explained that the extent to which individuals have socially integrated helps them find meaning and purpose in life and protects them from isolation and suicide (as cited in Mueller et al., 2021; Tinto, 1993). Spady (1970) also specified that students dropping out of college is "a less drastic form of rejecting social life than suicide" (p. 78). However, Spady (1970) argued that the social conditions leading to suicide and dropping out of college were similar. The social conditions included "a lack of consistent, intimate interaction with others, holding values and orientations that are dissimilar from those of the general social collectivity, and lacking a sense of compatibility with the immediate social system" (Spady, 1970, p. 78).

Moreover, Spady (1970) argued that students who received extrinsic and intrinsic rewards would successfully persist when integrated into an institution's academic and social systems. According to Spady (1970), students received academic rewards from grades, an extrinsic reward, and intellectual development, an intrinsic reward. College students would assimilate into the social system because of the congruence between the college environment and friendship support. However, Spady (1970) acknowledged that the model was limited because it did not consider the student's background, including family, culture, or academic potential. Spady's (1970) work was an early attempt to create a conceptual framework for student attrition that focused on sociological rather than psychological factors (Berger et al., 2012). Durkheim's Theory of Suicide and

Spady's (1970) sociological model influenced Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure (Morrison & Silverman, 2012; Tinto, 1993).

Theoretical Perspectives of Student Involvement and Retention

As retention research transitioned to incorporating a sociological perspective, theorists like Tinto (1993) and Astin (1984/1999) considered the relationship between students' engagement in higher education and program solutions higher education institutions could pursue to increase students' retention. Tinto's (1975, 1993) Model of Institutional Departure and Astin's (1984/1999, 1993) Student Involvement Theory have significantly informed intuitional retention policies and initiatives to improve student persistence. Together, Tinto's (1993) and Astin's (1984/1999) theoretical frameworks form a comprehensive look to understand why students leave college before graduating and how institutions can promote student involvement to improve retention.

Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure. Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure has become a cornerstone in understanding student persistence and institutional action to improve retention (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Based on the previous work of Spady, Durkheim, and Gennep, Tinto (1993) posited that "colleges consist of both academic and social systems, each with its own characteristic formal and informal structure and set of student, staff, and faculty communities" (p. 106). Institutional academic and social systems are different, yet "mutually interdependent and reciprocal" and depend on the student's experiences and the institution the student attends (Tinto, 1993, p. 119). Students' academic and social integration occurs in informal and formal settings at the institution. For instance, Tinto (1993) described that students

experience informal social integration through peer group interactions and formal social integration through extracurricular activities.

Students benefit from achieving both social and academic integration within the institution (Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto (1993), successful integration helps students reach and refine their goals, intentions, and institutional commitments. However, students also experience external factors that influence their academic persistence and commitments, including family and community backgrounds, personal attributes, financial resources, skills, and educational background (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) stated, "Positive integration serves to raise one's goals and strengthen one's commitments both to those goals and to the institution within which they may be attained" (p. 116). Although not necessary for students' presentence, Tinto (1993) highlighted that "some degree of social and intellectual integration and therefore membership in academic and social communities must exist as a condition for continued persistence" (p. 120).

Additionally, Tinto (1993) argued that institutions must be purposeful in defining terms related to retention, like dropout, gathering appropriate data related to student retention, implementing retention programs, and allocating resources. Tinto (1993) suggested two principles that institutions should consider when assessing the institutional approach to students leaving the institution. First, Tinto (1993) believed that "institutions should not define dropout in ways which contradict students' own understanding of their leaving" (p. 141). Second, Tinto (1993) argued that "in the course of establishing a retention policy, institutions must not only ascertain the goals and commitments o entering students, they must also discern their own goals and commitments" (p. 144). Universities must consider both principles as they consider retention programs.

Although each university has unique needs and situations to address student retention, universities with successful student retention programs have commonalities that Tinto (1993) called "the principles of effective retention" (p. 145). Tinto (1993) identified three principles of effective retention. First, Tinto (1993) stated that "effective retention programs are committed to the students they serve. They put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals" (p. 146). Second, retention programs are "committed to the education of all, not just some, of their students" (Tinto, 1993, p. 146). Finally, successful retention programs are "committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members" (Tinto, 1993, p. 146).

Figure 6

Tinto's Principles of Effective Implementation

1. Provide resources for program development and incentives for program participation that reach out to faculty and staff.
2. Commit to a long-term process of program development.
3. Place ownership for institutional change in the hands of those across the campus who have to implement that change.
4. Actions should be coordinated in a collaborative fashion to insure a systematic, campus wide approach to student retention.
5. Act to insure that faculty and staff possess the skills needed to assist and education their students.
6. Frontload efforts on behalf of student retention
7. Continually assess actions with an eye toward improvement.

Note: Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. The University of Chicago Press.

Along with the principles of effective retention, Tinto (1993) outlined seven fundamental principles universities should consider to successfully implement retention programs and policies. Overall, practical retention principles and implementation create an informed approach for institutions to guide retention program development and

institutional policies to help students persist at the university (Tinto, 1993). Figure 6 lists

Tinto's (1993) principles of effective implementation.

        Astin's I-E-O Model and Student Involvement Theory. Astin (1993) created a

model to understand how the higher education environment influences student outcomes.

The conceptual framework, which Astin continually updated, was called the Input-

Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) Model (Astin, 1993). In the I-E-O Model, Astin (1993)

defined inputs as the "characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the

institution" (p. 7). The environment in the model includes the "programs, policies,

faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed" (Astin, 1993,

p. 7). Finally, the model's outcomes are the "student's characteristics after exposure to the

environment" (Astin, 1993, p. 7). Astin (1993) detailed that the purpose of the model was

to identify student growth or changes based on the environment and to help inform

decision-making processes in creating desired educational outcomes.

        Astin (1984/1999) also contributed a theoretical framework for student

involvement based on a study of college dropouts. In designing the Student Involvement

Theory, Astin (1984/1999) created an unassuming framework that college administrators

and researchers could use to develop better learning environments. Astin (1984/1999)

summarized that student involvement was more than a student's motivation. Instead,

student involvement refers to the "quantity and quality of the physical and psychological

energy that students invest in the college experience" (Astin, 1984/1999, p. 528).

Fundamentally, Astin's (1984/1999) theory relied on five basic postulates, which

included:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized . . . or highly specific.

2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum: that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement . . . can be measured quantitatively . . . and qualitatively.

4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.

5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (p. 519)

Astin (1984/1999) clarified that student involvement is both academic and co-curricular. In the theory, the amount of "student learning and personal development" a student experiences in college depends on the amount of the student's involvement (Astin, 1984/1999, p. 529). Astin (1984/1999) argued that students' motivation and behavior were essential to students' development. Students' time and energy were considered finite institutional resources that university policies and practices could influence. Moreover, Astin (1984/1999) specified that the Student Involvement Theory did not focus on developmental outcomes. Instead, Astin intended that the theory focus on the student development process.

Effects of Financial Investment on Student Retention

Investment in student retention programs and services has financial implications for universities and administrators (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020; Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2012; Tinto, 1993). Scarce financial and organizational resources inform institutions' decision-making processes to enhance student retention programs and allocate resources to keep students (Tinto, 1993). As such, student retention remains a significant concern for institutions. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2020) examined the persistence and retention of college students and found, "Among the 2.6 million people who enrolled in college as a first-time undergraduate student in fall 2018, 75.9 percent . . . persisted at any U.S. institution by fall 2019, while 67 percent . . . were retained at their starting institution" (p. 1). The National Clearinghouse Research Center (2020) also found that the percentage of students retained remained consistent, and persistence rates barely changed from 2015 through 2018, with an average of 9.2% of first-year students transferring institutions the following fall (p. 1). Further, the COVID-19 pandemic also impacted student retention and institutional financial health, with decreased enrollment and retention rates primarily at two-year institutions. (Howell et al., 2021).

Promoting student retention is essential to higher education institutions' financial health and development since universities rely on the revenue generated from tuition and government financing to remain viable (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020). Currently, the Institute of Education Sciences reported that the total revenue from degree-granting postsecondary institutions in 2018-2019 was $672 billion, including $416 billion at public institutions and $242 billion at private nonprofit institutions (Irwin et al., 2021, p. 28). At the same time, total expenses for degree-granting postsecondary institutions were

$632 billion, including $401 billion at public institutions and $219 billion at private nonprofit institutions (Irwin et al., 2021, p. 28). Moreover, private non-profit four-year institutions spent $63,830 per full-time student, and public four-year institutions spent $47,890 per student. Private nonprofit four-year institutions spent $19,310 on instruction and $18,880 on "academic support, student services, and institutional support" per full-time student (Institute of Education Sciences, 2021b, p. 3). Public four-year institutions spent significantly less on instruction and academic support than the private non-profit sector, with $12,750 spent on instruction and $9,890 on support services per student (Institute of Education Sciences, 2021b, p. 3).

Current Funding Sources*. Institutions have increasingly relied on student tuition and fee revenue generated from students remaining enrolled in their respective institutions (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020; Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2012). However, an institution's dependence on student tuition and fees, combined with low student retention rates, is susceptible to a decrease in revenue (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2012). Schuh and Gansemer-Topf (2012) provided an example of lost revenue at a fictitious, four-year private university caused by student attrition. They suggested a rough estimate that annual tuition and fees were $27,000 (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2012, p. 114). Schuh and Gansemer-Topf (2012) described, "If eighty out of the four hundred (using an 80 percent retention rate) drop out of Private University X, then the gross amount of tuition lost for the second year is $2,160,000 less any institutionally provided merit aid" (p. 114). Overall, Schuh and Gansemer-Topf (2012) suggested that the private university would lose $5,880,000 in tuition funds (p. 114).

Based on the hypothetical example, Schuh & Gansemer-Topf (2012) concluded that "it is certainly in the institutions' interest to retain as many students as possible" (p. 114). Schuh and Gansemer-Topf (2012) also argued that the fictitious universities would lose revenue generated from housing, dining, bookstore purchases, entertainment, and family and friends visiting campus. The lost revenue from tuition and fees would create additional issues for the institution to address, including a reduction in operations costs, ineffective faculty and staff salaries, loss of potential donations, decreased future enrollments, and diminished third-party rankings (Hossler, 2006; Kretovics & Eckert, 2020; Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2012).

In addition to money generated from students' tuition and fees, government funding contributed to the revenue generated by institutions (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011; Hossler, 2014; Institute of Education Sciences, 2021a; Kretovics & Eckert, 2020). Student retention impacts the extent of support institutions receive from government funding. The Institute of Education Sciences (2021a) described the percentage of revenue postsecondary institutions received from tuition and fees compared to several forms of government funding and concluded, "The primary sources of revenue for degree-granting postsecondary institutions in 2018–19 were tuition and fees; investments; government grants, contracts, and appropriations; and auxiliary enterprises" (p. 1). Government funding contributed 41% of overall revenues for public institutions during the same timeframe (Institute of Education Sciences, 2021a, p. 1).

At the same time, higher education has experienced a funding shift with increased tuition prices and decreased government funding at the state and federal levels (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020). Although state funding has diminished, some states have implemented

performance funding strategies to fund higher education (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011;

Kretovics & Eckert, 2020). Performance funding is a funding model utilized by states to

determine the amount of funding based on the performance of the institution in the areas

of retention and graduation rates (Dougherty & Reddy, 2011). Hossler (2014) highlighted

that "institutional interest in student persistence, however, goes beyond straightforward

financial incentives based on the tuition students pay" (p. 2). State lawmakers have

increased focus on retention and graduation rates to make funding decisions (Hossler,

2014). However, Dougherty and Reddy (2011) extensively studied the history and impact

of performance funding on institutions throughout the United States. Dougherty and

Reddy (2011) concluded that performance funding impacted institutions' behaviors but

did not increase the desired outputs tied to funding "increases rates of remedial

completion, retention, and graduation" (p. 43).

Resource Allocation and Institutional Structure. Institutions have addressed

student retention by improving institutional oversight, reallocating university resources to

retention programs, and investing in enrollment management (Gansemer-Topf and Shuh,

2004, 2005, 2006; Hossler, 2006; Hossler et al., 2009). Hossler et al. (2009) studied the

effectiveness of student retention initiatives in higher education and discovered an

incongruence between the allocation of resources and the effectiveness of student

retention programs. Hossler et al. (2009) found that 60% of institutions participating in

the study had a staff member assigned to coordinate student retention efforts, but "the

average amount of time allocated to coordinating these efforts was less than one-third of

a full-time position" (p. 6). Moreover, the researchers concluded that "only 40 percent of

the retention coordinators have the authority to implement new programs and only a

quarter of those individuals could also fund the new initiatives" (Hossler et al., 2009, p. 7). Hossler et al. (2009) recommended balancing institutional oversight and resource allocation and suggested that staff responsible for overseeing retention receive the "time, authority, or personal and professional encouragement" to create change in retention policies and programs (pp. 10-11).

To address student retention, institutions must determine how to provide financial and structural support to retention programs (Berger et al., 2012; Gansemer-Topf and Schuh, 2004; Hossler, 2006). Gansemer-Topf and Schuh (2004) researched the instruction and academic support expenditures and their impact on student retention and graduation rates. The study found that instruction and educational support expenditures "significantly predicted retention rates" (p. 138). Gansemer-Topf & Shuh (2004) summarized that private institutions "allocated more money per headcount student" on instruction and academic support than public institutions, resulting in higher first-year retention rates when compared to their respective public institution (p. 138).

Additionally, the enrollment management function has played a critical role in institutional fiscal allocations and organizational structure to address student retention (Berger et al., 2012; Hossler, 2006). Berger et al. (2012) identified managing enrollments as an era of retention that began in the 1980s and utilized Jack Maguire's definition of enrollment management as a means to "align efforts across the admissions, financial aid, registration, and institutional research" (as cited in Berger et al., 2012, p. 24). Hossler (2006) also discussed the importance of universities investing in enrollment management to improve student retention initiatives and emphasized the need for enrollment

management offices to create institution-specific retention plans that focus on more than marketing initiatives and new student orientation.

Institutional Grants and Financial Aid. Gansemer-Topf and Schuh (2005, 2006) extensively researched the role of intuitional grant expenditures, including financial aid grants, on student retention. Gansemer-Topf and Schuh (2005) considered the amount of money provided to students in institutional grants and the percentage of institutional finances dedicated to institutional grants at a private, non-profit institution. The study found that the amount and percentage spent on institutional grants positively affected retention and graduation rates (Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2005). Gansemer-Topf and Schuh (2005) also noted a statistical difference between institutional selectivity and expenditures. Gansemer-Topf and Schuh (2005) concluded that institutional grants for low-selectivity institutions "significantly contributed" to retention and graduation rates (p. 15). In contrast, institutional grants did not contribute to retention and graduation rates at highly selective institutions.

Additionally, Gansemer-Topf and Schuh (2006) reported the importance of institutional selectivity in allocating resources to improve retention. Although some exceptions existed based on institutional selectivity, the researchers discovered "a direct relationship between expenditures and retention and graduation rates" (Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2006, p. 629). Gansemer-Topf and Schuh (2006) found that retention and graduation rates benefited from expenditures concentrated on instruction and academic support expenditures. However, retention and graduation rates did not improve from student services expenditures (Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2006).

Higher Education Programs to Improve Retention

Higher educational institutions have explored various methods to improve student retention and persistence. Tinto (2010, 2012a) suggested four conditions for informing institutional action to improve student retention: expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement. Institutions have implemented first-year experience programs, social engagement, learning communities, and mentorship programs to improve retention. Previous research on student involvement in campus organizations has shown that students have increased university satisfaction, experience intellectual development, and have higher GPAs (Gellin, 2003; Montelongo, 2002; Webber et al., 2013). Ultimately institutions need to learn why students attend college to support students in their degree attainment (Schultz & Higbee, 2007).

First-Year Experience Programs and Student Success. Previously, Nevitt Sanford (1962, 1968) researched first-year college students and considered the importance of creating an educational environment that challenged students but also supported the students' learning and development. Other researchers, like Smith (2021), have also investigated the role of first-year engagement programs based on theoretical frameworks to increase student success, belonging, and retention. Universities have used first-year seminars, early warning programs, and orientation programs to support and retain students (College Board Advocacy, 2009; Hossler et al., 2009; Hundrieser, 2008; Tinto, 1993, 2012a). Professional advising for students has also served as a successful method of helping students persist (Bai & Pan, 2010; Filson & Whittington, 2013; Hanover Research, 2014; Tinto, 1993).

However, researchers have debated the efficacy of first-year or student success programs (Brint & Clotfelter, 2016; Cuseo, 2010; Hossler, 2006). Brint and Clotfelter

(2016) questioned the effectiveness of student success programs since universities'

retention evaluations fail to control for students' motivation. Brint and Clofelter (2016)

believed universities lack robust research to create and implement retention programs.

Similarly, Hossler (2006) argued that despite universities' efforts to implement retention

programs, little evidence showed the effectiveness of the programs or initiatives. Jones

and Braxton (2009) also recommended that more institutions research "campus-based,

methodologically rigorous studies" (p. 136). However, Cuseo (2010) suggested that

universities must evaluate first-year programs based on the programs' statistical and

fiscal significance since universities may benefit fiscally from the programs. Cuseo

(2010) stated, "The revenue gained from the modest increase in additional tuition-paying

and fee-generating students may contribute significantly to institutional budget" (para. 7).

Social Engagement. Historically, higher education has implemented programs

and student support structures to engage college student development outside the

classroom (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh, 1995, Schlossberg et al., 1989; Sanford,

1968). Sanford (1968) argued that students' development is essential in higher education,

and institutions should view a student's individual development inside and outside the

classroom as a necessary endeavor in higher education. Likewise, Kuh (1995) discussed

that "out-of-class experiences" are critical to student development, and institutions should

help cultivate an environment that fosters student participation (p. 125). Research has

found a positive relationship between students' extracurricular involvement and

leadership growth, competence, and character development (Galvin, 2016; Harrison &

Laco, 2022; Kuh, 1995; Foreman & Retallick, 2013).

Likewise, peer groups significantly influence students' attitudes as students explore higher education (Newcomb, 1962). Like Astin (1984/1999), Tinto (2012a) specified student involvement, or engagement, as "the most important condition" in student success (p. 7). Tinto (2012a) stated, "The more students are academically and socially engaged with faculty, staff, and peers, the more likely they are to succeed in college" (p. 7). Tinto (2012a) summarized that the quality of meaningful involvement is significant for institutional retention and stated, "Retention requires that a student see him- or herself as belonging to at least one significant community and find meaning the involvements that occur within that community" (p. 67). Previously Tinto (1993) also considered the importance of students finding congruence and support in subcultures within the university.

Further, Moxley et al. (2001) argued that retention has a psychosocial nature, and university retention policies need a student-centered approach to help students persist. The university community should also be inclusive and supportive of historically underrepresented communities and backgrounds (Tinto, 1993). Retention initiatives are also a matter of understanding and supporting students' diversity (Moxley et al., 2001; Tinto, 1993). Similarly, Bai and Pan (2010) suggested that universities create retention programs based on students' demographics and characteristics. For example, social integration programs were specifically effective in increasing retention for female students and students at more selective colleges (Bai & Pan, 2010).

Academic Engagement. Intellectual and academic engagement is vital for student academic success and persistence (Kuh et al., 2008; Tinto, 1993, 2012b; Xerri et al., 2018). Like Kuh et al. (2008), Tinto (1993) argued that classroom engagement and

learning are essential to persistence. Specifically, institutions should intentionally create

learning communities to develop peer groups and social connections within the classroom

(Tinto, 2012b; Xerri et al., 2018). Tinto (2012b) described that learning communities

consist of students enrolling in two or more courses organized by theme. Faculty help

design a learning environment emphasizing "cooperative learning, collaborative learning,

and problem- or project-based learning" (Tinto, 2012b, p. 262). Tinto (2012b)

highlighted that learning communities help students develop peer support, create

opportunities to spend more time together, and become more involved in an active,

experiential learning process.

Faculty and student interactions also benefit students' persistence. Faculty-student

relationships help students within the classroom and can positively increase student

academic engagement (Reason et al., 2006; Tinto, 1993; Xerri et al., 2018). Reason et al.

(2006) argued that students' academic success during the first year of college was

essential for developing competence and persistence. Reason et al. (2006) stated,

"Students' perceptions of the campus environment as supportive were the most powerful

predictor of growth in academic competence" (p. 170). Universities should also seek

policies to improve faculty-student relationships, and faculty should encourage student

engagement in the classroom (Reason et al., 2006). Outside the classroom, faculty and

staff professional development are critical in helping students persist and providing them

with the resources and tools they need to navigate the university system, including the

financial aid office (Farrell, 2008).

Mentorship Programs. Mentoring serves a significant role in supporting

students' development and helping students persist in college (Chickering & Reisser,

1993; Parks, 2000; Tinto, 1993). Universities have created mentorship programs to increase student involvement on campus and improve retention (Sutter & Francis, 2022; Tinto, 2012a). Mentorship programs have positively impacted first-year student success, created an educational environment that supports students, and increased retention (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Tinto, 1993, 2010). However, the effectiveness of mentorship programs is difficult to study because mentorship programs do not have a clear definition in the existing literature, programs are typically institution-specific, and programs lack a unified theoretical approach. (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Gershenfield, 2014; Jacobi, 1991; Lane, 2020).

Although the exact definition of mentoring is inconsistent throughout the literature, Crisp and Cruz (2009) referenced the work of Philip and Hendry (2000), who identified five styles of adolescent-adult mentoring. The five mentoring styles included classic, individual, friend-to-friend, peer group, and long-term relationships (Philip & Hendry, 2000). Of note, classic and peer group mentorship styles are evident in the higher education setting. First, classic mentorships consist of a "one-to-one relationship" where the mentor, in a position of authority, "provides support, advice, and challenge" (Philip & Hendry, 2000, p. 126). Classic mentorships are evident in faculty-student mentorships and other mentorships that have clearly defined authority structure, including mentorships with university staff, administrators, academic advisors, and religious leaders (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jessup-Anger et al., 2016; Philip & Hendry, 2000; Tinto, 2012a).

Next, peer group mentoring is based on the "friendship group" and involves individuals of a similar age who share common interests or hobbies (Philip & Hendry,

2000, p. 217). Peer group communities are similar to mentorship communities recommended by Parks (2000) to help students develop faith and search for meaning. Higher education has increasingly focused on peer mentorships through peer-to-peer mentorships programs. Peer mentorship programs provide several benefits to first-year students, including increased student persistence, stress and anxiety reduction, adjustment to college, a sense of belonging at the university, encouraged involvement in university activities, increased academic socialization, and increased student satisfaction with higher education institutions (Collier, 2017; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Flores & Estudillo, 2018; Lane, 2020; Sanchez et al., 2006). At the same time, students participating as mentors in peer-based programs benefit from structured learning and development opportunities, network development, and community building (Kiyaman & Luca, 2014).

Summary

The literature reviewed examined three strands related to higher education: psychosocial development, religiosity and spirituality, and student retention. Based on the work of Erikson (1950/1993) and Chickering and Reisser (1993), students' psychosocial development has played a vital role in understanding how students engage in identity development through extracurricular participation. Likewise, the literature examined the historical development of students' religiosity and spirituality, including how higher education has embraced students' spiritual and religious growth through extracurricular engagement and interfaith dialogue. Finally, the review assessed the theoretical approaches, financial concerns, and institutional initiatives related to student retention and persistence in higher education. Overall, student engagement and institutional support structures were critical factors in the literature review's three topics. The

literature review provided a foundation for the study's methodology and design,

discussed in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Design

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research design and methodology of the study. The chapter details the research site, participant recruitment and eligibility, the research design, data collection strategies, and data analysis. Overall, the study utilized a mixed methods approach to research the efficacy of undergraduate students' involvement in a religious organization on psychosocial development, identity development, academic persistence, and graduation rates. The qualitative data collection and analysis aimed to learn from participants' experiences using open-ended, semi-structured interviews (Fraenkel et al., 2015), a focus group, and observations of the Roman Catholic Student Organization (RCSO). Similarly, the quantitative data collection and analysis aimed to determine whether a relationship existed between students' involvement in religious campus organizations and graduation rates.

Research Site

The research study examined undergraduate student involvement in a Roman Catholic Student Organization (RCSO) at a private, non-sectarian university in the Midwestern United States. Historically, the university had connections to the Presbyterian Church. Today, the university is a non-sectarian institution but continues to have a university chaplain and a campus chapel for non-denominational worship services. As of Fall 2021, the university enrolled 4,619 undergraduate and 2,384 graduate students (Lindenwood University, n.d.). Moreover, the university had 3,752 students enrolled in a traditional, on-campus program (Lindenwood University, n.d.).

As of the 2020-2021 academic school year, the university had six religious student organizations registered as university-sanctioned student organizations, including

the RCSO. During the 2020-2021 academic school year, the RCSO had 31 active

registered members. Likewise, in the 2020-2021 academic year, the organization

averaged 7.7 student attendees per event hosted by the RCSO and had 49 unique

attendees at events (J. Jost, personal communication, July 7, 2021).

The RCSO has a building adjacent to the university's campus, which the

organization uses for student activities, events, study space, and worship services.

Members of the RCSO and the local Roman Catholic Archdiocese maintain and manage

the organization's building. In addition to the organization's facility, the RCSO holds

weekly meetings on the university's campus in a lecture hall. The researcher conducted

all interviews and observations on the university's campus, not the off-campus building.

The local Catholic Archdiocese assigned a Catholic priest and four missionaries from the

Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) to manage campus ministry

activities and work with students. The university officially recognizes the Catholic priest

and FOCUS Missionaries as volunteers within the RCSO.

Participants' Demographics and Recruitment

After receiving approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, the

Associate Vice President of Student Affairs, and the Director of Student Involvement, the

researcher contacted the student president of the RCSO. In September 2021, the

researcher met with the president of the organization and the Catholic priest and

explained the nature of the research study, data collection strategies, and recruitment

needs. The priest and student president agreed to allow the researcher to recruit students

from the RCSO to participate in the study, observe the student group, and present a

recruitment presentation to student members.

In October 2021, the researcher attended an RCSO weekly meeting and conducted a 15-minute presentation to recruit students. The researcher explained the study, outlined the participation requirements, and answered students' questions about the study. Additionally, the researcher allowed students to sign up for semi-structured interviews after the meeting. The researcher also provided contact information to students who felt more comfortable signing up for the study at a later time. The researcher screened students interested in research participation to determine if the students met the minimum participation requirements. All interview and focus group participants received an informed consent document to review before participation.

The study required participants to be undergraduate students enrolled full-time in courses at the university. The study required participants to be 18 years old or older to qualify for the research and that participants be actively involved in the RCSO. Participants under 18 years of age were excluded from the research study to avoid needing parental consent for participation. For the purpose of the study, the researcher defined active involvement as students who attended at least two or more events per academic year sponsored by the organization. RCSO events included social events, volunteer opportunities, church service attendance, community outreach, Bible studies, and organization-wide meetings. Since the research focused on a specific student population with distinct religious backgrounds and experiences, the study excluded participants who were not actively involved at the RCSO nor enrolled in an undergraduate program.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

What role does undergraduate students' involvement in a Catholic student organization play in student psychosocial development?

Research Question 1a. What psychosocial crises are evident in undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization?

Research Question 1b. How do undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization experience the development of meaningful, intimate relationships?

Research Question 2

What is the perceived impact of undergraduate students' involvement in a Catholic student organization on student identity development?

Research Question 2a. How do undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization perceive identity development?

Research Question 2b. Which vectors of the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development Theory do undergraduate students perceive most influenced by participation in a Catholic student organization?

Research Question 2c. Which vectors of the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development Theory do undergraduate students perceive to be minimally influenced by participation in a Catholic student organization?

Research Question 3

What is the perceived role of undergraduate student involvement in a Catholic student organization on student academic persistence?

Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to the overall undergraduate student graduation rate at the institution.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to undergraduate students who self-identify as Catholic but are not involved in the Catholic student organization.

Null Hypothesis 3

There is no difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to undergraduate students involved in other student religious organizations.

Research Design and Methodology

During the qualitative research design, the study utilized interviews, a focus group, and observations to collect data to answer the research questions. First, the researcher used semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to collect participant data. The researcher utilized a convenience sample of undergraduate students registered as members of the RCSO to recruit for interviews (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The researcher considered the appropriate sample size for interview participants in the research design. Baker and Edwards (2012) extensively explored the necessary sample size for one-on-one interviews and concluded that the parameters for defining a minimum and a maximum number of participants to provide validity to the study vary based on the research design and sample population. Other common trends determining sample size include the initial population size, information redundancy, and reaching saturation

(Vasileiou et al., 2018). For this study, the researcher considered the population size of the research site and the intended sample population. The student population for this research study was a homogenous group with similar educational attainment and religious backgrounds. Based on existing research, the study would not need to exceed 10 to 15 participants (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Vasileiou et al., 2018).

While designing the study, the researcher considered the role of the interviewer in the interview process and the importance of creating a standard interview protocol. In preparation for data collection, the interviewer formulated unbiased questions to gather the interviewees' responses (Cropley, 2019). Similarly, the researcher created expansive, open-ended interview questions to learn from the insights and opinions of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). After designing the initial interview protocol and questions, the researcher tested the interview questions with two former members of a Catholic student organization. The researcher determined a rough estimate for the duration of interviews and edited questions based on feedback from the trial group.

While conducting interviews, the researcher considered the interviewee the expert with all the knowledge and experiences relevant to the research questions (Cropley, 2019). Further, the interviewer created an "appropriate atmosphere" for the interview and followed scripted protocols to not interfere with or influence the interviewees' responses (Cropley, 2019, p. 94). Finally, the interviewer used basic counseling skills with interviewees to encourage participation and create a safe, welcoming environment (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Despite the benefits of this research design, the researcher acknowledged that one-on-one interviews could potentially limit the quality of the research data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) identified four limitations of using interviews in data collection. First, data collected through interviews are "filtered through the views of interviewees" (p. 310). Second, interviewees provide information in a "designated place rather than the natural field setting" (p. 310). Next, the researcher's presence could bias participants' responses. Finally, participants may not "equally articulate" or perceive their experiences (p. 310). The researcher triangulated data from field observations and a focus group to overcome potential limitations to the data gathered from interviews and increase the reliability and validity of the data collection (Cropley, 2019).

The researcher also used field observations to research participants' behavior patterns and social interactions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher used semi-structured field notes and remained a nonparticipant during observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Finally, the researcher used a focus group to facilitate a discussion with RCSO members. Typically, an interviewer or moderator facilitates focus groups of 6 to 10 people, lasting about 1.5 to 2 hours (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Although the focus group's internal validity was limited based on the small sample size, the focus group created an environment for a robust discussion and a "deeper examination of complex issues" (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 78).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Qualitative Data Collection Procedures

The qualitative research occurred during the Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 academic terms. The study relied on participants' perspectives and experiences to assess the

applicability of student identity development, including Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Seven Vectors of Student Development. The research allowed undergraduate students to share their perspectives and experiences related to their involvement in an undergraduate religious organization and the RCSO's perceived role in psychosocial and identity development. Qualitative data included one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and field observations. The researcher transcribed and coded audio-recorded interviews and the focus group for thematic analysis (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Likewise, the researcher coded observation notes and looked for thematic responses.

In October 2021, the researcher gave a 15-minute presentation at an RCSO weekly meeting explaining the study to RCSO members. The researcher explained the scope of research participation and answered any questions the members of the RCSO had about participation. During the presentation, the researcher explained participant eligibility, screened participants based on previously outlined criteria, and provided interested volunteers with an informed consent document outlining the rights of the research participants. The researcher informed participants that they could leave the study without any consequence, that the researcher would deidentify data gathered, and that participants would be assigned pseudonyms to protect their rights and anonymity.

Seven members of the RCSO, who met eligibility criteria, volunteered to participate in interviews. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with participants between October 2021 and December 2021. All interviews occurred in a reserved study room in the university's library. The library study rooms provided a "quiet, semi-private" place to conduct the interviews, which helped to protect participants' involvement in the study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 7). The researcher recorded all

interviews and followed scripted interview protocols and research questions to maintain

consistency in data collection. The research questions used in the interview protocol

considered participants' backgrounds, knowledge, feelings, and experience (Fraenkel et

al., 2015). See Appendix A for the interview questions the researcher used during one-on-

one interviews and the focus group.

After completing interviews with participants, the researcher transcribed all audio

recordings. Once the researcher transcribed interviews, the researcher allowed

participants to review the verbatim transcripts for accuracy and corrections. Next, the

researcher edited transcripts to reflect the revisions made by the research participants.

Then, the researcher coded and analyzed the interview transcripts while looking for

thematic responses. The researcher read each transcript three times. During the first read-

through, the researcher noted reoccurring words, phrases, or thoughts that participants

used. Through the second read, the researcher identified apparent themes in the

transcripts. Finally, the researcher read the transcripts a third time to confirm themes.

Next, the researcher observed participants between November 2021-December

2021 and February 2022. The researcher conducted a total of eight observations over the

duration. The observation schedule was interrupted by the academic term break and the

university's COVID mitigation policies at the beginning of the Spring 2022 semester.

Otherwise, the researcher followed a consistent observation protocol to minimize

unexpected interference during data collection. The researcher observed weekly RCSO

meetings between 8 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. on Tuesdays. All observations lasted

approximately 1.5 hours and were in the same lecture hall in the university's library.

During observations, the researcher was a nonparticipant, made observation field notes,

and recorded data based on a predetermined checklist. After data collection, the researcher examined observation notes to code and theme the collected data. See Appendix B for the observation field checklist the researcher used during observations with the RCSO.

Finally, the researcher invited students to participate in focus groups in November 2021 and February 2022. Initially, the researcher attempted to schedule three separate focus groups when recruiting participants for the study. However, the researcher successfully conducted one focus group of eight RCSO members in February 2022. Three of the eight members who participated in the focus group had previously participated in individual interviews. The focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes in a semi-private room in the university's library. During data collection, the researcher audio-recorded the focus group, transcribed the recording, and reviewed the transcription for thematic responses. Like the one-on-one interviews, the researcher read through the transcripts three times to confirm thematic responses.

Quantitative Data Collection Procedures

The researcher also gathered quantitative data to compare the historical graduation rates of undergraduate students involved in campus religious organizations at the approved university site between 2012 and 2020. The researcher utilized the test of homogeneity of proportions and a series of two-sample z-tests for difference in proportions to compare the six-year graduation rates of students registered as members of the RCSO to members of other university-recognized student religious organizations, the university's overall undergraduate student population, and students who self-identified as Roman Catholic. After receiving IRB approval, the researcher requested student rosters

from the university's Office of Student Involvement and the university's chaplain for data preparation.

First, the researcher requested student membership rosters of university-sanctioned religious student organizations from the university's Office of Student Involvement. The Office of Student Involvement gave the researcher student membership rosters for six religious campus organizations from the designated period. The Office of Student Involvement provided the researcher with an Excel spreadsheet for each organization's student roster per academic year. The researcher compiled each roster into a master spreadsheet and prepared the data for Institutional Research (IR) to deidentify the master roster and provide graduation data.

The researcher organized the data alphabetically by the student's last name and first name to prepare the data for IR. The researcher removed duplicate records of students registered as members of organizations for multiple academic years. While preparing the data, the researcher observed that some students were registered members of multiple religious-based organizations. The researcher created a different roster of students who were members of more than one religious-based campus organization to compare to students involved in the RCSO. The researcher kept organization rosters mutually exclusive during data preparation. Based on guidance from IR, the researcher removed students from the master roster who did not have university-provided email addresses. The researcher submitted a master roster list of 800 students to IR.

Next, the researcher requested religious self-identification data from the university's chaplain. The chaplain had previously gathered data on student religious affiliation from incoming first-year cohorts from 2016-2021. The list contained 774

students who self-identified as "Catholic," "Christian/Catholic," or "Roman Catholic."

Based on guidance from the university's IRB and IR, the university chaplain prepared the

data and sent the data directly to IR for anonymization. To protect students' Federal

Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) rights, the researcher did not have access to

the data until after IR had deidentified the data.

IR returned deidentified religious-based organization membership rosters and

self-identified religious affiliation rosters with university start dates, conferral dates, and

semester of last attendance to the researcher. After receiving the deidentified list of

students who self-identified as Catholic, the researcher organized the data and filtered the

data to students who were first-time freshmen, self-identified as Roman Catholic, and had

started attending the university's main campus from Fall 2016 through Fall 2017. The

researcher set the last term date of attendance as Fall 2021. After preparing the data, 80

students fit the criteria for the study. The researcher then noted the number of students

who graduated and those who had not completed their degrees.

Then, the researcher prepared the religious-based organization membership

rosters. The researcher filtered the historical data to first-time freshmen who attended

classes on the university's main campus. The researcher set the last term date of

attendance as Fall 2021 and excluded students currently enrolled in a degree program and

who did not have a conferral date. A total of 475 students fit the designated criteria. The

researcher organized the data by religious-based student organizations, including Athletes

in Action (n = 67), RCSO (n = 100), CRU (n = 71), International Student Fellowship (n =

139), InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (n = 36), and Latter-day Saint Student

Association (n = 23). The researcher also noted an additional group of students who

participated in more than one religious organization (n = 39). The researcher recorded the number of students who graduated and those who had not completed their degrees for each religious-based organization.

Finally, the researcher used a test of the homogeneity of proportions and a series of z-tests with a significance level of .05 to compare the graduation data from the RCSO to each registered religious-based student organization. Additionally, the researcher used a z-test to compare the graduation data from the RCSO to the university's reported six-year graduation rates from the 2020-2021 common dataset published by the university. Then, the researcher utilized a z-test to compare the graduation data from the RCSO to students who self-identified as Catholic during their first year at the university.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity played an important role during the study's design. Creswell and Creswell (2018) discussed the importance of the researcher's reflexivity in qualitative research and research design. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that researchers must "reflect about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to the data" (p. 301). Creswell and Creswell (2018) continued to reason that it is more than "merely advancing biases and values in the study" (p. 301). Although the researcher had no direct connection or influence over the RCSO or the study's participants, the researcher's previous experiences and cultural background impacted the research. The researcher is affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, previously worked for a non-profit Christian training organization for nine years, and was a member of an RCSO while pursuing an undergraduate degree between 2008 and 2012.

The researcher created the study from the researcher's interest in understanding the role of religion and religious organizations in student development. The researcher remained aware of possible biases during the research design, participant recruitment, and data collection stages of the study. The researcher's prior experience helped secure the RCSO's approval to participate in the study and created a professional, welcoming environment for participants. Additionally, the researcher's prior experience helped the researcher understand the topics participants discussed, the terminology used during interviews and observations, and helped inform follow-up questions.

Summary

The study utilized a mixed methods approach to research the efficacy of undergraduate students' involvement in a religious organization on psychosocial development, identity development, academic persistence, and graduation rates. The qualitative data collection and analysis aimed to learn from participants' experiences using open-ended, semi-structured interviews (Fraenkel et al., 2015), a focus group, and field observations of the RCSO. Similarly, the quantitative data collection and analysis aimed to determine if a relationship existed between students' involvement in religious campus organizations and the university's six-year graduation rates. Next, Chapter Four provides an analysis of the data collected.

Chapter Four: Analysis

The mixed-methods research considered the psychosocial development, identity formation, and academic persistence of undergraduate students who were members of a student religious organization. The research questions sought common themes to understand the psychosocial and identity development of Roman Catholic Student Organization (RCSO) members at a private, non-sectarian university in the Midwest United States. The researcher utilized interviews with members of the student religious group, a focus group, and group observations to find thematic responses to the research questions. As applicable, the researcher triangulated the qualitative data. At the same time, the research considered three hypotheses to inquire if the academic graduation rates of members of the RCSO were significantly different from other religious groups, students who self-identified as Catholic, and the institution's six-year graduation rate. The researcher gathered institutionally available data and anonymized organization rosters to compare graduation rates using the two-sample z-test for difference in proportions and the test of homogeneity of proportions.

Research Question 1

What role does undergraduate students' involvement in a Catholic student organization play in student psychosocial development?

Members Experience a Community Based on Similar Religious Beliefs and Perspectives.

Research participants discussed the significance of having a community with a similar religious tradition and belief system. Sharing similar views and attitudes helped create meaningful relationships with other organizational members. For instance,

Participant 1 explained that the RCSO created authentic relationships because organizational members had similar religious beliefs. The participant stated:

Faith-based friendships are some of the deepest and the fastest-forming and deepest friendships that I have ever had. Having that connection and the faith being such a deep, establishing point already really opens up for authentic friendship because that already puts you in a very vulnerable place.

Likewise, Participant 4 explained the importance of sharing a common religious tradition with other organization members. Participant 4 said, "I thought it was nice to be able to make friends with people that at least you already have something in common with, and I think especially something as important to a person's life as being Catholic." The participant discussed finding comfort as a freshman, "When you're in a new environment like I was as a freshman, [having] people who have similar knowledge as you and similar beliefs that can be kind of comforting." Also, the participant discussed the difference in the "conversations" and depth of relationships between their relationships with other organizational members and individuals who do not participate in the RCSO. The participant stated, "You don't talk about the same things with a roommate who has a different religion or just someone that you only like [have] a class with that you talk to every now and then."

Participant 5 also discussed the quality of relationships with other Catholic organization members. Participant 5 detailed the underlying quality of their relationships and how their relationships have challenged them to grow. The participant indicated they initially joined the RCSO because "I grew up Catholic and, I just enjoyed hanging out with people that are like-minded with me and share a similar faith drive and are

motivated in life in that area." The participant found that members of the RCSO and the

"faith community" could "help challenge me in my faith." The participant also indicated

that the RCSO had provided "an opportunity to meet more people and develop in a social

aspect."

Likewise, Participant 7 discussed the differences between religious-based and

non-religious based organizations on campus. The participant discussed the significance

of participating in a community based on religious beliefs and formed out of love for

other members. The participant stated, "People join fraternities or sororities or clubs . . .

that might give you the sense of community and like a shallow sense." Instead, the

religious-based relationships drew the participant toward the RCSO:

> The agape sense of community is really only found built on the foundation of
>
> Christ within the body of Christ. That's true community. That's the community
>
> that I want to be around if I'm going to get through college and also try to
>
> progress in sanctity. That's the community that I need, and some clubs couldn't
>
> do that for me like the [RCSO] can.

Participant 7 also discussed how having similar beliefs can create a supportive and

understanding community. The participant discussed that the "community offers support

and help" when struggling with "grave sin" like "pornography" or avoiding "drugs or

alcohol or even procrastination with homework."

Participant 6 discussed the importance of creating relationships and friendships

through their faith and religious beliefs. The participant discussed that the RCSO had

"given me a new kind of perspective on friendships and forming your friendships around

God and just like connecting with other people based on faith." The participant stated,

"Christ-centered relationships have really impacted me. They're almost a selfless type of friendship, and they help me see God's love through others." Finally, during the focus group, Participant 10 explained the benefit of finding support in a community with similar life perspectives. The participant stated, "Having a group of people that you can go to with questions about the deepest parts of your brain and deepest things that you can think of and like, your values is so important." Unlike other groups and non-religious friendships, the participant said they feel comfortable going to other RCSO members with these thoughts.

Research Question 1a

What psychosocial crises are evident in undergraduate students who are involved in a Catholic student organization?

Members Achieved Intimacy in Relationships

During participant interviews, the focus group, and group observations, the psychosocial crisis of intimacy versus isolation was evident in the participants involved with the RCSO. Participants described that they had achieved intimacy in their relationship and had resolved the psychosocial crisis of intimacy versus isolation by obtaining support from the RCSO and learning to become vulnerable with other members. Participants also indicated that their relationships outside the RCSO, including with family, had improved from those modeled within the RCSO.

During interviews, Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 5 indicated that the RCSO had encouraged strong relationships with other members and improved their relationships with family members. First, Participant 1 stated:

It's actually improved my relationship with my twin brother a lot. Getting into

college, I realized I was treating my male friends similarly to how I treated my

brother, which was not very kindly. I learned that I needed to treat those people

better, and that, in turn, like made me want to treat my brother better.

Likewise, Participant 2 indicated that their relationships with their family improved. The

participant stated that the RCSO "definitely affected the way I spent time with my family.

I just started to try to want to be with them. It's encouraged me to actually foster a good

relationship with the people that I care about." Then, Participant 5 discussed that the

RCSO has helped them interact with others and "strengthened a lot of relationships

outside of the [RCSO] with my family and a lot of my close relatives that aren't

necessarily involved in their faith." The participant can now have "a heart of compassion

for other people." Participant 3 also shared a similar perspective and indicated that the

RCSO had encouraged their relationship development with their family. The participant

specifically discussed how discovering their identity had improved relationships with

their family. The participant stated, "I have a greater sense of who I am as a daughter of

God. Now, I'm able to see that in other people a lot more clearly. That comes out in

having a lot more patience with my family."

Participants 1 and 4 also detailed how the RCSO encouraged members to engage

in meaningful interactions with other members. Participant 1 discussed the "harder

conversations" that come from relationships within the RCSO. The participant stated that

conversations go beyond surface-level discussions, and members ask each other, "How

are you actually? What's going on in your life? What do you need? What can I help you

walk through? What can I pray for you about?" Likewise, Participant 4 detailed that the

RCSO creates an opportunity to have more meaningful relationships. The RCSO enabled organization members to engage in difficult conversations and build trust with other members. The participant specifically mentioned the role of Bible studies in forming relationships. The participant explained that during Bible studies, group members learn "intimate things about people than you would otherwise." The participant said, "I showed up to a Bible study like the first or second-week people are giving me their life story about their reversion or conversion." The participant summarized that "there's some beauty" to having an environment where members can "have those kind of difficult conversations, but then do it in a productive way . . . It gives you a little bit more trust in—just kind of like acceptance of the group that you're in and willingness to participate."

During interviews and the focus group, Participant 2, Participant 7, and Participant 8 expressed that the RCSO had helped with being vulnerable with other members. For example, Participant 2 discussed how the environment in the RCSO promoted vulnerability. Participant 2 stated, "It's encouraged me to be more vulnerable with them, to actually open up and show them what I'm actually like, not just put up walls and pretend to be someone else." The participant highlighted, "It helped me have a real relationship with people where they actually know who I am." Next, Participant 7 reflected, "I've learned about myself that I'm on this journey to heaven essentially . . . I am not perfect, and I need people who I can turn to for support and people who understand kind of what I am experiencing." The participant had learned that "no one's alone in the path to sanctity" and that people deal with the same "hardships" and "stress" in life. The participant summarized, "I can talk with them about that." Then, during the

focus group, Participant 8 discussed feeling vulnerable with other group members. The participant stated, "Everyone here is so kind, and they're so open. It's hard to be afraid to just be myself around these people." The participant also suggested that they do not feel judgment from RCSO members: "I don't feel I'm gonna come, and then because of some sort of characteristic, I'll be judged in some way by the community."

Additionally, participant vulnerability and development of intimacy were evident during group observation sessions. During Observation 1, the presenter invited participants to share stories about times when God's provision was evident. While sharing, members told stories about personal or family experiences with cancer, unfortunate life situations, grief, and infertility. Other students were verbally encouraging and silent when necessary during the sharing activity. Similarly, during Observation 2, an RCSO member discussed the importance of participating in an upcoming Catholic retreat. The student stated that the event helped create an "intimate connection with four or five guys and helped provide a restart in my faith life." Members then discussed how the retreat helped students maintain relationships through ongoing Bible studies on campus.

During Observation 3, organization members participated in a discussion activity focused on love languages and how people give and receive love. Members took an interactive quiz to learn their love languages. After learning about love languages, members were divided into groups of four to five people and took turns sharing their identified love languages. Members respectfully shared, listened, and reflected on other group members' experiences. After sharing, the entire group reconvened and openly discussed two questions. First, "What is your love language?" Second, "How have you used these things for yourself?" Members shared while the remaining group listened and

verbally encouraged the speakers. One member stated that understanding their love language "helps me love others more."

Later, during Observation 7, students discussed finding healing through God and overcoming life difficulties. A speaker encouraged members in small groups to consider two questions, "How can God lift you up in your pain? What areas in your life do you feel burdened or weighed down?" Members identified their feelings and discussed their feelings of sadness with other members.

Finally, organization members' vulnerability and self-reflection in relationships were evident during a confrontation between members. Before the beginning of Observation 5, members were teasing each other and relating sarcastically and hurtfully. Another student interrupted the conversation and said, "We need to be kinder to each other and start an initiative to be kind. We joke with each other a lot but need to think about how people see us from the outside."

Research Question 1b

How do undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization experience the development of meaningful, intimate relationships?

Members Encounter Genuine and Intentional Relationships

Research participants during interviews and the focus group discussed the importance of having an environment that encouraged intentional relationships with organizational members. The research participants described how the relationships created a supportive environment, which helped members develop and explore their identities. For instance, Participant 2 discussed how the genuine relationships formed within the RCSO encouraged the participant to join the group, "I could tell that they had

genuine relationships . . . You could tell they all actually cared for each other. You could

tell that they actually meant something to each other. There was something meaningful

that was there."

Likewise, Participant 1 explained, "My friendships within the [RCSO] are

definitely much deeper and more reliable than my friends from classes or in my dorm."

The participant also indicated, "Having your faith as your immediate connection that is so

much more meaningful than having your major be the same or having you live in the

same hall." Similarly, Participant 4 detailed how the environment of the RCSO

encouraged meaningful relationships compared to other student groups. The participant

explained, "I think that [the RCSO] specifically is an environment that lends itself to

discussion that's probably more detailed and more nuanced than you would get in typical

student groups."

Moreover, Participant 5 detailed how members form genuine relationships

through the RCSO. The participant stated that the RCSO had "really created a strong

foundation of relationships in my life because it's taught me that God is really at the

center of everything that I do, and so He can be at the center of relationships." The

participant further said that they learned that having God at the center of their

relationships "has taught me a lot about relationships and how good ones form."

Participant 5 also described that their genuine friendships through the RCSO consist of

"people that check in on you, that care about you . . . General conversations are very

genuine . . . They remember things and ask you questions, and it's a very mutual thing."

During the focus group, participants extensively discussed the RCSO's beneficial

environment and how the environment helps students form meaningful and genuine

relationships. First, Participant 12 discussed the organized structure of relationships through planned activities. The participant said, "So a lot of my relationships with people within the [RCSO] are built around organized discipleship and making sure we have time to meet and check in on each other, like every week." The participant further compared relationships within the RCSO to relationships outside the organization. The participant said, "When you come together, with the goal of growing in your faith . . . we take our relationships pretty seriously . . . We make sure we're meeting once a week, so I have relationships [that are] intentionally way more sound."

Participant 8 agreed with Participant 12 and discussed the nature of relationships in the RCSO. The participant explained that the RCSO provided a community where the "goal is to have [a] proper foundation of building real relationships." The participant stated, "Having a community in which we come together specifically to be together in an organized manner, in which we hold each other to higher standards at every moment in our lives." The participant continued, "It's encouraging to take those relationships with us and apply them in other places versus just getting a friend group and maybe having something to do together."

Finally, Participant 11 discussed how the RCSO encouraged members to live an "authentic" life. The participant stated, "I noticed how the difference between [the RCSO] and other groups is that we're just good at calming each other and just like building each other up." The participant indicated, "The realness that we have with each other, I feel comfortable being authentic, not just in this group, but then I'll carry that out with other things I do."

Relationships Encourage Authority-based Mentorships

During individual interviews and focus groups, members expressed the importance of mentorship in developing meaningful relationships. Members experienced mentorship opportunities with missionaries through the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) and the priest the local Catholic Archdiocese assigned to the RCSO for pastoral support. Participants' reliance on authority figures was also evident in their relationships with mentors. For example, Participant 3 spoke extensively about their relationship with a FOCUS Missionary involved with the organization and how that relationship has impacted the student's development. The participant stated:

Anytime someone is like, 'Who has been influential in your faith journey in college?' A hundred percent [Redacted] . . . She was really the one who was like walking with me in my faith life and personal life. That was really attractive to me that she was actually being an authentic friend. She was the first person in a long time who I could tell was actually concerned with how I was doing and where my life was going.

Additionally, Participant 5 discussed learning from other group members and witnessing group members and missionaries use their talents. The participant stated, "I will build a relationship with somebody, and I'll see they have a really good talent." The participant said, "One of the Focus Missionaries is really good with the piano, so seeing her use those talents…and use them to bring other people into that musical element of faith is something that's really inspiring to me."

During the focus group, Participant 7 discussed how mentorships have impacted the participant's spiritual development and helped the participant overcome a challenging

period in life. The participant discussed their experience transferring to the university and

joining the RCSO, "I found a great group of adults who were pushing me and challenging

me in the faith and a great spiritual father coming up as well, who was like loving and

encouraging and always took time for me." The participant also highlighted that the

support received from mentorships created an environment that helped the participant

during "a period of deep isolation" that became "a joyous time to kind of take time for

myself and pray and grow close with God."

Similarly, the role of mentorships and emphasis on authority in relationships were

evident during group observations. The FOCUS Missionaries and the priest encouraged

members to participate in the organization while also helping run logistical operations for

the organization. For instance, during Observation 2, the FOCUS Missionaries urged

students to sign up for an upcoming national conference for Catholic young adults. The

missionaries stressed that the conference would help members grow in leadership skills,

build relationships, and strengthen their relationship with God. The missionaries helped

members to sign up for the conference and provided free registrations through raffles.

Likewise, during the same observation, a new member at the meeting expressed concern

about knowing Catholic doctrine. The organization's priest offered support and reassured

the potential member that they could join the organization without extensive knowledge

of Catholic doctrine.

Then, during Observation 3, the priest who guided the group was late to the

meeting. Since the priest was absent, the group was unsure when to start the meeting and

was worried about who should pray to begin the meeting. The meeting started 20 minutes

late because of a lack of direction. Finally, during the organization's Christmas party, the

event depended on the priest and missionaries involved. The priest took a prominent role in judging an ugly Christmas sweater competition, while the missionaries organized the white elephant gift exchange and enforced the rules.

Research Question 2

What is the perceived impact of undergraduate students' involvement in a Catholic student organization on student identity development?

During individual interviews, a focus group, and observations, participants expressed two areas where the RCSO supported their identity development. First, participants discussed how the RCSO helped them develop and build leadership skills. Second, participants indicated that the RCSO had created an environment that fostered participants' pursuit of religious-based vocations or career choices.

Leadership Skills and Development

First, all seven interview participants discussed how involvement in the RCSO benefited their leadership skills. Participants indicated that leadership development was significant during their undergraduate experience. For example, Participant 1 explored the importance of having the opportunity to serve in a leadership position within the organization. Although the participant had unsuccessfully campaigned for leadership positions in high school, the participant stated, "The [RCSO] is kind of the first time that I've had permission to be a leader."

Moreover, Participant 1, who is in a teacher education program, indicated the impact of their leadership skills, "I have to go up and talk in front of people at least twice a week now, which is not something that I necessarily would've had a problem with before." However, the participant discussed experiencing anxiety or nervousness

speaking in front of others during the previous semester. The participant indicated, "As the semester has gone on, they've gotten less and less and less until a week or two ago, I would go up and did announcements, and I didn't feel anything."

Similarly, Participant 6 indicated that the RCSO had given them opportunities to serve in a leadership position. Participant 6, who is pursuing a minor in marketing, also detailed how they could develop leadership skills and prepare for a future career. The participant is responsible for social media marketing, including Instagram and Facebook profiles for the RCSO. The participant said, "I'm always updating on the stories about events coming up, posting pictures of other events . . . It's helped me learn too." Likewise, the participant stated, "I've never really done leadership positions, so this is a new experience. It's definitely brought me out of my comfort zone and helped me to realize that I can make a difference, and I can help bring others to the light." These leadership opportunities helped the participant build "confidence and responsibility."

Like Participants 1 and 6, Participant 2 discussed the participant's thankfulness of having the opportunity to grow as a leader. Participant 2 indicated leadership growth in organizing activities and religious practices. The participant said, "I'd say it's helped me grow as a leader more. I've definitely had more opportunities to step up and take the lead in a variety of applications." Participant 2 detailed that they organize and lead prayer activities, like leading other members in the rosary and in night prayer. Moreover, the participant helped organize a group to go camping.

Like Participant 2's development experience, Participant 3 discussed how serving in a leadership role has helped them develop skills and lead religious activities. Participant 3 indicated that organizing events and leading Bible studies were crucial areas

of development. The participant felt "much more confident and equipped" after "getting the opportunity to lead a Bible study last year." Based on their leadership experience, the participant felt confident to ask their parish to "lead a Bible study for middle school girls." The Bible study provided the participant with the opportunity to plan and design the curriculum. The participant said, "Not only have I been shown how to be a good leader and given the tools to be a good leader, but now I'm actually getting all these opportunities to lead in my own way."

Participant 4 also discussed how involvement in the RCSO impacted how they view the qualities of leaders and the skills necessary to serve in a leadership position. The participant had served on the executive board of the RCSO for three years, including as the marketing coordinator, treasurer, and senior executive. The participant summarized these leadership positions as "doing service to help [the RCSO]." Participant 4 stated that leadership occurs during "times when you'll have to step out and help others and then also being able to help other people when they have questions." The participant also learned that "communicating effectively is so important being a leader" and that leaders must make sure to do their "due diligence" to make "real changes" and "real differences for people."

Likewise, Participant 7 expressed a similar experience to Participant 5. The RCSO helped Participant 7 to understand the qualities of a "good leader." Participant 7 discussed the importance of self-reflection and boundaries, "I've learned that good leaders have a healthy balance of knowing when is a time to act professional and when you can actually kick back and relax and crack jokes." The participant continued to elaborate:

I recognize that some of the younger kids look up to me being a junior. I

recognize that. I recognize that if people have questions about the faith that, I can

answer them. I also can recognize the fact that like I want to just have fun and

joke around, and that can be equally the mark of a great leader as much as acting

professional can be.

Finally, Participant 5 discussed the importance of being around other leaders

involved with the RCSO and having a joint mission. The participant stated, "I think it has

definitely made me a lot more confident and just the way that I speak with people and

interact." The participant attributed their development to serving as the event coordinator

at the RCSO. The participant also indicated that weekly organization meetings had

helped their leadership development. The participant stated, "Being surrounded by a

bunch of leaders who share a similar drive to want to make the world a better place has

been critical in shaping me as a leader even more than I was before."

Pursuit of Religious-based Vocations or Career Choices

During individual interviews, the focus group, and observations, participants

indicated that involvement in the RCSO helped support their pursuit of a religious-based

vocation or a career. Participants said that involvement in the RCSO inspired them to

pursue working in an environment that supported their religiosity. Participants also

discussed how the RCSO created an environment that encouraged students to find a

vocation that supported their Catholic identity, regardless of their careers. For instance,

during Observation 8, one group member discussed the history and biography of a

Catholic role model, Saint Sebastian. The member learned the importance of

perseverance, sacrifice, and resilience from the saint's life. The member discussed how

they try to "embody" these qualities in their own life. Regardless of a person's career choice, occupation, or responsibility, the speaker indicated that "faith and mission" were critical components in their life, and they found their purpose in evangelizing others to join the Catholic Church.

Likewise, during the focus group, Participant 12 discussed how the RCSO had provided a supportive environment that helped them develop a career while living out their faith. The participant described that one of their "life's goals" is to evangelize and "let other people know [Jesus] through me." Participant 12 said, "It's actually been really easy in the context of having the [RCSO] here just because it gives me a way to communicate my faith in a normal, natural way." Further, the participant discussed their purpose in attending college and stated, "A small purpose why I'm here is to pursue my career and get my degree so I can get a new job and advance in life, so I can support a family." At the same time, the participant highlighted, "I think people can kind of tell that I have my faith as a backdrop behind all of that."

During the focus group, Participant 10 had a similar experience as Participant 12. Participant 10 discussed how support through the RCSO helped them realize that their career path depends on God. Participant 10 stated:

> Last year I was figuring out what do I want to do with my life and what career do I want. I think this year, and especially with talking to people in the [RCSO], I've kind of realized it's not really what I want to do with my life. It's what God wants me to do.

Additionally, during individual interviews, Participant 7 indicated the positive role the RCSO played in providing a supportive environment to discern a pastoral career

or vocation. The participant stated that the other members at the RCSO had helped

provide guidance and support:

> Every Catholic's mission should be to fulfill his or her vocation, and every
>
> Catholic male who seriously practices the faith, at one point or another, should
>
> have at least considered the possibility of priesthood or the diaconate or some
>
> kind of religious life. And then, of course, considering marriage as well . . . I've
>
> been able to get lots of good guidance on my vocation that God has planned for
>
> me.

Currently, the participant is "discerning" the vocation of marriage. The participant

indicated they were dating another member of the RCSO. The participant stated the

RCSO allowed them to talk with "young men, who have good heads on their shoulders

who can give me advice on how to go about dating in a virtuous manner, striving for

holiness."

Similarly, Participant 1 talked about supporting college faith-based ministries and

working in a Catholic educational environment in a future career. The participant

discussed how their involvement in the RCSO encouraged them to support Catholic

college ministries in the future. The participant said, "It's made me way more passionate

about college ministry." The participant said they became more passionate about college

ministry during the past three years. The participant encouraged their parish to be more

involved in college ministry to address "the rapid loss of young people in the church."

The participant stated that their parish "will talk about how kids will leave the church in

college . . . I will sit there and think, 'Why don't you do something about it while they're

in college? Why don't you have anything for college students over the summer?'

Participant 1 also discussed their desire to teach in a Catholic school after graduation. The participant stated, "I don't think that I could teach long term in a public school where I couldn't be Catholic." After working on a graduate degree, the participant stated, "I will end up in a Catholic school because I need to be able to express that wherever I go."

Like Participant 1, Participant 3 discussed how the RCSO created an environment that fostered a future career working in ministry. The participant stated, "I've always joked with my friends that I'll probably be a youth minister by 40." The participant described a conversation with another parishioner, who encouraged the participant to rethink their career path and embrace the possibility of being a youth minister. The participant stated, "I was talking to a lady at my parish, and we were talking about the confirmation programs, and that's something I'm really passionate about." During the conversation, the church member asked the participant, "What are you doing with your life?" After the discussion, the participant prayed about their future. The participant stated:

> I went to a holy hour later that day, and I was like, 'Jesus, what do you want me to do with my life?' I just felt really strongly compelled that I should change my major and that I should really start thinking seriously about like a career in ministry. Within five hours of hearing that question posed to me, I was like, I think I'm going to change my major and my whole life path.

Research Question 2a

How do undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization perceive identity development?

During group observations, interviews, and the focus group, participants focused on two areas of identity development that were significant to them. First, five interview participants highlighted the importance of members engaging in evangelization and introducing other university students to Catholicism. Second, research participants discussed that having a relationship with a higher power and developing that relationship through religious activities was essential to their identity development.

Identity is based on having a Personal Relationship with a Higher Power

During the interviews and a focus group, participants discussed that their relationship with a higher power was a cornerstone of their identities. The importance of participants' personal relationship with God was evident during group observations, including participants' interactions and discussions with other RCSO members. Participants discussed how their relationship with God or Jesus impacted other facets of their lives, including their relationships and purpose. Participants discussed aligning their lives to reflect their relationships with God.

For example, Participant 3, a junior, succinctly stated, "The biggest thing, and this is something I'm so, so passionate about now, like sharing with others, is that my identity is rooted in God first and like God alone." The participant detailed a conversation with a mentor at the RCSO about the participant's identity. The mentor previously asked the participant during the participant's first year, "In one word, who would you say that you are?" The participant stated, "I couldn't even answer that question because I couldn't figure out what the answer would be for me, so I definitely came in very lost, very confused." After their involvement in the RCSO, the participant said, "I just feel so secure, and my identity is first and foremost as like a daughter of God, and that just

changes everything when you know that." The participant also said their answer to the mentor's initial question would be "beloved."

Participant 2 also summarized the RCSO's role in developing their relationship with God and how it impacts their identity. The participant stated:

It's definitely drawn me closer to my Catholic faith and Jesus as well. So, in that sense, it helps me want to pursue Him more, which really helps to find the way I'm supposed to live and the way I'm supposed to treat others, and what I'm supposed to do with my life.

During the focus group, Participant 2 discussed how their relationships within the RCSO helped them develop a relationship with God. The participant stated, "It's helped me realize I'm not the most important thing in my life. It's helped me really set some priorities." The participant indicated these priorities included "putting God before myself," "holding myself last," and that it was "more important to discern myself to God and to get myself to him and to love others than it really is to just live for myself."

Similarly, Participants 5 and 6 discussed how the RCSO's environment helped them build a relationship with God. Participant 5 described, "I've learned how to challenge myself more in my faith and how to dive deeper into my faith." The participant explained that they utilized "scripture, adoration, and different sacraments to their fullest ability to get me where I want to be in my faith and build that relationship with Christ." Then, Participant 6 stated, "I feel the biggest thing I've learned is I really need to rely on God even [when] figuring out how to navigate life." Ultimately, Participant 6 highlighted, "I still am learning that my identity comes from being a daughter of Christ [and] learning about who I am and what's my purpose here."

The importance of having an identity rooted in a relationship with a higher power was also evident during field observations. For instance, during Observation 1, a student presented the importance of developing trust in God and "having faith in God's provision." During a discussion activity, members discussed the importance of trust and used the metaphor of walking on water. One student said, "God really provides for us!" Later, during Observation 3, a member discussed that learning more about expressing and receiving love helped build their relationship with God. The member explained that attending church services and participating in Catholic religious practices, like receiving the Eucharist during communion, is vital to experiencing God's love.

Later, during Observation 5, a participant discussed the necessity of trusting God's providence, even when difficult. The participant addressed the importance of trusting in God and building trust through communication with God. The student stated, "Miracles really do happen." The student also discussed how suffering through difficult times can be beneficial. The participant said, "Redemptive suffering set me on a path to Heaven," and encouraged fellow members that God has a plan for their lives. The member detailed how breaking their mom's bicycle in high school led them to become a college student. Then, during Observation 7, a student shared their experience watching their mom die from cancer. The student realized through the process that she had focused her identity in the wrong place. The student stated, "I placed my identity in humans." Instead, the student learned to trust God, "who has placed the right people in my life."

Engaging in Evangelization and Introducing other Students to Catholicism

Participants discussed the importance of evangelization and introducing other university students to Catholicism to their identity development. A significant part of

members' evangelization was welcoming students and guests who were not members of the RCSO. For example, during the focus group, Participant 12 stated, "It helps me evangelize too because I have friends who come to the [RCSO] now who wouldn't even come to mass every Sunday before." Participant 3 also discussed a friendship with a non-Catholic university student. The participant summarized "planting the seeds of evangelization" in friendships. Participant 3 described:

> One of my friends who's in my Bible study, she is very, very strong in her faith—raised non-denominational. I went to one of her church services. She came to a Catholic mass. Just finding a way to reach out and meet her where she's at, and just like being upfront and honest about Catholic stuff. Since she is so strong in her faith where she's at, I would love to see her become Catholic, but I don't think that's where she's at right now. So like, open to the idea of becoming Catholic. I'm hoping that just planting these seeds and dispelling any false ideas she has about Catholicism. I'm hoping that plant these seeds now, later down the road, wherever she's at, if she encounters someone else who's Catholic, then they'll be able to kind of pick up from there.

The emphasis on evangelization was evident during several observation sessions with the RCSO. Primarily, group members demonstrated a welcoming and friendly attitude toward prospective students, guests, and visiting relatives during Observations 3-5. Organization members also discussed how to incorporate evangelization into their lives. For instance, during Observation 7, a participant asked, "How can we further share the message of the gospel with others?" The members actively discussed the importance of evangelization and shared their experiences in overcoming burdens in life through

religious support. One member remarked about living a "new life in Jesus" and sharing

that with other people. Likewise, during Observation 8, members discussed methods to

evangelize on campus and encourage participation in the RCSO. One member discussed

the significance of evangelizing through intramural sports participation. The member

discussed building relationships with teammates through sports and sharing the faith

through a "Catholic lens." The discussion also focused on hosting kickball and pickleball

tournaments to introduce the RCSO to non-members and begin conversing about their

faith with non-members.

Similarly, Participant 5 discussed the importance of sharing their relationship with

God with other students. The participant discussed how their relationships within the

RCSO models how to build relationships outside of the organization. Participant 5 stated:

> Realizing that there's a bigger purpose and that you might be the only glimpse of
>
> Jesus that people ever get in their lives. That's definitely something that the
>
> [RCSO] has taught me because everybody takes every opportunity they can to be
>
> that example of Jesus on earth. So, I think that's, that's really awesome. [It's]
>
> been awesome to see and experience, and then it's helped me put it into play
>
> outside of [the RCSO].

The participant discussed how they evangelized through other activities, like intramural

sports. The participant discussed using "talents that God has given me and trying to use

those for a greater purpose." The participant considered, "How can I use the interactions

that I have with the people I play sports with, and how can I bring my faith into that?"

Additionally, Participant 6 discussed becoming less introverted and developing

interpersonal skills, including evangelizing and inviting students to join the RCSO. The

participant stated, "I've learned to appreciate and love everyone that I meet and being more outgoing and putting myself out there . . . Making those extra friendly steps to meet a new person if they come." The participant stressed it was necessary to ensure that "everyone feels welcome," and they actively worked on "branching out of my comfort zone" to "invite" people to the RCSO. The participant provided an example of evangelizing to a friend and stated, "She's never really learned any Christian values or anything, and I have invited her to Bible study a few times. She hasn't come yet, but I'm slowly trying to inch my way into introducing her to the faith."

Moreover, Participant 4 and Participant 7 discussed growing in charity toward other people and inviting students to the RCSO. Participant 7 stated: "I try to bring that same charity to people who aren't Catholic . . . [I am] not trying to drag them crawling and screaming into mass but just trying to be nice to them." The participant discussed the importance of evangelizing and building relationships with other students who are not RCSO members. The participant stated, "I get people asking me like, 'Hey, where are you off to?'" The participant answered: "I'm off to mass or, oh, I'm off to hang out at the [RCSO]…I get people asking questions, and I've even actually brought several people to the center because of that fact."

Finally, Participant 4 shared a similar perspective on evangelism as Participant 7. Participant 4 shared that the RCSO "taught me a lot about how to reach out to people the right way." The participant differentiated between meeting "someone and then you never hear from them, or you meet someone at a thing, and then you get five text messages the next week there." The participant indicated that they had reflected on these experiences and began evangelizing based on how they would want to be treated by others.

Research Question 2b

Which vectors of the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development Theory do undergraduate students perceive to be most influenced by participation in a Catholic student organization?

Members Developed Intellectual Competence

Interview participants indicated they had developed intellectual competence by participating in the RCSO. Participants discussed that the RCSO helped them develop intellectual competence by learning more about their Catholic beliefs and doctrines. For instance, Participant 6 stated, "I definitely have been learning a lot more about the faith and just really like, kind of like learning new kind of world views." The participant continued that they learned "to defend my faith" and to use their religious competence "as a tool" to start "a conversation with someone."

Likewise, interview participants discussed how mentorships helped develop intellectual competence and understand their religious beliefs. For example, Participant 1 detailed how mentorships played a role in helping them establish intellectual competence. The participant stated, "I started talking to FOCUS Missionaries and a priest on a regular basis and realized I don't know nearly as much as I thought I did. I don't understand the rationale of a lot of things nearly as much." The participant continued, "I learned that I know far less than I thought I did and that I have learned a lot more about the faith and teachings and rationale by being present and being around people who know things."

Similarly, Participant 3 explained the importance of participating in Bible studies and mentorship opportunities in developing intellectual competence. The participant indicated they both lead and participate in Bible studies on campus. The participant had

recently completed a Bible study program for the fifth time. Participant 3 stated that

Bible studies provide "so much great knowledge about the faith." Unlike their high

school ministry experience, the participant felt "intellectually challenged to defend [their]

beliefs." The RCSO had challenged the participant to "engage more in those beliefs"

through Bible studies, theological book clubs, and a study the participant planned to lead

on Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. The participant summarized their reflection

on developing competence:

> Why do I actually believe these things? Can I defend them myself? How much do
>
> I know beyond that? It's definitely challenged me to think more about the beliefs
>
> of the church since it's so rich, and you can never stop learning about it.

Additionally, participants' intellectual competence was evident throughout

observations. For instance, participants used presentation skills, software, and biblical

knowledge to instruct other students in Catholic theology and beliefs. Participants taught

other members through presentation topics, including trusting in God's provision,

understanding love languages, and explaining their religious and personal experiences.

Moreover, interview participants indicated that organization meetings and presentations

helped them develop competence. For example, Participant 2 stated, "I've never been the

best at public speaking." However, the RCSO had helped the participant "improve" at

public speaking and become more competent in "having conversations with people and

spending time with people and one-on-one situations, not just being in the room with

them."

Participant 4 also discussed developing intellectual competence and having the

opportunity to speak at organizational meetings. The participant indicated that the RCSO

allowed students to present theological and Catholic topics of their choice at

organizational meetings. The participant described, "Every Tuesday, people find a topic

or a scenario that's happened where they explain its relation to the faith." Participant 4

described their previous presentation called "Catholics and Comics." The "approachable

topic" explained the "relation of the Catholic Marvel superheroes and how their moral

compass guides them." The participant explained the Christian influences found in

Spiderman comics. Overall, the opportunity to talk about personal and faith-based topics

provided the members with "general knowledge about Catholicism." The participant

indicated it also helped to have a "better understanding of why you believe what you

believe" and to apply what they had learned during "discussions with people that aren't in

[the RCSO], or maybe aren't even Catholic."

Members Discovered Purpose through Religious Participation

In addition to pursuing religious-based vocations or careers, participants in the

focus group and interviews discussed how the RCSO helped them create purpose in their

lives. Participants indicated they intended to live a life honoring their Catholic beliefs and

religious identity. Generally, participants focused on finding purpose in their faith or

religious experiences rather than career paths. For instance, Participant 3 detailed

changing majors to fulfill their life's purpose and follow God's plan. The participant

discussed that through participation in Bible studies and religious conferences, they had

decided to switch majors. The participant stated, "I'm really excited that this is where

God is calling me to because I already feel this greater sense of fulfillment in life [by]

studying things that will help me become a better person." Overall, the participant saw

this change in a major as an enduring impact on their life. The participant said,

"Personally, as like a mother, as a wife, as potentially a teacher or a minister, this is how I can do my part . . . I'm so excited. This is the direction that God is putting me."

As a senior, Participant 4 reflected on their experience as a member of the RCSO and how involvement in the organization facilitated their life's mission. The participant detailed the importance of their religious practices to their overall purpose in life:

I think what the [RCSO] has done for me so far has given the will for me as I go

forward to keep my faith present and to continue to have my Catholic beliefs and

my faith be a part of what I do, like regularly in my life as I leave college.

The participant discussed religious activities, like attending "daily mass," going to "adoration," and participating in "confession" as essential parts of their life that they want to continue after they graduate. The participant stated, "It's surprising when you really experience something and how helpful it can be to your life. So, I think those experiences have made me want to keep that a part of my life as I go forward."

Participant 5 also discussed that their ultimate purpose was to get to Heaven and live a selfless life. The participant explained, "Being involved with the [RCSO] has immensely changed my perspective on life. I think before I would go about things in a very selfish way and think more internally rather than think big picture type of stuff." The participant further explained the benefit of being "surrounded by people that are like-minded." The participant stated, "I can see that like the end goal is heaven and there's a purpose to my life and realizing through prayer and more interaction with them that God has a specific purpose for everybody."

Likewise, Participant 6 shared a similar experience to Participant 5. Participant 6 stated that their life purpose is to serve God, love other people, and get to heaven. The

participant stated that the RCSO helped them see "that we're not made for this world; we're made for heaven." Overall, the participant said, "This faith community has helped me rediscover what I'm really here to do and kind of really has given me purpose. It's really given me a new mission and realize why I'm here." The participant clarified that their purpose is to "love others, know God, and bring others to the truth."

Focus group participants shared similar experiences with developing purpose through the RCSO. Participant 12 summarized, "Two really basic parts of my life's mission are to get to heaven and show God's love to other people." Participant 12 also described that evangelization and sharing "God's love" with other students was essential to their mission or purpose in life. Participant 9 also spoke extensively about the importance of faith to their purpose in life and explained how opportunities available through the RCSO helped them mature on their journey to heaven. Participant 9 stated:

> I think my understanding of my faith has just so greatly matured in college. I can definitely see how it has been fruitful for my faith and for my sense of purpose as a person to dive into that maturity and understanding of my faith, through the Bible studies, through being on the lead board at the [RCSO], through encountering people at different places in their faith . . . My faith has definitely deepened as a college student, and I think it has altered how seriously I take it.

Members Formed Identities Structured in Catholic Values and Beliefs

Interview and focus group participants indicated that involvement in the RCSO helped them establish their identity and their Catholic religious identity. At the same time, participation in the RCSO helped participants build confidence in their identity and helped them maintain their identity when relating to other people. For example,

Participant 1 described their involvement in a leadership position in the RCSO made them more "confident and outspoken." The participant discussed making the RCSO their "first priority" and developing confidence in their religious identity despite the "culture shock" they experienced. The participant found that "a lot of people aren't that receptive to Catholics" on the university's campus. The participant continued:

> They hear Catholic, and they think you're in a cult or something. I would try to make friends my freshman year with girls in my hall, and then they would find out that I'm Catholic, and then they would never talk to me again. So, for a little while, I kind of just stopped talking about it . . . Now it is like the [RCSO]— because it's such a strong group. I don't care if these people never talk to me again because I have such a strong group of people to fall back on.

> Likewise, Participant 2 highlighted that the RCSO helped them establish and

develop confidence in their religious identity. The participant said the RCSO supported them to "lose fear of judgment of what people would think I'm like." The participant further detailed, "[The RCSO] helped me not be worried about what they think of me and allows me to share who I really am without worrying about what others are thinking about." Participant 2 also indicated that the RCSO "helped me to pursue just being a good person in general. Holding up virtues and morals and striving to be a better man." Participant 2 elaborated on living their life according to their Catholic identity:

> I know in a Catholic sense, it would be like following the commandments, trying to have a better relationship with Jesus, and, like I said, being just a good person towards others, having good relationships with them. Then just in that general

sense of caring for others, helping them out, even if it's a sacrifice that I have to make.

Additionally, Participant 4 explained that the RCSO fostered confidence in sharing their religious beliefs with others and reinforced confidence in their religious identity. The participant summarized, "I think being in [the RCSO] has definitely brought my faith and my beliefs to more of a forefront." The participant explained that the RCSO provided an environment where they could explore their religious beliefs and solidify their Catholic identity. The participant stated:

> I think being in a Catholic-specific organization was probably more fruitful for me, and to just getting to explore more about these ideas that I've believed my whole life and getting to understand why I hold these beliefs and why I think it's important to act within them. I think being in [the RCSO] and having that environment to develop my faith has helped me to a point where I can live better within a lens of what I believe. When your beliefs are more present in your mind, when you've discussed them with people more, I think it's easier to make decisions based on them.

Participant 4 also explained their confidence in expressing their religious identity in front of others. The participant explained that the RCSO had "definitely shown me how I can be more visible with my faith around people just around like people that I interact with all time." The participant also said that they do not feel "self-conscious" about "wearing clothes," "crosses," and organizational branded items that show they are Catholic. Instead, the participant stated, "I've sort of more embraced it . . . This is something that I can show off and be proud of."

Similarly, Participant 3 described their religious identity development and finding confidence in their identity. The participant stated they developed a "boldness to claim I am Catholic" while "exemplifying" their beliefs when interacting with others. Participant 3 said, "I feel comfortable talking about Catholic stuff, like with my coworkers . . . Everyone knows I'm Catholic." The participant explained their experience sharing their faith with prospective students and families as a student ambassador and first-year orientation leader at the university. The participant said they shared with prospective families and students that "I'm very involved with the [RCSO]." The participant discussed that they share their religious identity because "as specifically a Catholic college student, there's not a whole lot of us that people at least know about or that are at least like practicing and are visible, like in our society."

Participant 5 also discussed the RCSO's role in making their Catholic faith a significant part of their identity. The participant stated that their Catholic faith was the "number one priority in my life." The participant indicated that the RCSO's environment was pivotal in helping them feel comfortable with their faith, and they became more willing to be "bold" and "sociable with their beliefs." Before joining the RCSO, the participant stated that their faith was a "normal part of my life. I grew up Catholic, but [The RCSO] gave me a reason, [that] you can really live your life, and this can be the center." The participant learned that their faith "can be surrounding everything that you do." Overall, the participant stated that the RCSO's emphasis on living their Catholic identity "changed me in an incredible way. I'm much more open about my faith to others, and that's a thing that people notice in me, so I think that has changed over the years."

Moreover, Participant 6 explained that the RCSO helped them form their religious identity. The participant indicated that their identity was primarily "rooted in Christ" and would be "quite lost" if they had not joined the RCSO. The participant described college as a place "everyone's already questioning their identity, their place in this world, kind of what they're made for." The RCSO helped the participant stay "grounded" and "form good habits like prayer." Ultimately, the participant summarized that the RCSO supported them in becoming "the fullest version of myself. Learning my worth and identity is rooted in Christ, not in other people's opinions or their views."

During the focus group, Participant 10 discussed the importance of their Catholic identity and that the RCSO provided an environment that helped them maintain their religious identity. The participant said, "So many people come to college, and they're just lost, and a lot of people do get lost, and people do a walkway from the Catholic faith in college." However, the participant indicated that the RCSO provided them with a group where the participant "didn't have to conform and be like everyone else." The participant discussed that the community has "people encouraging me in my faith and also going that journey together—Going against the grain of what everyone else does." The participant also discussed that evangelizing through "actions" and "words" on campus was an essential part of their "daily life." The participant stated, "That's a big part for me because this is my main organization outside of my sorority. I think that's really important and speaks to how it's just formed me and my identity as a daughter of God."

Similarly, Participant 12 explained how activities through the RCSO helped emphasize their religious identity. The participant shared, "I think, especially at college, it's really easy to live two or more lives depending on who you're with at the time."

Participant 12 indicated, "I would still be a Catholic if there wasn't a [RCSO]." However, the participant stated that "faith nights" and "Bible studies" have become "a regular part of my life." The participant explained that the RCSO's support "helps me remember my Catholic identity. That way, I'm not living a separate life every time except Sunday mass. It keeps my faith as part of my life."

Members Developed Tolerance in their Relationships

Interview participants also discussed the RCSO's role in developing mature interpersonal relationships. Specifically, participants discussed how they had developed tolerance or appreciation of differences with other people. For instance, Participant 2 indicated that the RCSO helped them grow in tolerance of people with different beliefs. The participant said:

> My time with the [RCSO] has helped me respect others more. I'm okay if others believe differently than I do. I wouldn't force my beliefs on them because I respect the way that they think, even if I don't agree with it.

Likewise, Participant 6 emphasized appreciating others and loving other people because of their uniqueness and their diversity. The participant detailed, "I know everyone is made in the image of God, and everyone has a different story. I definitely think being part of [the RCSO] has really helped me see that everyone has their own uniqueness that makes them them." Participant 6 further described having "appreciation for people of all different spectrums." According to the participant, they have an appreciation of differences "because we're all diverse human beings with their own like unique things." The participant emphasized that "your only job is to just love others and not to judge them."

Moreover, Participant 5 indicated that involvement in the RCSO created an opportunity to encounter diversity and interact with other students from different countries and regions of the United States. The participant indicated the RCSO had introduced them to "a lot of different perspectives," including people from "foreign countries and people from across the United States." Participant 5 highlighted what they had learned from the other students they encountered:

> I've just heard a lot of cool things about them and their stories and have learned a lot of things from them as well, just in the way that they live their life. It just gives me a more open heart to others and the hurt that they might be experiencing, and realizing that the world is much, much bigger than just myself.

Participant 3 also discussed accepting students from different faith backgrounds, students who are sexual and gender minorities, and students from underrepresented groups. The participant detailed how members of their Bible study were from various backgrounds. The participant stated, "In the Bible study that I lead right now, it's pretty much split like half Catholic, half Protestant. I think four girls out of the seven of us identify under the LGBTQ umbrella . . . Just a lot of different backgrounds there, several different racial backgrounds." From this experience, Participant 3 summarized, "At our core, we are all children of God first, and that's the message that I need to be providing for these girls since we all do have some different backgrounds that we're coming from."

Additionally, Participant 4 articulated the importance of being tolerant of other students on campus, even if those students have different beliefs and backgrounds. The participant also discussed providing an accepting environment for students, despite a perceived "stigma" of intolerance by the Roman Catholic Church. Participant 4 stated

that "loving one another" is "the most important thing you can do." Like Participants 3 and 6, Participant 4 discussed accepting and welcoming individuals who are sexual and gender minorities and students from underrepresented groups. Participant 4 stated:

> I want to be the very opposite of a judgmental person. I want to love and support everyone, and I am a big advocate for LGBTQ+ people, uh, people of all races. I want to create an environment where everyone can feel comfortable and supported. No matter what background they're in—I think what's been really cool about [the RCSO] so far is that we actually have had a pretty decent amount of people that have other religious beliefs or, you know, no matter their background on sexual orientation, will come to events and even come to some of our other more Catholic-based things, like Bible studies.

Similarly, Participant 1 discussed the danger of being "surrounded by a group of like-minded people all the time." The participant explained that they can "forget that other people exist" and that people "are different from you." Participant 1 detailed that the RCSO has emphasized that members need to "listen" to people who are not group members. The participant indicated that the organization encouraged members to engage in relationships by "actively listening, asking questions, and trying to understand, rather than just thinking about the next thing you're going to say." The participant emphasized that RCSO members are instructed to approach people with differing opinions with "compassion and knowing that that person is still a child of God, whether or not they agree with you."

Participant 1 and Participant 7 highlighted the importance of building relationships with other religious organizations on campus. Participant 1 discussed

creating relationships with other religious organizations, like CRU, Athletes in Action, and InterVarsity. The religious-based student groups work together to host campus events, like a 24-hour prayer event. Participant 1 stated, "I was really excited to work with other Christian groups because we all have a relatively similar mission, and we're all here for a similar purpose, so there's no reason we should not get along." Like Participant 1's experience, Participant 7 discussed a previous interaction with a Mormon undergraduate student. The participant detailed learning about the other student's beliefs and respecting the other student's perspectives. The participant stated, "I brought a friend of mine who's Mormon to mass, and we all went back to the [Catholic Student Center] and just hung out and chatted." Participant 1 approached the conversation with the student with curiosity and an open-mind. The participant said, "I really was talking with him, and I was not looking to debate at all. It's pretty fascinating, to be honest, and just like letting him talk and tell me about his faith." From this experience, the participant expressed they wanted to be "charitable" and desired a relationship not "contingent on evangelism."

Research Question 2c

Which vectors of the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development Theory do undergraduate students perceive to be minimally influenced by participation in a Catholic student organization?

Members Relied on Other Group Members to Regulate Emotions

During the individual interviews, all seven participants discussed the ability to recognize and manage emotions. Participants 2 and 6 addressed their abilities to recognize and internally manage emotions without assistance from other RCSO

members. However, the remaining interview participants indicated that the RCSO created dependent relationships where organization members relied on each other to recognize and manage emotions. For example, Participant 1 said:

> Partially because we get to know each other on a very deep level and partially because we've known each other for a long time at this point. There are a couple of my friends within the [RCSO] who will point out how I react to things and how I'm reacting to something is maybe not the best way to react to something, and that person has the ability to look back at other things I've told them and like things that have affected me as I've grown up and said, 'I know that when this happens to you, you do this because of this. That is like a logical way for you to react because of that.' But is it the best way for me to react? Other people being able to do that has made me think about doing that and look for that in other people.

Similarly, Participant 3 discussed the role of mentorships in the RCSO, which affected the participant's perspective on managing emotions. Participant 3 described having a "rough week" and relying on their mentor to manage their emotions. The participant said, "I actually have someone that can talk to me with this, and that's actually going to help me become more in control of these emotions and help like dispel some of these bad [emotions]." The participant explained, "So definitely having someone who's not afraid to have authority in that and be willing to share that with me has been such a gift because that's definitely helped me to understand what emotions I'm feeling."

Likewise, Participant 7 discussed the role of mentorship and external support in emotion management. Participant 7 indicated:

A lot of the work that FOCUS Missionaries do revolves around checking in on

students and seeing how they're feeling. I think discipleship helps with that a lot.

We do weekly check-ins, and it's a great way for us to communicate to our peers.

It's just like a small group of guys—how we're feeling, how we're doing, how

our relationship with Christ is going, how our relationships with other people are

going.

Participants 4 and 5 also described having other RCSO members identify

emotions in other members. Participant 5 indicated, "The more I've gotten to know

people, they can kind of see my emotions a little bit more." The participant explained that

as their friendships have developed at the RCSO, other organization members will

acknowledge and identity the participant's emotions. The participant said, "So people

being able to identify when something's with me or if I'm like feeling a certain way, then

they might ask about it. Then usually that results in some sort of genuine conversation

with them."

Finally, Participant 4 discussed the desire to help other RCSO members through

the emotions they experience. Participant 4 indicated the importance of being

"compassionate" and willing to "help others." The participant described learning from

their experience managing emotions and helping other members do the same. The

participant stated, "Whenever I can observe someone feeling something that I've felt

before, and not only knowing how to deal with that [but wanting] to help that person, I

think is another big thing."

Research Question 3

What is the perceived role of undergraduate student involvement in a Catholic student organization on student academic persistence?

Social Support helps with Academic Persistence

During the research interviews, all seven participants indicated that the RCSO did not provide formal or organized academic support for organization members. However, six interview participants specified that they received social support from other members, which helped participants persist toward graduation and benefit academically. For instance, Participant 1 discussed the help they received in completing homework and learning from other group members, "We all will do homework together a lot. There's a group of us that on Tuesdays and Thursdays go sit and work on homework for a couple hours, and everyone's open to helping each other." Participant 1 also indicated they received support from RCSO members in other programs or areas of concentration. The participant said, "The nice thing about the [RCSO] is there is someone from like every major. So, if you need help on math, we have a math major who can help you."

Similarly, Participant 5 discussed the social support the participant received from other members when completing homework. The participant indicated that the RCSO had "very informal types of homework gatherings" and appreciated having a "community" for homework support. Participant 5 stated, "There are plenty of moments where I find myself at the [RCSO] doing homework and doing projects, and usually it's like the Sunday night after mass . . . It's sometimes just fun to be with people." The participant continued to describe the atmosphere of completing homework and having support from other organizational members:

I'm in those types of environments, and I'm still trying to crank out my homework before it's due at midnight. There's a lot of moments like that, but usually, somebody else is always working on something too. So, we'll go up in a little room that they have, like a meeting room, and we will work on homework.

Additionally, both Participant 1 and Participant 5 elaborated on the social and community support to remain motivated in school. Specifically, Participant 5 discussed the intersection of religious-based community and academic persistence. The participant stated that the community helped them be "more motivated" in their faith and discover their faith throughout their "daily life." In turn, the participant's faith life helps them stay "more motivated in my schoolwork." The participant detailed, "There's days where I'll wake up, and I'll pray for energy for the day. Those types of things get me motivated, and then the whole process of trusting God and involving him in my schoolwork." Participant 5 summarized, "Just being around people who are very similar and very motivated and driven people helps with that." Moreover, Participant 1 stated the importance of social support in staying enrolled at the university. The participant stated:

> I mean, the [RCSO] is a big reason why I would never—I wouldn't want to leave. I could graduate a semester early if I wanted to, and they are a big reason why I don't want to because I don't want to like leave this group before my time is supposed to be up.

Participant 2, a theater minor, discussed the support the participant received from RCSO members during theatrical performances. Participant 2 stated, "[The RCSO] had a whole event last year. Whenever we were still streaming all the shows, there was a whole event. It was like a watch party to see my musical. That was really cool." At the same

time, Participant 2 reflected on the social support the participant received during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The participant indicated they had "always been pretty motivated" to complete their degree. However, the participant reflected, "COVID was so weird. You never know if having that really strong connection to other people and really feeling needed and valued in community played more of a part in not just totally giving up than I realized."

Participant 6 also discussed how involvement in the RCSO helped the participant's stamina during school. The participant stated, "[The RCSO] definitely provided me with stamina" The participant detailed, "The schedule for [the RCSO] is very relaxed. There's no pressure to do anything. Homework always comes first within these things." Like Participant 5, Participant 6 discussed the importance of relying on their faith to persist academically. The participant said, "I'm just thankful I've been able to just ultimately trust in God through this and given me the stamina to keep going and not stress about things."

Finally, Participant 4 discussed their experience of potentially changing their degree program during the participant's sophomore year. The participant considered transferring schools to align with the new degree program. However, the participant remained enrolled at the university because of the social support from RCSO members. Participant 4 discussed transferring schools, "I definitely thought to myself if I change a major, it would make sense for me to transfer to a school where they had a better program for it." However, the participant decided to stay at the university. The participant reasoned:

I think one of the things that kept me here at [the university] was knowing the

relationships and the friendships that I've formed here and the life that I've built

for myself here . . . [The RCSO] is a part of that because of the amount of time

that I've spent with [the RCSO] and the amount of time I spent with the people in

it . . . I've built a good life for myself, and the fact that [the RCSO] is a part of it,

and it's something that has to do with my faith. That's a part of my life that I'm

proud of and that I didn't want to necessarily throw away.

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students

involved in a Catholic student organization compared to the overall undergraduate

student graduation rate at the institution.

Table 1

Two-sample Test of Proportions Comparing Graduation Rates between the Catholic

Student Organization and the Institutions' Undergraduate Students.

Group	N	Graduates	Proportion	z score	p-value
Catholic Student Organization	100	86	.860		
Total Institutional Undergraduate	1217	646	.531		
				6.37	<.001

The researcher conducted a two-sample test for difference in proportions to

determine if the graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic

student organization and the university's six-year undergraduate graduation rate differed.

The analysis revealed that the graduation rate of students who were members of the

Catholic student organization (n = 100, 86.0%) was significantly different from that of

the university's six-year undergraduate rate (n = 1217, 53.1%); $z = 6.37$, $p < .001$. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that the graduation rate for members of the Catholic student organization was significantly higher.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to undergraduate students who self-identify as Catholic but are not involved in the Catholic student organization.

Table 2

Two-sample Test of Proportions Comparing Graduation Rates between the Catholic Student Organization and Self-identified Catholic Students

Group	N	Graduates	Proportion	z score	p-value
Catholic Student Organization	100	86	.860		
Self-identified Catholic Students	80	75	.938		
				1.69	.091

The researcher conducted a two-sample test of proportions for difference in proportions to determine if the graduation rates of members of a Catholic student organization and undergraduate students who self-identified as Catholic were different. The analysis revealed that the graduation rate of members of the Catholic student organization (n = 100, 86.0%) was not significantly different from undergraduate students who self-identified as Roman Catholic (n = 80, 93.8%); $z = 1.69$, $p = .091$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the graduation rates were similar.

Null Hypothesis 3

There is no difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to undergraduate students involved in other student religious organizations.

Table 3

Contingency Table for Graduation Rates of Members of All Student Religious Organizations

	More than 1 Org	Athletes in Action	Catholic Student Organization	CRU	International Student Fellowship	InterVarsity	Latter-Day Saint	Total
Graduated	35	53	86	53	103	32	13	375
Did not Graduate	4	14	14	18	36	4	10	100
	39	67	100	71	139	36	23	475

The researcher conducted a test for homogeneity of proportions to determine if there was a difference in graduation rates between the religious student organizations. The analysis revealed that the graduation rates were different; $\chi^2(6, n = 475) = 17.58$, $p = .007$. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that at least one group had a significantly different graduation rate. The researcher conducted a two-sample test for difference in proportions to determine which student organizations had statistically significant graduation rates compared to the Catholic student organization.

Table 4

Two-sample Test of Proportions Comparing Graduation Rates between the Catholic Student Organization and Students Participating in More than One Organization

Group	n	Graduates	Proportion	z score	p-value
Catholic Student Organization	100	86	.860		
More than One Organization	39	35	.971		
				3.21	.001

The researcher conducted a two-sample test for difference in proportions to determine if the graduation rates of Catholic student organization members and members of more than one religious organization differed. The analysis revealed that the graduation rate of members of the Catholic student organization (n = 100, 86.0%) was significantly different from members of more than one religious organization (n = 39, 97.1%); $z = 3.21$, $p = .001$. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that the graduation rates of members of more than one religious organization were significantly higher than members of just the Catholic student organization.

Table 5

Two-sample Test of Proportions Comparing Graduation Rates between the Catholic Student Organization and Athletes in Action

Group	*n*	Graduates	Proportion	*z* score	*p*-value
Catholic Student Organization	100	86	.860		
Athletes in Action	67	53	.791		
				1.17	.242

The researcher conducted a two-sample test for difference in proportions to determine if the graduation rates of members of the Catholic student organization and members of Athletes in Action were different. The analysis revealed that the graduation rate of members of the Catholic student organization (n = 100, 86.0%) was not significantly different from members of Athletes in Action (n = 67, 79.1%); $z = 1.17$, $p = .242$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the graduation rates of the two groups were similar.

Table 6

Two-sample Test of Proportions Comparing Graduation Rates between the Catholic Student Organization and CRU

Group	*N*	Graduates	Proportion	*z* score	*p*-value
Catholic Student Organization	100	86	.860		
CRU	71	53	.746		
				1.88	.060

The researcher conducted a two-sample test for difference in proportions to determine if the graduation rates of members of the Catholic student organization and members of CRU were different. The analysis revealed that the graduation rate of members of the Catholic student organization (n = 100, 86.0%) was not significantly different from members of CRU (n = 71, 74.6%); $z = 1.88$, $p = .060$. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the graduation rates of the two groups were similar.

Table 7

Two-sample Test of Proportions Comparing Graduation Rates between the Catholic Student Organization and International Student Fellowship

Group	N	Graduates	Proportion	z score	p-value
Catholic Student Organization	100	86	.860		
International Student Fellowship	139	103	.741		
				2.23	.026

The researcher conducted a two-sample test for difference in proportions to determine if the graduation rates of members of the Catholic student organization and members of the International Student Fellowship were different. The analysis revealed that the graduation rate of members of the Catholic student organization (n = 100, 86.0%) was significantly different from members of the International Student Fellowship (n = 139, 74.1%); $z = 2.23$, $p = .026$. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that the graduation rates of the Catholic student organization were significantly higher than members of the International Student Fellowship.

Table 8

Two-sample Test of Proportions Comparing Graduation Rates between the Catholic

Student Organization and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

Group	*N*	Graduates	Proportion	*z* score	*p*-value
Catholic Student Organization	100	86	.860		
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship	36	32	.889		
				-.440	.660

The researcher conducted a two-sample test for difference in proportions to

determine if the graduation rates of members of the Catholic student organization and

members of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship were different. The analysis revealed

that the graduation rate of members of the Catholic student organization (n = 100, 86.0%)

was not significantly different from members of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (n

= 36, 88.9%); z = -.440, p = .660. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and

concluded that the graduation rates of the Catholic student organization were similar to

members of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

Table 9

Two-sample Test of Proportions Comparing Graduation Rates between the Catholic

Student Organization and Latter-day Saint Student Association

Group	*N*	Graduates	Proportion	*z* score	*p*-value
Catholic Student Organization	100	86	.860		
Latter-day Saint Student	23	13	.565		
				3.22	.001

The researcher conducted a two-sample test for difference in proportions to determine if the graduation rates of members of the Catholic student organization and members of the Latter-day Saint Student Association were different. The analysis revealed that the graduation rate of members of the Catholic student organization (n = 100, 86.0%) was significantly different from members of the Latter-day Saint Student Association (n = 23, 56.5%); $z = 3.22$, $p = .001$. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that the Catholic student organization's graduation rates were significantly higher than the Latter-day Saint Student Association members.

Summary

Data gathered from research participants and field observations indicated several themes related to psychosocial development, identity formation, and academic persistence. Research participants indicated that the RCSO provided members with a community based on similar religious beliefs and an environment encouraging meaningful and intentional relationships. Participants also described achieving intimate relationships with other members by developing meaningful relationships through mentorships emphasizing authority.

Regarding identity development, participants discussed that involvement in the RCSO helped them develop leadership skills and consider religious-based vocations or career choices. Participants highlighted that the RCSO helped them to develop intellectual competence, discover purpose through religious participation, form identities structured in Catholic beliefs, and become tolerant in their relationships. The participants also stressed that engaging in evangelization and having a personal relationship with a higher power were essential to their identity development.

During interviews, participants indicated they received social support to help them academically persist. However, the inferential statistical analysis of the quantitative data revealed mixed results for the graduation rates of RCSO members compared to other populations. For Hypothesis 1, a two-sample test for difference in proportions showed that the graduation rate of members of the Catholic student organization was significantly higher than the university's six-year undergraduate graduation rate. For Hypothesis 2, a two-sample test for difference in proportions showed that the graduation rates of members of the Catholic student organization were not significantly different from undergraduate students who self-identified as Roman Catholic.

For Hypothesis 3, the test of homogeneity of proportions showed that at least one student religious group had a significantly different graduation rate. In the subsequent two-sample tests for difference in proportions, students who were members of more than one religious organization had graduation rates significantly higher than the Catholic student organization. Members of the Catholic student organization had higher graduation rates than students involved in the International Student Fellowship and Latter-day Saint Student Association but similar rates to Athletes in Action, CRU, and InterVarsity. Chapter Five provides additional reflection, recommendations for future higher education practice, and limitations to the research.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Review of Study

The research study sought to understand the role of a Roman Catholic student organization in undergraduate psychosocial development, identity formation, and academic persistence at a non-sectarian university in the Midwest United States. The researcher utilized a mixed-methods approach to gather data for the study. First, between October 2021 and February 2022, the researcher used interviews, group observation, and a focus group to collect data and learn from the perceptions of Roman Catholic student organization members. The researcher then reviewed transcripts and field notes to determine thematic responses to the established research questions. Additionally, the researcher considered three related hypotheses, which compared the graduation rates of members of the Roman Catholic student organization to the institution's six-year undergraduate graduation rate, students who self-identified as Catholic, and students involved in other religious student organizations.

The university's Office of Student Involvement gave the researcher religious organizations' membership rosters from 2012 through 2020. The researcher prepared the data and submitted the data to the Office of Institutional Research (IR) for deidentification. At the same time, the university's chaplain provided historical data on students' religious self-identification to IR for deidentification. After receiving the deidentified data, the researcher utilized a test of homogeneity of proportions and a two-sample z-test for difference in proportions to compare graduation rates and determine if a statistically significant difference existed between the groups. In the subsequent chapter,

the researcher discusses the research results, offers a further reflection on the study's

implications, and considers recommendations for the future.

Discussion

Research Question 1

What role does undergraduate students' involvement in a Catholic student

organization play in student psychosocial development?

Members experience a community based on similar religious beliefs and

perspectives. Research participants described the importance of belonging to a student

community where members shared religious beliefs, values, and perspectives on

existential questions (Parks, 1986). A common belief and value system created an

environment that allowed participants to feel comfortable exploring their psychosocial

and identity development. Participants indicated that the religious-based community

helped them to create deeper relationships in which they felt comfortable being more

vulnerable with other members. The religious-based community allowed participants to

develop fidelity and love, which Erikson (1950/1993) discussed were the positive

outcomes of resolving psychosocial crises related to identity and intimacy development.

The research participants' religious experience and involvement in the RCSO was

unique for undergraduate college students. Previously, Astin et al.'s (2011) research

found that students' religious engagement decreased during college. However, research

participants indicated that the RCSO helped them to maintain or increase their religious

engagement in college. Instead, members found a supportive environment where students

shared similar perspectives on religious commitment, engagement, and conservatism. At

the same time, the RCSO created an environment that helped participants as they worked

through the Synthetic-Conventional Faith of Fowler's Stages of Faith Development,

where participants relied on their faith to navigate relationships outside of their families

and formed their identities (Astin et al., 2011; Fowler, 1995).

The researcher reflected that further studies could consider if undergraduate

students' participation in a community that shared a religious belief and value system had

a similar effect on students who attend sectarian institutions, like a Catholic-affiliated

university, public institutions, or institutions with a different religious affiliation from the

student group (Crocker, 2009; Gladstone, 2001; Walters, 2001). Also, the researcher

wondered if the type, size, demographics, and religious denomination of the student

organization played a factor in having a shared belief system that encouraged members to

take risks to develop their identity and relationships (Cawthon & Jones, 2004;

Schmalzbauer, 2013). Finally, the researcher wondered if the RCSO's relationship to a

local church structure that provided administrative, financial, and spiritual support

provided a secure environment that allowed student participants an opportunity to

develop a sense of community (Cawthon & Jones, 2004; Schmalzbauer, 2013).

Research Question 1a

What psychosocial crises are evident in undergraduate students who are involved

in a Catholic student organization?

Members achieved intimacy in relationships. Based on Erikson's (1950/1993)

Psychosocial Development Theory presented in Chapter Two, the researcher expected to

see evidence that participants were experiencing the psychosocial crises of identity versus

role confusion and intimacy versus isolation. Erikson (1950/1993) described that during

the psychosocial crises of identity versus role confusion, individuals develop the virtue of

fidelity and learn how their identity applies to their life roles and interactions with others. Erikson (1950/1993) suggested that the identity versus role confusion crisis primarily occurred in individuals between 12 and 19 years old. In the subsequent stage of intimacy versus isolation, individuals develop the virtue of love. Individuals develop interpersonal relationships and commit to others, even when faced with adversity. Erikson (1950/1993) detailed that young adults should work on resolving this crisis between 19 and 25 years old.

Initially, the researcher expected to see evidence for Erikson's (1950/1993) psychosocial stage of identity versus role confusion. However, focus group and interview participants primarily indicated they had resolved this crisis and had solidified their identity through their Catholic religious beliefs and participation. Although Erikson's projected age range of adolescents in this psychosocial crisis overlapped with the expected age ranges of RCSO members, only one research participant was a traditional first-year student. The researcher wondered if the data analysis would have supported this psychosocial crisis if more traditional first-year students had elected to participate in the study.

Based on Erikson's (1950/1993) theory, the researcher also expected that participants would be actively experiencing the psychosocial crisis of intimacy versus isolation because of the anticipated age of participants. The researcher found this psychosocial crisis evident in participants' responses and observations. Research participants actively worked on developing the virtue of love by expressing vulnerability, having difficult conversations with others, and learning skills to develop authentic relationships with other people. Participants used the relationship skills modeled in the

RCSO and applied them to further their commitment to other people, including family.

Also, research participants indicated that they experienced meaningful relationships by

building intentional relationships and authority-based mentorships.

Research Question 1b

How do undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization

experience the development of meaningful, intimate relationships?

Members encounter genuine and intentional relationships. Research

participants indicated that the RCSO provided an environment that encouraged genuine

and intentional relationships with other members. The RCSO encouraged members to

build relationships through structural support, discipleship programs, prompted

discussions, and engagement opportunities during organizational meetings. Participants

explained that their intentional relationships were in contrast to superficial relationships

they experienced on campus through other social activities or extra-curricular

organizations. Instead, participants found that their relationships were authentic and that

community members expressed care for each other. Research Question 2a further

explores how genuine and intentional relationships helped the participants further their

identity.

Considering Erikson's (1950/1993) psychosocial crisis of intimacy versus

isolation, the RCSO allows members to resolve the crisis and develop intimate

relationships with other members. RCSO members were able to practice and learn how to

be vulnerable with other people, build trust, and share their experiences. Members have

formal and informal opportunities to commit to each other. The community encourages

members to build genuine relationships and seek support rather than self-isolating or

withdrawing. Likewise, participants' intentional and genuine relationships aligned with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vector of developing mature interpersonal relationships, which consisted of healthy relationships and emphasized unconditional regard for others.

Relationships encourage authority-based mentorships. Research participants expressed that classic, authority-based mentorships were significant relationships in identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Philip & Hendry, 2000; Tinto, 2012a). Philip and Hendry (2000) explained that classic mentorships had an inherent authority structure with a mentor who provides challenge and support in a one-to-one relationship. Participants highlighted one-to-one mentorships with FOCUS Missionaries and the Catholic priest working with the RCSO as key mentors in helping to develop religious commitment and engagement (Astin et al., 2011). Through these mentorships, research participants described developing intimacy in relationships. These relationships helped participants resolve Erikson's (1950/1993) psychosocial crisis of intimacy versus isolation by encouraging participants to be vulnerable while sharing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Despite the growing research and institutional investment in peer mentorship programs, the research participants preferred authority-based mentorships (Collier, 2017; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Flores & Estudillo, 2018; Lane, 2020; Tinto, 2012a; Sanchez et al., 2006). Research participants discussed having mentor-mentee relationships through discipleship programs or Bible studies. Like Chickering and Reisser's (1993) definition of student-faculty relationships, these relationships emphasized a clear hierarchical structure with knowledge and support from the authority figure. These adult mentors helped participants understand their religious beliefs and encouraged their spiritual

development. The vital role mentorships played in participants' development aligned

with previous research on formal mentorships for college students in their faith and

spiritual development (Jessup-Anger et al., 2016; Love, 2001; Parks, 2000).

Research Question 2

What is the perceived impact of undergraduate students' involvement in a

Catholic student organization on student identity development?

Leadership skills and development. Interview participants discussed that the

RCSO helped with their leadership skills and development. During the research design

phase, the researcher did not plan or script interview questions for this development area.

Instead, the theme of leadership development naturally occurred during research

interviews. Participants received leadership development opportunities through formal

executive board positions or volunteering to lead activities for the organization.

Participants indicated they were responsible for service activities, marketing, religious

liturgy, leading meetings, and organizing Bible studies. Five of the seven interview

participants indicated they currently served on the organization's executive board. The

researcher wondered if other RCSO members who did not participate in the research also

experienced leadership development or if participants in leadership positions were more

inclined to volunteer for the study to create a positive narrative about the organization.

Further, participants expressed that their leadership roles were essential to their

identity. Although Chickering and Reisser did not define a specific vector for leadership

identity, the RCSO's student leadership opportunities provided participants with a way to

work through the vectors of developing competence and developing purpose. Participants

developed intellectual and interpersonal competence by taking on leadership roles in

organizing meetings and designing Bible studies for middle school students. Next, participants developed purpose through their leadership development. Chickering and Reisser (1993) indicated that students developed purpose by forming vocational plans and aspirations. In this study, participants stated that their leadership development and skill acquisition helped with their future careers in teaching and marketing.

Pursuit of religious-based vocations or career choices. Research participants also indicated that the RCSO helped them to pursue a religious-based vocation or career choice. The researcher noted that participants' religious-based vocations were more than a job or an area of expertise. Religious vocations were fundamental to the participants' lives and superseded their careers. For example, participants considered marrying a partner, having children, or becoming religious clergy crucial to their identity development. At the same time, participants wanted a career that helped them express their religious identity freely or to work for an entity operated by the Catholic Church.

Participants' desire to pursue religious-based vocations or careers directly relates to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vector of developing purpose. As discussed in Chapter Two, students progressing through the vector of developing purpose focused on developing a vocation based on interests, making interpersonal commitments, and intentionally making decisions. Research participants' goal to find a religious-based vocation or career in the future was an intentional process to ensure they could live a lifestyle that honored their religious identity and values.

Research Question 2a

How do undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization perceive identity development?

Identity is based on having a personal relationship with a higher power.

Research participants expressed that their identity was rooted in their relationship with a higher power and that their relationship with God or Jesus Christ was essential to their identity development. Participants explained that they wanted to build and improve their relationship with God and depended on God as a provider or father. At the same time, participants wanted their behaviors, beliefs, and values to reflect their relationship with God. Participants also explained that their relationship with God influenced how they built relationships with other people and found purpose in life. Interview and observation data aligned with research from Astin et al. (2011) that found students who saw God as a father figure were directly related to students' religious or social conservatism.

The father-child relationship with God became foundational to participants' identity development. The personal relationship helped participants as they progressed through Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Seven Vectors of Student Development, including the development of mature interpersonal relationships. As previously discussed, Chickering and Reisser (1993) found that students who develop mature interpersonal relationships create a capacity for intimacy and become vulnerable in relationships. Research participants achieved an interpersonal relationship with God, modeling a relationship of trust and vulnerability. The relationship participants experienced with God was mirrored in the capacity of intimacy participants had with authority figures and other community members.

Engaging in evangelization and introducing other students to Catholicism.

Related to having an identity based on a personal relationship with a higher power, participants emphasized a desire to share that relationship with non-members and

students on campus. Like the father-child relationship with God, Astin et al.'s (2011)

found proselytizing as another aspect of students' social or religious conservatism. The

concept of evangelization, or introducing other students to Catholicism and the RCSO,

was a significant point of discussion during participant interviews and the focus group.

The researcher also noted messaging related to evangelization during group observations.

Participants wanted to be friendly and inviting to other students while sharing their

religious beliefs and values with students on campus. Further research would benefit by

examining how evangelization impacts participants' identity development, relationships,

and generalizability to other religious groups.

     Evangelizing non-Catholic students and recruiting students to join the RCSO

became integral to participants' identities and their purpose in life. Participants'

evangelizing also aligned with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vector on developing

integrity. As discussed in Chapter Two, the vector of developing integrity is the

culmination of students' establishing identity and developing purpose. Chickering and

Reisser (1993) identified personalizing values as a step toward students developing

integrity. In personalizing values, students engage in "affirming core values and beliefs

while respecting other points of view" (p. 51). While evangelizing or proselyting is a

religiously conservative behavior, participants discussed trying to balance respecting

other students' beliefs while sharing their own religious beliefs (Astin et al., 2011).

Participants affirmed their Catholic beliefs through evangelizing and shared their

relationship with God with other students. At the same time, participants expressed

wanting to respect other viewpoints and religious backgrounds. They respected the

beliefs of others by listening, engaging in conversations, and learning about other students' religious experiences.

Research Question 2b

Which vectors of the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development Theory do undergraduate students perceive to be most influenced by participation in a Catholic student organization?

Members developed intellectual competence. Research participants discussed that involvement in the RCSO helped them to progress through the vector of developing competence. As discussed in Chapter Two, Chickering and Reisser (1993) found that the vector of developing competence included intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence. Although the researcher asked interview participants about intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence, the participants talked specifically about intellectual competence. Chickering and Reisser (1993) defined intellectual competence as students' ability to "master content" and develop the "ability to reason, solve problems, weigh evidence, and engage in active learning" (pp. 53-54).

During interviews and the focus group, participants explained how they had developed intellectual competence. Participants developed intellectual competence through leadership skill acquisition, presenting on religious topics to other students, learning about Catholic theology, and conversing with mentors to learn about their religious beliefs. The researcher noted a congruence between participants' responses about intellectual competence and participants' demonstration of intellectual competence during group observations. Participants' intellectual competence development aligned with previous research on the identity and psychosocial development of college students,

including Prather et al.'s (2018) findings on the identity development of college students involved and Martin's (2000) longitudinal study of psychosocial development of college students.

Members discovered purpose through religious participation. Next, research participants discussed how involvement in the RCSO impacted their purpose in life. As discussed in Chapter Two, Chickering and Reisser (1993) found that students progress through the vector of developing purpose by making vocational plans and setting goals in life. Developing purpose involves students' making intentional decisions, exploring their personal interests, and managing their commitments to other people. Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated that students clarify purpose by finding "an anchoring set of assumptions about what is true, principles that define what is good, and beliefs that provide meaning" (p. 234). Overall, participants' belief in God and their religious experiences through the RCSO provided participants with a decision-making structure to help clarify their purpose in life.

Participants' purpose in life was directly related to their religious identity, which provided meaning and guiding principles as they clarified their purpose in life. The researcher reflected that participants broadly discussed their purpose in life as a religious experience encompassing the participant's lifespan. Participants aimed to live their lives inspired by their relationship with God and share God's love with other people. Participants explained that their ultimate purpose in life was to be in Heaven. As previously discussed, participants also specified that their religious vocations and evangelizing were also a part of their purpose in life. Participants' discovering and developing purpose also aligned with prior research on identity development, which

found that the vector of developing purpose applied to college students engaged in social

activities on campus (Martin, 2000; Prather et al., 2018).

Members formed identifies structured in Catholic values and beliefs. During

interviews and group observations, participants expressed that the RCSO supported their

identity development, which included participants' religious identity. Participants

discussed that their Catholic beliefs and heritage were critical to identity development.

Participants' Catholic identity development aligned with Chickering and Reisser's (1993)

Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development. Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated

that identity development involved students finding their identity as part of their

"religious or cultural tradition" (p. 49). Participants described how their Catholic identity

influenced how they developed relationships, shared their beliefs with other people, and

made religious practices a priority in their lives.

The researcher reflected that participants did not provide evidence that they were

currently experiencing Erikson's (1950/1993) psychosocial crisis of identity versus role

confusion. Instead, participants had already established and strengthened their religious

identity through religious engagement and involvement in the RCSO (Astin et al., 2011;

Erikson, 1950/1993). Participants discussed growing confident in their identities in the

face of adversity and overcoming the desire to conform to other a lifestyle that

contradicts their Catholic lifestyle. The researcher noted that future research would help

clarify the intersectionality of RCSO members' identities and how members' Catholic

identity integrates with other aspects of their identities (Torres et al., 2009; Wijeyesinghe,

2019).

Members developed tolerance in their relationships. Then, research participants discussed that involvement in the RCSO helped them develop mature interpersonal relationships. As discussed in Chapter Two, Chickering and Reisser (1993) defined mature interpersonal relationships as a balance between autonomy and attachment. Students who develop mature interpersonal relationships are more vulnerable in relationships, develop tolerance for others, and create intimacy with other people. Chickering and Reisser (1993) found that students who progress through this vector "choose healthy relationships and make lasting commitments" (p. 48). As previously discussed, the vector of developing mature interpersonal relationships was evident in participants' intentional relationships fostered in the RCSO and participants' relationships with a higher power.

Based on Astin et al.'s (2011) research on students' spiritual and religious measures, the researcher wondered how the dichotomy of students' ecumenical worldview and religious conservatism would impact students' development of mature interpersonal relationships. The researcher specifically asked interview participants about their tolerance and appreciation of differences in their relationships with other people. Participants indicated that they successfully built relationships with people from different religious backgrounds and students with different perspectives. For instance, two participants discussed partnering with other religious organizations on campus to work together to manage events. Likewise, participants discussed being welcoming and supportive of students who are sexual and gender minorities.

Although participants tried to navigate between their ecumenical worldview and religious conservatism during interviews, the researcher noted that the group observations

did not provide an opportunity to see congruence between participants' behaviors or interactions. Participants' development of mature interpersonal relationships aligned with Prather et al.'s (2018) research on Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Seven Vectors of Student Development. However, participant responses conflicted with Martin's (2000) study on student development, which did not find support for students developing mature interpersonal relationships.

Research Question 2c

Which vectors of the Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development Theory do undergraduate students perceive to be minimally influenced by participation in a Catholic student organization?

Members relied on other group members to regulate emotions. The researcher asked interview participants about their ability to manage emotions. Based on Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Seven Vectors of Student Identity Development, the researcher initially expected participants to discuss emotion management and self-regulation. As discussed in Chapter Two, Chickering and Reisser (1993) found that students managed emotions by learning to control feelings, appropriately expressing emotions, developing coping skills, and balancing "negative and positive emotions" (p. 88). Subsequently, Chickering and Reisser (1993) found that students' ability to develop interdependence required "emotional and instrumental independence" (p. 47). The researcher noted that participants expressed and shared emotions in activities and small group discussions during group observations.

However, interview participants responded that they depended on other members for emotion regulation and helped other students regulate emotions. Participants detailed

that they received help in managing emotions from other group members and through

their relationships with FOCUS Missionaries. The researcher wondered how participants'

emotion management and dependence on others for regulation related to the importance

of authority-based mentorships, including participants' father-child relationship with God.

Similarly, the researcher noted that future research would be necessary to determine if

participants' dependence on others for emotion regulation was unique to the RCSO or if

it was common among other religious student groups.

Research Question 3

What is the perceived role of undergraduate student involvement in a Catholic

student organization on student academic persistence?

Social support helps academic persistence. Research participants indicated that

the RCSO provided social support, which helped them persist toward graduation. The

RCSO also helped participants with homework completion because RCSO members

created informal study groups and sought help from other members with content

knowledge or expertise. However, participants indicated that the RCSO did not provide

formal or structural academic support.

Participants' perceptions of the benefits of social support aligned with previous

research on retention and persistence in higher education (Astin 1984/1999; Tinto, 1993,

2012a). As discussed in Chapter Two, Tinto (1993) and Astin (1984/1999) considered the

importance of social support and integration in academic persistence and helping students

graduate. Specifically, Tinto (1993) found that students' social and academic integration

occurs in formal and informal structures, which help students persist. The RCSO

provided students with a positive means of social integration and a community for

encouragement. Further, participants' thematic responses related to academic persistence aligned with the statistical results of Null Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 stated, "There is a difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to the overall undergraduate student graduation rate at the institution." The researcher found that the graduation rate for members of the Catholic student organization was significantly higher than the institution's six-year graduation rate for first-time undergraduate students. The statistical significance of these results aligned with participants' perceptions in Research Question 3. The results also aligned with previous research, including Tinto's (1993) Model of Institutional Departure and Astin's (1984/1999) Student Involvement Theory, which emphasized the importance of social integration and student engagement in students' academic persistence. During qualitative data collection, participants suggested a high degree of social involvement with the RCSO, including Bible studies, formal mentorships, and leadership involvement (Astin, 1984/1999).

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated, "There is a difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to undergraduate students who self-identify as Catholic but are not involved in the Catholic student organization." The researcher concluded that the graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization and undergraduate students who self-identify as Catholic were similar. Although statistically non-significant,

the proportion of students who graduated that self-identified as Catholic was higher than students involved in the RCSO. Based on Tinto (1993) and Astin (1984/1999), the researcher initially expected that the graduation rates of students involved in the RCSO would be significantly higher than students who self-identified as Catholic. However, the researcher noted that additional research into the support structures and involvement of students who self-identified as Catholic would provide further context to the self-identified graduation rates. The researcher wondered if students who self-identified as Catholic still attended religious services or events hosted by the RCSO but never formally joined the organization. Similarly, the researcher wondered if the students who self-identified received support from outside the institution, like family support, or participated in other campus groups.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 stated, "There is a difference in graduation rates between undergraduate students involved in a Catholic student organization compared to undergraduate students involved in other student religious organizations." The researcher conducted a two-sample test for difference in proportions to determine which student organizations had statistically significant different graduation rates compared to the Catholic student organization. The researcher found that students who were members of more than one religious organization had graduation rates significantly higher than the Catholic student organization. Additionally, members of the Catholic student organization had higher graduation rates than students involved in the International Student Fellowship and Latter-day Saint Student Association but similar rates to Athletes in Action, CRU, and InterVarsity. The researcher noted no trends in the type of student

religious organization or affiliation with church bodies (Cawthon & Jones, 2004). The researcher noted that students involved in more than one religious organization had a significantly higher graduation rate, which also aligned with previous theoretical frameworks on persistence (Astin, 1984; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1993). Additional research on students involved in multiple religious organizations would help clarify their involvement in other institutional organizations, support structures, and social integration.

Implications for Future Practice

Based on the study's findings, the research has implications for higher education officials, including student affairs professionals, faculty, and academic advisors. Grounded in prior research on college student's religiosity (Astin et al., 2011) and faith development (Fowler, 1995; Parks, 2000), the study found that university administrators can apply Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Seven Vectors of Student Development and Erikson's (1950/1993) Psychosocial Development Theory in creating programs to support students involved in a religious student organization. Likewise, the study found that religious involvement can be a critical social support in students' academic persistence.

Significantly, the university experience provides an opportunity to help students further their development outside the classroom through co-curricular activities like the RCSO. Although Astin et al. (2011) found that students' religious involvement decreased in college, this study found that students' religious commitment and engagement remained essential to RCSO members. Participants perceived the RCSO as vital to psychosocial and identity development outside the classroom. The RCSO helped students develop meaningful and intimate relationships with other people, including college peers.

At the same time, participants indicated that involvement in the RCSO helped establish

identity, develop competence and purpose, and develop mature interpersonal

relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Similarly, the research also indicated that social support from the religious student

organization was vital to academic persistence and graduation rates (Astin, 1984/1999;

Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1993). Participants discussed the positive social support they

received from other members of the RCSO, which was congruent with the quantitative

data analysis. The graduation rates for members of the RCSO were significantly higher

than the institution's six-year undergraduate rate. Graduation rates for students involved

in more than one religious organization were significantly higher than students only

engaged in the RCSO and the institution's undergraduate, six-year rate.

Moreover, the quantitative analysis showed that students' religious self-

identification had a similar graduation rate to members of the RCSO. As previously

noted, IR informed the researcher that the university did not record students' religious

self-identification data. Although the researcher found related data from the university's

chaplain, it would benefit the institution to gather students' religious self-identification

data for decision-making purposes. Tracking religious self-identification could provide

additional information about the relationship between religious identity and graduation

rates.

Next, the university should seek to provide additional education to staff and

faculty regarding students' religiosity and promote religious student groups on campus.

One way the university can help students is to clearly define terms for stakeholders

regarding students' spiritual and religious development. Although used interchangeably,

prior literature includes specific definitions for faith, spirituality, and religion (Astin et al., 2011; Fowler, 1995; Parks, 1986, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). However, the students involved in the research study and university stakeholders used these terms in contrast to the literature. Providing clear definitions would help understand students' religiosity and support their identity development through campus involvement. Also, the university can provide awareness of the importance of students' religiosity by providing stakeholders, faculty, and staff with training regarding students' religious and spiritual development.

At the same time, the university should continue to look at additional opportunities to invest in students' religious involvement and provide campus resources to encourage social engagement. First, the university should consider expanding classic mentorship opportunities for students that support their religious or spiritual identity (Philip & Hendry, 2000). Based on the study's results, participants indicated that classic, authority-based mentorships helped in their religious development, psychosocial development, and identity formation. Participants' emphasis on mentorships aligned with previous research studies on the significance of mentorship for student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Parks, 2000; Tinto, 1993, 2012a). Since participants benefited from having mentorships with authority figures, the university should consider creating classic mentorships and assigning students to university personnel, like faculty or academic advisors, who will respect and support students' religious identity.

Second, the university should consider continued investment in spiritual and religious student groups, including the use of campus space. Although prior literature has considered removing access to campus space for religious and spiritual practice, the on-

campus and off-campus locations used for the RCSO provided a consistent place, time, and space for members to create and maintain social support (Grubiak, 2012). The physical space available to RCSO members provided more than a space for religious practices. The physical space provided RCSO members with the opportunity to achieve social integration to aid with persistence, receive academic support from other members, and have social interactions to support identity development.

Limitations

The study had several limitations that impacted the research results. First, the study's qualitative results had minimal generalizability since the qualitative focus on a specific student religious group at a private, non-sectarian university in the Midwest United States. The student religious group received assistance and was supported by the local Catholic Archdiocese, with a physical building near campus open to students to congregate, host events, and participate in religious activities. Although participant eligibility requirements and focus on one student religious organization created a homogenous participant group, which minimized variability, the researcher reflected that additional research would be necessary to determine the role of religious student groups on psychosocial and identity development. To improve the generalizability of the study, the researcher included a quantitative analysis comparing graduation rates of members of the Catholic student organization to students who self-identified as Catholic, members of other institutional-sanctioned student religious groups, and the institutional, six-year graduation rate for undergraduate students.

Additionally, the availability of institutional data related to student religious group rosters and undergraduate students' religious self-identification limited the

research results. First, the historical rosters received from the Office of Student Involvement were disorganized, with missing data points, like university-sanctioned email addresses, that IR needed to anonymize and gather graduation data. At the same time, some student religious groups were missing rosters from specific years. For instance, InterVarsity was missing rosters from 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. Additionally, the Latter-day Saint Student Association was missing the membership roster from 2017 to 2018, along with inconsistent record keeping. Finally, the IR informed the researcher that the institution did not gather religious self-identification from students. The researcher relied on anonymized data provided by the university's chaplain. The researcher limited self-identification to incoming first-year students from Fall 2016 and Fall 2017 to accommodate an appropriate time for students to graduate.

Moreover, the sample size of interview and focus group participants limited the research. In preparation for the study, the researcher considered the total population size of the Catholic student organization, information redundancy, and data saturation to determine the necessary sample size needed for research interviews (Saldana, 2011; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Based on historical data of 49 unique participants during the 2020-2021 academic year, the researcher planned to recruit a minimum of 10 members to participate in interviews and attempted to host three focus groups. However, the researcher limited the qualitative data collection to self-selected participants, which resulted in seven interview participants. Likewise, the focus group consisted of eight participants, including five unique participants and three participants who also participated in the interviews. In total, 12 unique members participated in interviews or the focus group.

After receiving historical rosters from the university, the researcher noted that membership numbers were lower than the 49 unique visitors. However, the RCSO had 31 registered members for the 2020-2021 academic year. Based on registered members, the researcher believed the study reached data saturation during recruitment. However, the researcher reflected that participants who volunteered were highly involved in the RCSO, with interview participants indicating they participate in 3 to 15 hours of formal activities a week at the RCSO. The researcher noted that participants who self-selected might have been biased in their responses and wanted to reflect positively on the RCSO, especially participants serving in a leadership capacity with the organization. The researcher acknowledged that participant responses may not have represented the perceptions of less involved students or students who utilize the RCSO for only religious services.

Implications for Future Research

As previously discussed, additional research is needed to understand further the role of student religious groups in psychosocial and identity development to advance the generalizability of the research results. Sectarian and non-sectarian universities, including private and public institutions, could replicate the study to clarify the applicability to different university settings. University stakeholders or student affairs professionals could also expand the study to investigate undergraduate students' involvement in other religiously-affiliated campus organizations, spiritually focused groups, and agnostic or atheist groups.

Moreover, future research could improve the qualitative methodology used in the study. Future studies would benefit from an emphasis on focus group participation. Although the study only had one focus group because of the institution's COVID-19

mitigation policies and scheduling conflicts, the focus group provided extensive data. The focus group also allowed the participants to interact with each other, share their experiences and perceptions, and determine the direction of the conversation. At the same time, future research would benefit from a longitudinal study to explore how a student's psychosocial and identity development changed over time. A longitudinal study could use interviews to learn how students' concept of identity and the role of a religious student organization in their development changed between their sophomore year and senior year or post-graduation.

Based on the study results, two areas of student development and religious involvement warrant continued research. First, additional qualitative study is needed to understand the applicability of the vectors of managing emotions and moving through autonomy toward interdependence to students involved in religious organizations (Chickering & Riesser, 1993). Additional research could investigate if members of other religious student organizations perceived these vectors or if the results were specific to the RCSO. Next, the researcher noted that 39 students were involved in more than one religious student group between 2012 and 2020. Additional qualitative research could help determine this population's involvement on campus in other activities and learn more about their psychosocial and identity development. The researcher wondered if their significantly higher graduation rate compared to the RCSO and the institution's six-year rate was due to increased religious and social involvement or if other factors helped the students persist.

Conclusion

Overall, the researcher intended the study to allow students to share their perceptions of the Roman Catholic student organization's role in their psychosocial development, identity development, and academic persistence. At the same time, the researcher sought to find if student involvement in a religious student organization positively affected graduation rates. The researcher created the study to benefit student religious organizations, higher education administrators, and student affairs professionals to understand better the role of religious student organizations in student development outside of the classroom.

The mixed-methods research study occurred from October 2021 to February 2022. The qualitative research included seven interviews with members of the RCSO, a focus group, and eight group observations. The researcher analyzed all transcripts and observation notes for themes to answer the study's research questions. Research participants indicated that the RCSO provided members with a community based on similar religious beliefs and an environment encouraging meaningful and intentional relationships. Similarly, the psychosocial crisis of intimacy versus isolation was evident, with participants highlighting resolving the crisis by developing meaningful relationships through mentorships that emphasize authority.

Regarding identity development, participants discussed that involvement in the RCSO helped them develop leadership skills and consider religious-based vocations or career choices. Similarly, participants highlighted the vectors of developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing competence as essential areas of development. The participants also stressed that

engaging in evangelization and having a personal relationship with a higher power was essential to their identity development.

Additionally, the quantitative research utilized anonymized student religious group rosters, religious self-identification data, and the institution's undergraduate, six-year rate to compare graduation rates. The statistical analysis of the hypotheses had mixed results. For Hypothesis 1, the graduation rate of members of the Catholic student organization was significantly higher than the university's six-year undergraduate graduation rate. For Hypothesis 2, the graduation rate of members of the Catholic student organization was not significantly different from undergraduate students who self-identified as Roman Catholic. For Hypothesis 3, students who were members of more than one religious organization had graduation rates significantly higher than the Catholic student organization. Members of the Catholic student organization had higher graduation rates than students involved in the International Student Fellowship and Latter-Day Saint Student Association but similar rates to Athletes in Action, CRU, and InterVarsity.

In summary, the research found that involvement in the RCSO helped students in their psychosocial and identity development. At the same time, social support helped students with their academic persistence, which was evident in the statistically significant graduation rates of RCSO members. Although the generalizability of the study limited the research, the study had implications for higher education officials in implementing programs that encouraged student religious involvement and improved graduation rates. Ideally, the results of the mixed-methods study will enhance and accentuate existing

relationships between religious student organizations and university administrators and

stakeholders.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Introduction and Retrieving Basic Information
1. Tell me more about yourself. (Where are you from? What are you studying in college?)
2. How did you become involved in the Catholic student organization?
3. What attracted you or encouraged you to join the organization?
4. What other groups or organizations do you participate in on campus?
5. How many hours per week, including religious services, do you estimate you participate in events or activities sponsored by the Catholic student organization?
6. What have you learned, if anything, about yourself by being a part of the Catholic student organization?
7. In what ways, if any, do you believe being involved in the Catholic student organization has impacted your overall development in college?

Set 1: Psychosocial Development Questions
1. In what ways, if any, has being involved in the Catholic student organization influenced your ability to build and maintain relationships with people in your life?
2. In what ways, if any, has being involved in the Catholic student organization impacted your relationships within and outside the organization?
3. In what ways, if any, are your relationships within the Catholic student organization different or similar to relationships you've built through other university activities?
4. What are some defining characteristics of the current relationships in your life?
5. What does your current social support system look like?

Set 2: Identity Development Questions
1. In what ways, if any, has being involved in the Catholic student organization shaped your identity or formed who you are as an individual?
2. In what ways, if any, has being involved in the Catholic student organization influenced your tolerance or appreciation of differences in others?
3. In what ways, if any, has being involved in the Catholic student organization impacted your ability to develop competency, including intellectual, physical, or interpersonal?
4. In what ways, if any, has being involved in the Catholic student organization impacted your ability to manage and recognize emotions?
5. In what ways, if any, has being involved in the Catholic student organization impacted your sense of purpose or your life's mission?
6. In what ways, if any, has being involved in the Catholic student organization impacted your ability to relate to live out your beliefs, while respecting the core beliefs or values of others?
7. In what ways, if any, has being involved in the Catholic student organization impacted how you perceive your role in a larger community/society?

Set 3: Academic/Graduation Persistence Questions

1. Have you previously considered either temporarily or permanently disenrolling from your school? If so, what factors contributed to you remaining enrolled at the university?
2. What type of academic or educational supports, if any, has the Catholic student organization provided you during your educational career?
3. How has your involvement in the Catholic student organization, if at all, impacted your educational career and your motivation to stay enrolled in college?
4. What support systems at the Catholic student organization, if any, have encouraged you to remain enrolled at the university?

Appendix B: Field Observation Form

Observational Statement	Yes	No	Not Observed	Additional Notes
Involvement in a Catholic student organization has shaped students' identity or identity formation.				
Involvement in a Catholic student organization has influenced students' tolerance or appreciation of differences in others.				
Involvement in a Catholic student organization has impacted students' ability to develop competency, including intellectual, physical, or interpersonal.				
Involvement in a Catholic student organization has impacted students' ability to manage and recognize emotion.				
Involvement in a Catholic student organization has impacted students' sense of purpose or life's mission.				
Involvement in a Catholic student organization has impacted students' ability to relate to others with different core beliefs or values.				

Involvement in a Catholic student organization has impacted how students perceive their role in a larger community or society.				
Involvement in the Catholic student organization has influenced students' ability to build relationships with people in their lives.				
Involvement in the Catholic student organization has impacted students' relationships outside the organization.				
Involvement in the Catholic student organization has impacted students' relationships within the organization.				