

Institutional Use of Spirituality Data: What Can We Learn From the Work of Others?

Introduction

A few months ago, the HERI Spirituality Project team invited institutional representatives from campuses that administered the HERI-sponsored College Student's Beliefs and Values (CSBV) Survey to share with our readership how their campus utilized their student assessment data to strengthen the spiritual development initiatives implemented on their campuses. Given the thoughtfulness of the responses received, we felt it was important to not only share some of the responses provided by our CSBV institutions (a sampling of which is provided below), but to also look across these institutions in order to highlight common approaches, challenges, and insights these campuses encountered as a means of furthering our collective understanding of (1) how to effectively utilize assessment data for purposes of institutional change and transformation; and (2) how spirituality-based data can serve as a "catalyst" for improving institutional outcomes as it relates to the spiritual development of students.

How did CSBV institutions utilize the assessment data?

For many institutions, the CSBV data was seen as a complement to existing assessment initiatives already conducted on individual campuses. For institutions engaged in spiritual-based assessment work, the CSBV tended to offer a more comprehensive set of questions from which students could respond. This permitted some campuses, already knowledgeable about basic student trends such as students' religious affiliation and rates of participation in religious activities, to consider new, as yet unexplored, spiritual dimensions of their students.

In addition to providing important information related to their own students' spiritual beliefs and values, the CSBV offered a national "baseline" for how college students perceived, internalized, and expressed their spirituality and religiosity. For participating institutions, this comparative data provided a much needed snapshot of where their students stood nationally. This was of particular value to those institutions that (1) incorporated spiritual growth and development as a core feature of their institutional mission; (2) were religiously affiliated and/or

held accountable for the spiritual growth of students by external entities; and/or (3) identified student spiritual growth and development as a student outcome that was both valued and complementary to their institution's "holistic" approach to student development.

Finally, CSBV institutional data compelled some campuses to realign their basic assumptions about students' spiritual proclivities as a result of the CSBV findings. In some instances, these "shifts" in thinking were profound. In the case of Cornerstone University, basic assumptions about the composition of students' religious affiliation and the degree to which students participated in religious activities had to be called into question. In other instances, campuses found that their assumptions regarding the institution's assumed impact on the spiritual development of their students were less significant than they had hoped or wanted. Indeed, many institutions found that greater campus cohesion was necessary if they were to achieve a measurable impact upon students' spiritual growth and development.

How did institutions utilize CSBV data as a catalyst for improving institutional outcomes related to the spiritual development of students?

Among the greatest challenges to any sort of change effort are concerns over institutional buy-in, devising institutional strategies for implementing change, and developing meaningful accountability measures to ensure that desired outcomes are met. Each CSBV institutional response we received faced one or more of these challenges in their efforts to implement spiritual-based change on their campuses. Whether it was identifying the correct set of individuals to sit in on a strategic planning meeting, setting out a course of action that was equally amenable to Residence Life staff as it was to faculty, or simply deciding the best manner in which institutional leaders could talk openly and meaningfully about the CSBV data, colleges found themselves challenged at every step of the way.

Despite these many obstacles, campuses reported that the CSBV findings provided important context for initiating institutional dialogue on issues of student spirituality. By organizing conversations around the CSBV findings, campuses had a ready-made set of terms, numbers, and concepts by which to evaluate their students' spiritual position relative to national aggregates. For religiously affiliated institutions such as Alvernia College, the findings facilitated evaluation of their spiritual mission and the developmental goals they established for their students. For secular institutions, such as UCLA (see "UCLA's SALF Forum: Holistic Interventions within Student Affairs"), the data offered possibilities for entering into meaningful conversations over ways in which to address the holistic needs of students.

While each of the institutions within our sample found themselves at varying stages of progress in their work towards spiritual-based change, there were surprising commonalities in their implementation approaches. Most campuses

reported a need to improve their service and community outreach efforts as a means of enhancing spiritual growth opportunities for students and faculty. Likewise, curricular change and faculty buy-in were seen to be equally important features of spiritual-based change at these institutions. Finally, campuses found that they needed to develop more comprehensive evaluation and assessment strategies to ensure that student data was consistently being provided to institutional leaders. These efforts, in combination with long-term strategic planning that incorporated a cross-section of key institutional leaders, appeared to provide the basic framework for these important change initiatives.

We would like to thank all of the institutions that shared their stories with us. In particular, we wish to thank Alvernia College, The College of Saint Rose, Cornerstone University, Mount St. Mary's College (Los Angeles), and Wartburg College for their willingness to share their thoughts, insights, and processes with our readership.

Alvernia College: Assessing Mission at a Religious-Based Institution- Challenges and Response*

By Vali Heist & Erin R. Ebersole

*This article was adapted from a presentation made at the AIR Annual Forum in May 2005.

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges for an Office of Institutional Research at a religious-based institution is how best to assess the needs of its students in relation to the mission of the College. In order to accomplish this, the College must determine both what are students' desires with regard to their religious and spiritual needs and how the College can best meet those needs. To begin the process, a baseline of data that assesses the spirituality of students—where they are, where they want to go, and how the institution can assist in those goals—has to be established. Alvernia College took on this challenge at the same time it was conducting its self-study for regional accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Alvernia College offers an affordable, quality education that combines liberal arts with career and professional opportunities in both graduate and undergraduate education. The College's primary objective is to prepare learners for personal achievement, social responsibility, moral integrity, and spiritual fullness. Alvernia emphasizes moral leadership throughout its curriculum. Founded in 1958 by the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters, Alvernia is a Catholic, Franciscan, coeducational institution located in Reading, Pennsylvania. In fall 2004, Alvernia College enrolled over 1,300 traditional undergraduate students, over 600 non-traditional continuing education students, and over 660 graduate students.

Alvernia's Spirituality Challenge

Alvernia's Mission Statement was revised in 1995 to reflect the addition of a spirituality component: "The goal is to prepare learners for personal achievement, for social responsibility, for moral integrity, and for spiritual fullness." In 1997 a new Vice President of Mission and Ministry was appointed and in 2003 a new goal was added to the long-range plan that supported the College's renewed dedication to its Mission Statement. Since its inception, the Mission and Ministry Office was physically relocated to a more visible area of campus; administrative support staff was added, including ecumenical and lay staff; and the office was asked to provide spiritual opportunities to all students across the College in both academic and extra-curricular settings.

Alvernia's tag line, "Skills for the workplace...Values for Life..." signifies a dedication to students to provide certain proficiencies. In order to meet these goals, the College also wanted to assess whether the tag line is true: Do students receive 'values for life' and how does the College assess the validity of its tag line?

In Alvernia College's Self-Study Design developed in 2004, it states, "The College's Mission Statement makes clear that the liberal arts should remain the core on which an Alvernia education is built, and that the transmission of values grouped in the Judaeo-Christian tradition lie at the heart of our educational enterprise. The self-study must test the validity of the Mission Statement against new realities of our student population..." As a result the focus of mission was pervasive throughout the Self-Study and the extent to which the mission was relevant for each of the 14 standards set by Middle States.

In spring 2003, a pilot study was conducted by Higher Education Research Institute with over 12,000 students across the nation. The study "Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose" was developed to build on an abundance of anecdotal evidence suggesting that there is growing interest on college campuses to reassert the significance of religion and spirituality as a core component of a liberal arts education. The study employs a multi-institutional and longitudinal design to identify trends, patterns, and principles of spirituality and religiousness among college students. Based on response rates and results, HERI decided to add a spirituality component to the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey (established in 1966) for fall 2004 and data was collected from over 112,000 freshmen.

Questions to Address

When Alvernia College began the process for regional accreditation in fall 2002 through Middle States, it was faced with the challenge of assessing mission and

ministry effectiveness and found a lack of purposeful assessment. The College was currently conducting many mission-related activities such as:

- Mission Moment-a brief prayer, reflection, etc. conducted before every class, meeting or event
- Service Learning-Alvernia requires community service for graduation
- Spiritual components in the classroom as evidenced in the “Course Summary” completed by faculty
- Ecumenical services are available and a Lutheran Minister is available on campus

In light of the impending accreditation, the College needed to address questions pertinent to the assessment of spirituality and mission as a whole. For example:

- How do we define religiosity and spirituality? Are they different terms?
- Does on-campus spiritual connectedness equal student retention? With whom should this spiritual connection be?
- How does the College ask questions about God to those who don't believe in God or to students who do not have the language to articulate their views?
- How does the College assess the effectiveness of the Mission and Ministry Office when we don't know the spiritual need of our students?
- How does the College assess the pervasiveness of the Mission ?
- Does Alvernia College 'live' its Mission Statement?

Dispelling false perceptions was also another goal of assessment; for example, Alvernia College's Board of Trustees believed the traditional student body was around 80% Catholic. In fall 2004, the percentage identifying themselves as Catholic was 46.6%. This was a paradigm shift for the entire campus given that Mission and Ministry had been planning for higher numbers of Catholics than were actually on campus. The College no longer believed that the headcount at weekly Mass was an accurate assessment of the success of the College's mission.

Assessment of Mission and Ministry

Dedicating resources toward activities that students may or may not utilize is not an effective use of the College's time money and manpower. Therefore, the College began to systematically break down current assessments with regard to the spirituality of its students and put in place a plan to utilize those assessments, as well as additional assessments, in planning and resource allocation. There were several areas that the College targeted with regard to the spirituality of its students:

- Spiritual needs of all sub-populations of students
- Service Learning Component in conjunction with academic preparation

- Values and ethics impact on graduating students (both undergraduate and graduate)

Assessment Plan

A step-by-step approach was adopted including which assessments would be used and what audiences would participate. Timelines were set by both the Mission and Ministry and Institutional Research Offices.

Step 1. In spring 2004 the “Campus Ministry Council Survey” was administered to a sample of undergraduate day students registering for an upcoming semester (n=108). Conclusions were shared with the Office of Mission and Ministry to dispel any myths that existed concerning our student’s religious practices. Some of the results were:

- 36% of our students regularly attend religious services
- Of those students, 59% attend on campus
- There are students who regularly attend religious services off campus (which was news to the campus)

Step 2. In summer 2004, the “Undergraduate & Graduate Student Religious Practices and Experiences Survey” was administered to all registered students as of August 1, 2004. This included traditional undergraduate, continuing studies, and graduate (n=321, 20% from each area). This survey was adopted and administered with permission from Villanova University who designed the study with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) through Georgetown University. Administration of the survey was approved by the Mission Effectiveness Board and the President’s Cabinet.

The purpose of the study was three-fold:

- Collect a temperature of the spiritual needs of Alvernia students;
- Send a positive “Ecumenical Message” to all Alvernia students; and
- Benchmark the services provided by Mission and Ministry.

The findings of the survey were as follows:

- Just under half of those that responded are attending weekly religious services either on or off campus.
- On average, about half that responded spent time each week in personal prayer or meditation.
- Thirty-four students responded with interest in joining Rite of Christian Invitation of Adults (RCIA).
- All sub-groups reported “finding a direction in life” as their most important need.

- Traditional students want more service opportunities, Bible Study, and Youth Groups.
- Campus Ministry participation is low and almost all involvement comes from traditional students.
- Very few students have turned to someone on-campus for spiritual counseling.

The findings from the survey were shared across campus with the Vice President for Mission and Ministry, the Campus Ministry team, the College Provost and Vice-Provost, and Dean's Council. Based on those findings, changes were made for the 2004-2005 year such as providing ecumenical services for traditional undergraduate students.

Step 3. In fall 2004, the "Cooperative Institutional Research Program/College Students' Beliefs and Values" was administered to all incoming full-time, first-time freshmen during orientation (n=298). This is a national study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose developed by Drs. Alexander and Helen Astin, and was the College's first opportunity to gather comparative data with other Catholic Schools.

Service Learning and Capstone Information

Another stage of the Mission and Ministry assessment plan is to incorporate Service Learning as it pertains to the spiritual development of students. In the past, traditional undergraduate students were required to complete 40 clock hours of community service. The College is attempting to move away from a quantitative experience (completing clock hours) and moving toward a qualitative experience, which includes completing a paper/project to reflect spiritual growth based on a Service Learning experience. The challenge will be tying all of these projects together to fully integrate the mission in order to have the most impact on students. Finally, assessing the values and ethics our students possess as they complete their degree is another on-going challenge. Longitudinal assessments and capstone courses may be used to capture this information from seniors and perhaps alumni. As mentioned earlier, Alvernia's Mission Statement purports to prepare learners for a values-based education and an assessment to validate this claim is necessary.

Resource Allocation and the Future

Finally, Alvernia College is analyzing all of the above-mentioned data and setting priorities for the future of Mission and Ministry activities and the campus community as a whole. It plans to complete and disseminate the UCLA analysis; share results with faculty and continue to make progress towards the importance of faculty/student spiritual relationships; share results with Mission and Ministry for future planning; continue to search for "Capstone Assessment" for Mission;

incorporate spirituality into the assessment plan; and monitor retention after implementation of Mission and Ministry initiatives are completed.

In order to “close the loop of assessment,” the College must incorporate the results of its assessments into the Long-Range Plan and resource allocation of the College. There are a number of reasons that this final step is crucial. First, Alvernia College is a tuition-driven institution that not only has to answer to its consumers for its survival, it is an institution with a number of professional programs with outside accrediting agencies that require assessment information based on data and not anecdotal evidence. Second, Alvernia’s planning and resource allocation process is closely tied to the assessment process and progress of that plan is carefully monitored. Finally, as a religiously-based institution, Alvernia answers to the Bernardine Sisters and its Board of Trustees and ultimately its students, and must provide evidence of effectiveness of its mission in academic and co-curricular areas of the College.

References

Fowler, J. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development*. New York , NY : Harper Collins.

Dalton , J. (2005). Supporting students’ spiritual growth in college: Recommendations for student affairs practitioners, *Journal of College and Character*, 2.

Fleming, J. (2005). *The Boston College questionnaire for undergraduate experience (BCQUE)*”. Villanova University presentation, April 4, 2005 .

Bartlett, T. (2005). Most freshmen say religion guides them. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 22, 2005 .

The College of Saint Rose

By Rev. Christopher DeGiovine, Dean of Spiritual Life

For the past 15 years, the College of Saint Rose has been surveying incoming students with regards to their religious preference for the purpose of assessing both their spiritual and religious needs. When HERI began the College Students’ Beliefs and Values Survey we were delighted to participate. This survey not only gave us much more data than we had gathered before, but we could now also compare our students with a national student population. The insights gleaned from this data were of great importance to us.

Our Office of Spiritual Life (Campus Ministry, Community Service, and Mission Experiences) spent several staff meetings discussing our students' high regard for and participation in community service activities but relatively low responses to religious reflection or connection between faith and justice. This discussion was expanded to our President's Cabinet meeting. At this weekly meeting of the President, Vice-Presidents, and key college personnel, the comparative data showing our students responses placed side by side with other college students from similar institutions was both lively and enlightening.

Pleased that our efforts in community service and social justice were attracting students committed to those issues encouraged our endeavors. Realizing that our students were not doing the critical reflection that others were doing challenged us to review our programming and increase our opportunities for reflection on the community volunteering and social outreach that we offered. Sharing the students' desire to speak about their spiritual concerns in the classroom and academic setting with faculty set the tone for a wider discussion on how professors can appropriately introduce spiritually-based questions to the curricula. This discussion continues on our campus and has encouraged some very valuable conversation.

We at Saint Rose are very interested in continuing to gather this data over several years so that we can begin to form a baseline from which we can measure our success at helping students to develop their beliefs and values systems. We are very interested in having students feel comfortable in sharing their beliefs and values with others so that they can clarify those beliefs and grow in their spiritual as well as their intellectual, emotional, and social lives. We hope to develop survey instruments that will give us similar data on our graduating students so that we can begin to better evaluate and assess the outcomes of our programmatic efforts in these areas.

The College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey has been a catalyst in our effort to address these important areas in the lives of our students. The survey added to our initial efforts and added considerably to the credibility of our data. The survey data invited us to reconsider our programming, encouraged us in our successes and challenged us to do better in those areas we were not sufficiently addressing. The data has helped to initiate an important college-wide conversation about the beliefs and values that our students bring to college and our role in helping students clarify and critique their beliefs and practice. It is our hope that we can continue to gather this data and have it inform our planning and our future directions.

Use of CSBV Survey by Cornerstone University

Cornerstone University is a faith-based liberal arts institution (1,300 students) located in Grand Rapids, MI and is a member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). The CCCU has over 100 member institutions and has sponsored a “comprehensive assessment program” to assist like colleges and universities in the area of assessment. Part of the CCCU-CAP is the administration of the CIRP and the CSBV. Cornerstone University chose to have its incoming students participate in the CSBV as part of the Higher Education Research Institute’s Spirituality in Higher Education Project during the fall of 2004.

Procedurally, Cornerstone University used the following steps in gaining ownership of the survey results:

- A campus stakeholders memo was sent to all internal constituent groups asking for their involvement in using the data (administration, faculty, student development)
- A report was written and distributed by the Office of Assessment highlighting the results of the CIRP and the CSBV data
- The report included the following items:
 - a summary of the tendencies of Cornerstone University students regarding each of the twelve dimensions of religious formation
 - a bullet point summary of the CIRP/CSBV data findings
 - a summary of how Cornerstone University students scored in relationship to other CCCU institutions (50 in the comparison group)
 - a summary of how Cornerstone University students scored in relationship to students from the national sample of all schools
- Each constituent group was asked to report back to the Office of Assessment on how the data informed logistic and strategic decisions.

The reports that have come back to the Office of Assessment indicate the following areas are being impacted by the CSBV data:

- Residence hall programming
- Chapel programming (structure and content)
- Co-curricular efforts led by the Office of Student Development
- Curricular review by the VPAA and the appropriate academic committees

Thus, the CSBV data along with the CIRP material is providing the leadership of Cornerstone University with some very good student perceptual data as the institution moves forward with its stated organizational mission while better

understanding the students who choose to study, learn and grow spiritually on its campus.

Catalyzing a Data-based Conversation by using the CIRP Spirituality Results Mount St. Mary's College

By Don Haviland, Jane Lingua, Sr. Darlene Kawulok

Mount St. Mary's College (Los Angeles, California) is a Catholic liberal arts college for women. As a result, we have a particular interest in nurturing and understanding our students' spiritual development and were pleased to participate in the 2004 CIRP/CSBV Freshman Survey with its focus on spirituality. Since getting our results this summer, we have started to use them in a variety of ways.

At the start of the academic year, Jennifer Lindholm spoke at our campus-wide convocation. This event, which marks the start of each academic term, engages faculty and staff in a conversation about our students and our campus. This fall's event was titled, "The Spiritual Life of College Students: The role of the institution in student development." Jennifer reviewed the survey data and shared her insights about trends in spirituality among students nationally. Her talk gave us a valuable portrait of how our students were similar to and different from these national trends.

Following Jennifer's talk, each of us spoke about how we see spirituality on our campus. Jane talked about the curricular and co-curricular ways in which spirituality is fostered and developed and about how the college climate has supported her own spiritual journey. Don shared additional data from the survey about the spirituality of our students and Sister Darlene addressed how faculty could support students' spiritual growth in the context of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition of inquiry and exploration.

The positive response to this event led us to realize that Jennifer's talk and our response had catalyzed a rich, data-based conversation about how to nurture the spiritual development of our students. Thus, we have started to meet regularly to determine how we can use data from the survey, as well as the expertise in our community, to engage students, faculty, and staff in dialogues around spirituality, student learning, and the Catholic intellectual tradition.

As we proceed, we will look to the data from the CIRP to provide direct evidence that will spark and inform our conversations. For instance, our survey results show that a portion of our students view science and religion as inherently contradictory world views, a fact has clear implications for how our professors approach their teaching. Therefore, we are looking forward to developing

conversations across the academic disciplines in order to understand how the Catholic Intellectual Tradition informs and supports the Arts and Sciences curriculum of the college.

These dialogues and others might be guided by questions such as:

- How do we implicitly or explicitly foster the spiritual and/or religious growth and development of our students?
- What could we do, better or differently, to support this growth?
- What are some ways we can measure or assess spiritual and religious growth?
- How does our own spirituality or religiosity influence that of our students?

We have also learned from the survey results that our students, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds themselves, share the college's commitment to social justice and a demonstration of faith through service to others. These findings suggest we might seek to expand curricular and co-curricular opportunities for service.

While our work is just beginning, it is already clear that the CIRP data will illuminate our students' spiritual struggles and their aspirations in a way that will help us shape the ongoing conversation and support student development.

CSBV & the Discovering & Claiming Our Callings Initiative at Wartburg College

By Fred Ribich

In 2003, Wartburg College was awarded a \$2 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to support the college's new Discovering and Claiming Our Callings initiative. Wartburg is now implementing an exciting new set of programs that will support students in their vocational discernment and preparation (for details about this initiative visit <http://www.wartburg.edu/discovering>).

The CSBV survey is being used in two important ways by the faculty and staff leading the Discovering and Claiming Our Callings initiative. First, the survey is being used diagnostically to understand student attitudes and beliefs so that programs can be crafted to meet students where they are upon entry to Wartburg. A key issue for us is the "gender gap" that appears to be present nationally but that may be even more pronounced among Wartburg students. Second, we are hoping that the CSBV survey can be incorporated into the college's assessment of this initiative's overall effectiveness.

Combined with plans for a senior survey and other assessment instruments, we hope to learn what impact the Discovering and Claiming Our Callings programs have had on students' beliefs, values, and practices. Ultimately, we wish to identify those aspects of this initiative that should be continued by the college when grant funding ends. For further information contact Dr. Lake Lambert, Program Director (lake.lambert@wartburg.edu) or Dr. Fred Ribich, Director of Institutional Research & Assessment (fred.ribich@wartburg.edu).