The Impact of Institutional Culture on Student Activism: A Multi-Case Study in Christian Higher Education

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THE IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE ON STUDENT ACTIVISM:
A MULTI-CASE STUDY IN CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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THE IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE ON STUDENT ACTIVISM: A MULTI-CASE STUDY IN CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Brian E. Cole, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2013

This study contributes to the description and meaning of student activism within the context of Christian college environments and cultures, and is interpreted through the sociological concept of symbolic interactionism. The purpose of this study is to help fill the void in the literature on student activism at Christian colleges and universities, positioning it within literature of broader Christian culture and activism, Christian higher education, generational history of college student activism, and student development theories and leadership models. The goal of the study is to help create an understanding of how students at Christian institutions understand and engage in activism within their college’s culture, and to provide institutional leaders information about these student activists and campus cultures as they create policy, plan learning activities and programs, and advise students.

This multi-case study, conducted at two Christian colleges in the Midwest, answers the questions: How do current students, studying at a Christian college or university, understand the concept of activism; what are the institutional facilitating factors or barriers in relation to student activism and how do they shape student activities; and how do students make meaning of their activism within the Christian campus culture as they think about their future activism? Data were received through 23 individual interviews with elite samples of student activists and were triangulated through two follow-up focus groups, 15 individual interviews with elite samples of
staff and faculty, campus observation, and archival records. One finding to emerge from the within-case analysis and multi-case synthesis was that student activists at Christian colleges understand activism the way their institutions teach them and through an educational paradigm. Student activists were also found to embrace and work within institutional systems that control student activism, making meaning of their activism through their institutional construct.
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CHAPTER I

The idea of this study started with a student interaction nine years ago on the campus of a Christian university. I was employed there overseeing student activities and consistently meeting individually with students on the activities programming board, advising them on the direction of their activities planning. These meetings were also designed to support students in their respective positions on the board, as well as in their personal development.

During one of these informal advising sessions a student expressed frustrations with a few campus policies that did not make sense to him and that, in his mind, ran counter to student needs. He proceeded to complain about these policies for several minutes in hopeless resignation of these perceived unchangeable rules. After listening to the complaints for a while I asked him what he was going to do about it. He appeared confused by this response. I verified with him that his opinions on these policies were commonly shared by many of the student body and pushed him further. I challenged him about his power to change policies on campus. I explained to him that groups of students engaging in collective action can put pressure on campus leadership and that pressure can leverage change. After giving him examples of how that may be accomplished, he started to disengage from the idea. Suddenly his original policy issues did not seem so important to him.

For several years I have thought back to that specific interaction and to other similar ones I have had in which students on Christian campuses have resisted the idea of pushing against the system for desired change. These students have certainly shown an aptitude and willingness to engage in social service activities, whether volunteering at a homeless shelter or fundraising for hurricane victims, but have seemed resistant to engage in organized dissent or protest. This reluctance resonates...
with me as someone who shares most of these students’ cultural background and undergraduate experience, albeit from a different generation. While I understand this culture intuitively, this study seeks to provide frameworks and to apply theory to the nature of Christian college campuses and how they influence student activism.

Context

Student activism has been a well-documented part of colleges and universities since the beginning of higher education. Within recent memory, enormous student action was dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement, protest against the Vietnam War, for student representation, and general social revolution protests of 1968, or what is now known in the U.S. as the “Year of the Student” (Boren, 2001). Much has been studied and written about these student movements, particularly on the characters, issues, and activist strategies during this tumultuous period in history (Boren). The literature has also tracked student activism on campus into the present day, with historical data allowing researchers to make reasonable assertions about our current generation of students. Missing within the historical and current literature is the involvement in student activism of those attending Christian colleges and universities. Without these data, there is little understanding of these students’ attitudes, activities, and methods for social and political change within this unique culture, as well as how activism effects their personal development while in college. This study attempts to qualitatively capture how students on Christian campuses perceive their roles as change agents, work within their campus cultures for this change, and understand this activity within the broader scope of their college experience and their personal development.
Literature Review

To provide a foundation to understand this study, chapter two positions it within a review of literature, starting with the conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism. Concepts of organization and culture are explored, particularly within broader Christian culture and Christian higher education contexts. Ideas of activism and social justice are presented, especially in how they relate to Christian cultural understanding and participation. A generational history of U.S. college student activism is offered, with special attention given to the current Millennial generation. Finally, there is an exploration of how institutions can support and foster student growth through relevant student development theories, leadership frameworks, and service-learning programs.

Conceptual Framework

Symbolic interactionism provides the primary framework to understand the unique cultures on a Christian college campus. Building upon the work of Blumer (1969) and Mead (1934), symbolic interactionism proposes that people make meaning of interactions from within the social systems of which they are a part. This concept is employed to build an understanding of Christian activism, the Christian higher education context, and ultimately institutional impact on student activism.

Symbolic interactionism also provides a framework for the emergent themes of how students make meaning of their activism. A historical account of student activism provides the backdrop to understanding the nature of these activities, eventually concluding with a closer examination of recent and current generations of students. Student development (Astin, 1984; Kohlberg, 1976) and leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991) theories are employed to apply *a priori themes* and to connect these
activities to students’ cognitive and psychosocial development and an understanding of how student activism leads to community engagement and leadership.

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological tradition inspired by Mead (1934), who was interested in how people create individual identities using symbols, but also continue contributing to society as a whole. The term symbolic interaction was formalized by Blumer (1969) as he built his views on three premises: (a) the actions of people are based on the meanings that people have for their environment, (b) the meanings people possess are gained from social interactions with other people, and (c) that these meanings are achieved by a process of interpretation. “Every human event can be understood as the result of the people involved…continually adjusting what they do in the light of what others do, so that each individual’s line of action ‘fits’ into what the others do” (Becker & McCall, 1990, p. 3).

A college community is a society that relies on symbols and social interactions to function. Expectations are placed upon members of these communities for their respective roles in order to maximize learning environments while keeping the institution sustainable. During these formative years in a student’s developmental process, personal identities are built and influenced by interactions with peers, faculty, and staff. One can estimate that there would be resulting pervasive symbols and traditions present when that student’s college continues a close relationship with the religious denomination on which it was founded. When a large percentage of the campus community are members of that denomination, the resulting social interactions can reinforce an insular environment. Symbolic interactionism can provide the framework to best understand these environments, and in particular student activism for the purposes of this study.
Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to understand the impact of institutional culture on student activism at Christian colleges within this study, and are further explored in chapter three:

1. How do current students, studying at a Christian college or university, understand the concept of activism?
2. What are the institutional facilitating factors or barriers in relation to student activism and how do they shape student activities?
3. How do students make meaning of their activism within the Christian campus culture as they think about their future activism?

By asking these questions I attempt to obtain a clearer view of how students choose to commit and act for change on Christian campuses. This study probes into the underlying community expectations of student behavior and how students respond within these environments. These questions attempt to determine how the campus culture influences student activism through the conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism.

Definition of Terms

The very nature of the term “activism” seems to have different implications on today’s campus, regardless of type of institution. Multiple definitions and differing perceptions of what constitutes activism exist, making it difficult to illustrate prescriptively what kinds of activities are considered activist on each campus. In order to be open to variations of activities Ropers-Huilman, Carwile, Lee, and Barnett (2003) present a definition of student activism as “involvement in and commitment to social change or social justice” (p. 6). This is sufficiently descriptive and broad
enough for multiple interpretations. Chambers and Phelps (1993) offer an alternative, but consistent definition of activism as “the active participation of individuals in group behavior for the purpose of creating change – in attitudes, knowledge, behavior, and/or symbols” (p. 20). For the purpose of this study, it is not so important to debate specific activities included in the definition. Rather, it is precisely the point of this study to identify how activist attitudes become manifest differently on campus, detailing specifically within the current student generation in Christian college contexts.
CHAPTER II

The previous chapter laid the groundwork for an understanding of Christian college cultures and student activism by providing an overview of the concepts and frameworks. This chapter positions my study within available literature on symbolic interactionism, organizational culture, student activism, relevant student development theories, and Christian college contexts. The next chapter then describes the methodology of my qualitative study of student activism at Christian colleges.

There is not a substantial amount of literature written about activism at Christian colleges and universities. In fact, my search yielded only one empirical study, an unpublished dissertation (Wang, 1992) that closely addressed my desired subject, but focused on Catholic institutions. Much has been written on historical activism on campuses during the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam War, and free-speech eras; however, these well-documented activities were at large public institutions. My review of literature failed to uncover a comprehensive empirical study of historical or present-day student social or political activism at Christian colleges or universities.

In order to best understand the topic the literature review strategy was to examine literature on symbolic interaction and to explore of how cultures influence learning and meaning making within organizations. The specific cultures reviewed in the literature were Christian cultures and Christian college cultures. A priori student development sources were reviewed with the idea that they could support the idea that student activism aids in the growth and leadership development of a student. Literature on generational characteristics was reviewed, particularly through historical accounts of college student activism. Finally, the larger context of current
national activism was investigated, specifically within churches and religious organizations.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological tradition inspired by Mead (1934), who was interested how people create individual identities using symbols and also continue contributing to society as a whole. The term symbolic interaction was named and formalized by Blumer (1969), one of Mead’s students, as he built his views on three premises, 1) the actions of people are based on the meanings that people have for their environment; 2) the meanings people possess are gained from social interactions with other people; and 3) that these meanings are achieved by a process of interpretation. “Symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (p. 5). Meaning is made by a dynamic interactive process instead of on personality or social structure (Charon, 1979).

Central to symbolic interactionism is the understanding of the self as a changing social structure instead of a static and predictable entity (Charon, 1979; Mead, 1934). In fact, each person has many selves that vary upon the social interaction in which one is involved. These selves constantly change through these interactions with others and contribute to one’s selfhood. This is why symbolic interactionists conceive the mind and the self as a process. “The person does not possess a mind so much as a minding process, meaning an ability to converse with self, an ability to pull out stimuli selectively from the environment, assess their significance, interpret the situation, judge the actions of others and self, and so on” (Charon, 1979, p. 30).
People take on societal roles by interpreting other people’s responses within interactions. The individual objectifies the self by other’s definitions gleaned from these interactions and then believes and behaves in that matter (Blumer, 1969). “Role-taking is the process of anticipating the responses of others with one whom is involved in social interaction” (Stryker, 1980, p. 62). Part of this process is taking physical and behavioral cues from others and actively forming perspectives that guide response, instead of passively responding to social stimuli (Charon, 1979).

An important part of role taking and self-definition is through the use of symbols in communicating physical and behavioral cues. Symbols are meaningful social constructs that represent something else simply because people agree to assign a specific definition to the symbol (Charon, 1979). The transmitter of the symbol in a social interaction identifies a meaning to the symbol and trusts the receiver will define the symbol in a similar manner. “What is essential to communication is that the symbol should arouse in one’s self what it arouses in the other individual” (Mead, 1934, p. 149). Symbols can be words, actions, and objects and are arbitrarily created by people to share meaning (Charon). It is through symbols that “one takes the role of others…to put oneself in another’s place and to view the world as others do” (Stryker, 1980, p. 62).

The concepts of symbolic interactionism are consistently applied to a group of any size, whether it is two people or more, communities, or society as a whole (Charon, 1979). “Human society as we know it could not exist without minds and selves, since all of its most characteristic features presuppose the possession of minds and selves by its individual members” (Mead, 1934, p. 227). Within each group of people normative elements develop that may or may not be accepted by all members of the group. Role conflict arises when somewhere in the social process expectations
contradict (Stryker, 1980). Other causes of conflict are the perceived societal gains of one group over another, communication breakdown, misinterpretation of symbols or situations, inaccurate role taking, or the failure to act appropriately or cooperatively in a situation (Charon).

Group or collective action is defined as a construction instead of a mere release from the individual through an interpretive process of situations. These are aligned with others by interpreting and considering each other’s actions (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). “Under the perspective of symbolic interactionism, social action is lodged in acting individuals who fit their respective lines of action to one another through a process of interpretation” (Blumer, p. 84). All social action can be viewed from a symbolic interactionist perspective as a person takes into consideration the perspective of others in devising personal action (Charon, 1979). “Social action is acting with others in mind. That means there is usually some attempt to communicate something to the other, even though that attempt may be quite subtle…Social action, therefore, is symbolic action: the actor does something meant to stand for something to others” (Charon, p. 127).

Particularly interesting for this study is how symbolic interactionism treats power, especially in the fields of education and deviance, “precisely on the ways in which authoritative and consequential power relations are enacted and sustained by real people in ways which contribute to the ‘structuring’ of societies” (Dennis & Martin, 2005, p. 207). It also explores asymmetric power relationships and how human agency contributes to resistance to domination. “A basic way organizations constrain humans, and humans react to subverting authority is through roles and rules” (Musolf, 1992, p. 173). Even within systems where power allows organizational representatives to interpret rules that leaders claim to be shared, a
power struggle is always present as those at lower levels attempt to subvert these constraints. Negotiations take place when situations arise that power is decoupled from authority, where the maintenance of the social order necessitates compromise and concessions to these roles and rules. This creates mechanisms that empower lower members of the organization to change the established power arrangements (Musolf, 1992).

While much of this study interacts with individual activists, who are a subculture of their student peers on campus, what is being studied is the institutional culture. Organizations are more than a collection of its members acting individually, but are defined through the members’ interaction, and the creation and exchange of shared ideas (Sanderlands & Stablein, 1987). Viewing symbolic interactionism through literature on organizational and culture frameworks may help to pragmatically understand the environment from which individuals interact socially, make meaning through interpretation, and choose to act.

Organization and Culture

Campus culture has been shown to greatly influence student activism (Van Dyke, 1998). Dyke’s quantitative study of 423 colleges around the subject of student activism in the 1960s finds that a history of student activism is strongly associated with incidents of student protest. The study also shows campuses with a single protest incident generally have multiple incidents of protest, due to activist subcultures present in these locations. Institutional culture clearly has an influence on the presence or absence, as well as amount of student activism on a campus community. To understand the impact of culture on student activism one must understand the basic concepts of culture.
According to Schein (1996), “A culture is a set of basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and out to be that a group of people share and that determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and, to some degree, their overt behavior” (p. 11). Culture is manifested through “deep tacit assumptions that are the essence of the culture” (p. 11); the idealized values espoused by a group and by which it wants to be publically viewed; and the daily behaviors that “represents a complex compromise among the espoused values, the deeper assumptions, and the immediate requirements of the situation” (p. 11). Basic understandings of a culture are gained either by sustained study of group behaviors or uncovering the values and assumptions held by group members that dictate their perceptions and thoughts.

For the purpose of this study culture is viewed through organizational frameworks. Organizations are not independent of individual members or merely a collection of individuals within them. Instead, they are defined by the interaction of its members (Sanderlands & Stablein, 1987). Furthermore, Yanow (2000) writes, “The concept of culture refers not only to a group of people, but also to the artifacts they create (including the values, beliefs, feelings, and other forms of meaning embedded in those artifacts)” (p. 252).

In studying cultures, Yanow (2000) argues for an interpretive methodological approach that,

Focuses on two relationships: the constructive character of the relationship between artifacts and their creators, in which the former are seen as embodying the intentions (or “mind” or “consciousness”) of the latter; and the symbolic (representational) character of the relationship between artifacts and their embodied meanings. This entails an analytic focus on meaning: what values, beliefs, and/or feelings an artifact represents beyond any “literal”, non-symbolic referent. (p. 252)
According to Yanow (2000), the artifacts on which a researcher should focus are collectives of people and their actions and interactions, the language they use within these actions and interactions, the objects focused on in these actions, and the meanings of these artifacts to these people at their specific site. There must also be a focus on meaning created at that specific site through organization member perspectives based on the artifacts they create, engage, and sustain and through their process of ongoing engagement with these artifacts.

Polletta (2008) views culture through an institutional schema, allowing culture to be treated as “constitutive of interests and identities but also as circulating through networks, backed up by resources, and employed in the service of organizational agendas” (p. 85). Resource and power is connected to culture in that they determine what schemas dominate an institution. “Once a schema begins to gain purchase, however, it creates stakes in its enforcement and interpretation (and for some, in its challenge)” (p. 85). Eventually becoming common practice, alternative practices are seen as inappropriate or not how things are supposed to be done. This institutional schema perspective views mobilization “not as the result of long-standing actors with stable interests confronting new political opportunities but, rather, as familiar, routinized practices becoming problematic in a way that creates new actors and interests in contention” (p. 86).

Smircich (1983) offers a symbolic perspective of organizational analysis, one in which anthropologists “treat societies, or cultures, as systems of shared symbols and meanings” (p. 350). The focus of a symbolic perspective is in the understanding of how cultural members interpret and understand their experiences and how they relate to action. Studying these cultures involves uncovering and interpreting the culture’s themes. The meaning of these themes is identified through the linkage of
symbols and their relationship to the activities of the culture’s members. This process of interpretation applies to organizations and their symbolic themes and systems. It is also important to recognize the “recurrent themes that represent the patterns in symbolic discourse and that specify the links among values, beliefs, and action in a setting” (p. 351).

According to Kim and Quinn (2011), personal change within a culture is necessary to affect organizational change. Individuals must be willing to act in different ways that are consistent with and reinforcing of the new cultural values.

It is possible to identify a desired culture and to specify strategies and activities designed to produce change, but unless the change process becomes personalized, individuals are willing to engage in new behaviors, and the managerial competencies demonstrated in the organization are altered, the organization’s fundamental culture will not change. (p. 135)

Christian Culture

There is a recognizable, ever-evolving, and eclectic culture around professing Christians in the United States. Through all, Christian culture has the simple goal to know, love, and serve God to achieve final and complete love and knowledge. “All the paraphernalia of our lives, intellectual, moral, social, psychological, and physical, has this end: Christian culture is the cultivation of the saints” (Senior, 1978, p. 22). But within that goal “the ‘religious problem’ for Christians has always been the same: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourself” (p. 20).

Christian culture is often viewed in how Christians approach and live within the world and broader culture. Woods (2013) poses the essential question: How should Christians relate to the world around them? “How should Christians live in the
world without becoming fully of the world (see John 17:14-16)” (p. xx)?

For many, engagement, it seems, is a contested and risky affair. Some theological and ecclesiological traditions feel so threatened by the prospect of being overwhelmed or consumed by the task of engagement that they retreat before they have advanced; standing apart from key issues and debates in culture is seen to be the only way of protecting the integrity and identity of the Christian tradition. Others prefer a different strategy – namely one of deep engagement – but, in so doing, can find themselves so transformed that they become alienated from their roots. In either form of engagement, a degree of cultural bewilderment seems inevitable. (Percy, 2005, p. 1)

There is dualism within Christianity, with one view of the world as “a wasteland of godlessness, with which the Christian should have as little as possible to do,” and another that “regards cultural transformation as virtually identical to ‘kingdom activity’” (Horton, 2006, p. 42). Within Christianity there are varying beliefs and theological interpretations of Biblical text that offer individuals and denominations different worldviews. Some believe they are to integrate themselves into the broader culture, not distinguishing themselves from it other than in their allegiance to a heavenly citizenship instead of an earthly one. As a result, this citizenship calls them to lives that are “distinct from the broader cultural activities to which Christians are called in love and service to their neighbors” (p. 44). For others, being a Christian means being countercultural, rejecting the broader culture and being set apart. Instead of choosing to integrate within this culture they choose to order their lives within subcultures that eschew secular life by substituting constructed Christian versions of it, like in politics, art, and literature (Horton).

Niebuhr’s (1951) classic work, Christ and Culture, describes a typology of five ways to view Christ, the church, and the Christian faith in relation to culture. The first sees “Christ against culture,” calling for a separation and opposition from the culture and world. The second type sees “the Christ of culture,” recognizing an
agreement between Christ and culture and seeing “Jesus as a great hero of human culture history; his life and teachings are regarded as the greatest human achievement” (p. 41), of which should serve as a guide to civilization. Three other types fall between these first two.

The third type sees “Christ above culture,” fulfilling cultural aspirations and restoring institutions that are part of a true society. The fourth type sees “Christ and culture in paradox” in which Christians live their lives “subject to two moralities, and as a citizen of two worlds that are not only discontinuous with each other but largely opposed” (Niebuhr, 1951, p. 43). They see a dualism in the authority of both Christ and culture and accept their opposition with the hope of reconciliation in the afterlife. The fifth type sees “Christ the transformer of society” and recognizes the opposition of Christ and culture, but sees Christ as the converter of humanity within the culture.

Another way to view Christian culture is through a political taxonomy, in terms of Right, Center, and Left Christianity. The Christian Right, sometimes known as fundamentalists, has its roots in anti-intellectualism, a rejection of modernity and science, and political characteristics of anti-communism and national individualism. They are critical of national culture as immoral, but also proclaim it as a Christian one over and against other cultures. The Christian Center identifies itself as evangelical, differing from the Right in its intellectual engagement with modernity and culture. The Christian Left has generally rejected the traditional connections of theology and political, social, and cultural conservatism, and has demonstrated interests in social dimensions of Christianity and transforming society through active engagement of their faith (Toews, 1991).

The research firm, Barna Group, finds several current themes and trends from its research of American Christians. One poll shows Christians becoming less
impressed with and involved in churches, instead preferring a private faith that they do not feel compelled to share. There is also an increasing interest in serving their communities. The data also show that tolerance of other people and ideas is becoming increasingly important to them. Christians are also more interested in developing life skills than practicing spiritual principles in the management of their lives (Barna, 2010).

Another Barna Group study describes that current characteristics of Christians has created “Nouveau Christianity.” Fewer people are identifying themselves as Christian, due in part to the poor public image of Christianity from a “combination of factors: harsh media criticism, ‘unchristian’ behavior by church people, bad personal experiences with churches, ineffective Christian leadership amid social crises, and the like” (Barna, 2007, Nouveau Christianity section, para. 1). The remaining Christians seek out more spiritually diverse conversations and friendships, do not desire regular spiritual regimens in their daily lives, and see the idea of rigid belief systems of absolute truth as evidence of close-mindedness. As a result, church looks very different than previous traditional forms. This “Nouveau Christianity” embraces more diversity and tolerance at church; accepts non-traditional forms of church, like house churches; does not see the need for weekly church routines; and incorporates into church the arts and other creative forms of instruction (Barna, 2007).

Amidst these changes, Christians seek to understand the implications of a personal relationship with God and the social responsibility to which their faith calls them. One illustration of this is in Christians’ understanding and engagement with the idea of “social justice.” A description of Christian social justice provides a tangible context in which to better understand contemporary Christian culture.
Social Justice

There are multiple understandings of the term “social justice” within political and moral philosophy, including providing “equal access to resources through just social structures” (Todd & Rufa, 2013, p. 315) and human development, worth, or dignity. In terms of social justice process, a meta analysis of the literature suggests that “education, critical consciousness, and navigating privilege as important in the process of privileged people becoming justice allies” (p. 317). Simply stated, “justice is described as the right use of power, and injustice as the abuse of power. Social justice wrestles with questions about power systems within society and how they affect people” (Cannon, 2009, p. 32).

Christian concern for human rights and social justice in its modern form has roots in the evangelical revivalist tradition of the 19th century, “a fact that is too little acknowledged by many who are successors to this legacy” (Rice, 2008, p. 28). Many of the evangelists of that time articulated a faith with social reforms, specifically around slavery, the primary issue of the day. There has recently been a rediscovery of that social justice tradition among many present-day Christians. “The false dichotomy of recent decades – that one kind of Christian talks about ‘evangelism’ and ‘revival’ and another kind altogether focuses on justice – is beginning to crack” (p. 31).

Todd and Rufa’s (2013) qualitative study of Christian perspectives of social justice and religious participation reveals that Christians view social justice as “structural and/or individual, related to human rights and dignity, and as connected to religious responsibility” (p. 320). The process of social justice development in these environments is awareness through “exposure, mentors, and finding a social justice fit and community,” as well as “strategically working to educate others about social justice” (p. 320). Barriers to social justice are the lack of resources and negative
feelings of guilt, self-worth, and fear. Congregational leaders are seen as instrumental to the amount of justice pursued by individual churches, although most religious institutions are seen as relatively uninvolved in social justice work (Todd & Rufa).

While the term “social justice” has been contested within some Christian communities, a variety of Christian leaders and writers have started articulating a Biblical vision for social justice. Colson (1990) addresses the topic of justice in a short *Christianity Today* article, where he acknowledges disunity among Christian evangelicals who understand the term “justice” differently. “Conservatives gleefully suppose that getting one’s due means wrongdoers receive punishment. Liberals glibly assert it means everyone getting an equal share of society’s benefits” (p. 72). Instead, Colson argues that Christians need to “hear the clarion call for men and women to be declared just by faith in Christ, and a call that the social order itself mirror God’s righteousness” (p. 72).

Part of the disagreement about social justice within Christian cultures is in determining the nature of God’s universal justice. According to Volf (1996), “Christians stand inside a culture, inside a tradition, inside an interest group” and therefore their knowledge is “limited and distorted” (p. 198). Even within these cultures there is much disagreement. According to Volf, the only way to true justice is to embrace the other in “a place where we will belong together with our personal and cultural identities both preserved and transformed, but certainly enriched by the other” (p. 225).

John Perkins states two Biblical passages are especially salient in framing God’s call for justice. One is Amos 5:24, “where God exhorts those who want to be religious but who exploit the poor to ‘Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream’” (Perkins, 1993, p. 127). The other starts
in Micah 6:6, where the prophet Micah responds to the question about how to worship God. “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (p. 127). Perkins also writes, “the church is called to be the prophetic voice in society; that’s what we see in the model that Jesus provided” (Marsh & Perkins, 2009, p. 45).

_The New Yorker_ published an article in 2008 that describes a movement of religious organizations and pastors advocating for a new national policy agenda, one opposed to the “religious right’s agenda” and that focuses on “their understanding of the life of Jesus and his ministry to the poor, the outcast, and the peacemakers” (Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 28). Sojourners is one of three organizations mentioned in the article as having leaders who have challenged the religious right agenda prior to 2004, the other two being Baptist preacher Tony Campolo and Ron Sider, president of Evangelicals for Social Action (Fitzgerald). Sojourners is particularly actively and vocal in the pursuit of Christian social justice and has the tagline, “faith in action for social justice (Sojourners, 2013). It was started in 1971 at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School when students started meeting and discussing “the relationship between their faith and political issues, particularly the Vietnam War.” Today, the organization resides in Washington, D.C., and is led by president and founder, Jim Wallis, “to discover the intersection of faith, politics, and culture” through social justice advocacy (Sojourners). According to Wallis (2005), “Religious action is rooted in a much deeper place than ‘rights’ – that place being the image of God in every human being” (p. 5). He calls for a spiritual revival to address societal problems. “Our religious congregations are not meant to be social organizations that merely reflect the wider culture’s values, but dynamic countercultural communities whose purpose is to reshape both lives and societies” (p. 6-7).
In 2010, television and radio opinion program host Glenn Beck publically declared the term “social justice” a perversion of the gospel. “He said that ‘social justice’ is a ‘code word’ for ‘communism’ and ‘Nazism,’ and that Christians should leave their churches if they preach, practice, or even have the phrase ‘social justice’ on their Web sites” (Wallis, 2010, p. 7). Wallis, through the Sojourners organization, challenged Beck’s assertion. “Social justice is a personal commitment both to serve the poor and to attack the conditions that lead to poverty is one of the most passionate beliefs of a younger generation of Christians, and one of their most compelling attractions to Jesus Christ” (p. 7). Wallis invited Beck for a conversation over the matter, which, in turn, brought an attack from Beck upon himself.

Former Sojourners political director, Adam Taylor, writes that young people today are attracted to the hope in a commitment to social justice, and that Christians are called to be “God’s change agents, empowered by the Holy Spirit to be God’s transformed nonconformists” (Taylor, 2010, p. 53). He argues that social justice is a “spiritual journey toward God’s kingdom come,” which includes lifestyle commitments of “praying for justice, making more ethical consumer choices, being better stewards of the earth, participating in service with the disinherit ed and, of course, political advocacy for systemic change” (p. 215). For some Christians, seeking justice and contributing to societal change means engagement in activism.

**Christian Culture Activism**

In the arena of social activism churches and other religious groups are distinct in how they are well-established, historical institutions that have values and ideologies at their core (Sethi, 1985). “Its concern for the poor and the downtrodden is rooted in both its values and traditions, and yet as a well-established institution
with strong historical roots, it also has a long-term perspective in dealing with issues and other institutions of society” (p. 40). Religious organizations must balance methods for social change and the prevailing attitudes in their memberships. An activity outside the comfort and sensibilities of that membership often offends and leads to skepticism and lack of faith in programs and leadership (Sethi).

One of the major social and political issues among conservative Christians and their churches is the pro-life agenda (Shields, 2005). Shields finds through participant observation and 80 interviews with Christian activists on this issue that their faith plays a central role in their activities and the meaning for their involvement, whether they were deliberative, disjointed, or radical activists. A major finding of and surprise to Shields is the extent that Christian activists engage in civil dialogue about pro-life issues instead of more radical or belligerent methods, which Shields interprets as more easily reconciled with their Christian beliefs (Shields).

While many Christian activists desire to view their activism in the context of their faith traditions, how is it enacted? In a quantitative study of 1,456 religious congregations, Beyerlein and Chaves (2003) looked at the political activities of four different faith traditions; Catholic, black Protestant, mainline/liberal Protestant, and evangelical/conservative Protestant. They found significant differences in how the different religious groups chose to politically act. The evangelical/conservative Protestants, which is the group that would fit the type of college in this study, scored at or around the lowest percentage of congregations engaged in most types of political activity, especially in outwardly vocal activities like organizing a demonstration or march or a sending a group to lobby elected officials. The only category in which this group scored highly is distributing voter guides, especially guides produced by
Christian Right sources. By comparison, Catholic churches scored highly in most categories, especially demonstrative political activities (Beyerlein & Chaves).

According to Time magazine in 2010, young evangelicals are different from previous generations in that “they are socially conscious, cause-focused and controversy-averse” (Sullivan, 2010, para. 5).

While their grandparents might have considered political and social engagement inappropriate and their parents may have spent their energies on culture-war issues such as abortion and school prayer, the members of the newest generation of Evangelicals are less interested in choosing sides. They focus on nonideological causes like fighting for clean water and poverty relief and fighting against sex trafficking. (para. 17)

They also are more globally minded and are likely to reject religious and political labels, like the label of “evangelical,” with which they have a negative association with more extreme and fundamental figures of previous generations (Sullivan).

Biblical Connections

Several Biblical themes, terms, and scriptural passages can be read and interpreted in a way that is instructive of Christian living, cultural engagement, social justice, and activism. One can be the Hebrew word shalom, found throughout in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, which loosely means peace or to be in a right relationship with God, the self, other people, and with nature. The near-equivalent Greek word found in the New Testament is eirene (Gowan, 2002). The concept of peace has broad social and theological implications throughout the Bible.

More precisely, according to Plantinga, Jr. (2002), shalom is the term the Hebrew prophets used to describe “the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight” (p. 14). Wolterstorff (1983) further
explores the social justice orientation of *shalom* and Biblical principles, claiming that without justice there cannot be *shalom*. The mere presence or feelings of hostility, a lack of enjoyment in one’s relationships, or a community lacking in ethics or responsibility wounds *shalom*. Joldersma (2001) takes *shalom* one step further in moving it beyond the concept of an individualistic view of justice for right relationships to a focus on people groups and the systems that create injustices.

Seeking *shalom* needs a critical side, one that engages students to become ‘sites of resistance’ with a healthy dose of distrust in the status quo injustices in which they are embedded…and it might include an ethos of outrage against the injustice social structures and cultural practices that are part of the world’s ‘business as usual.’ (p. 114) *Shalom* becomes a way to understand our society’s current wrongs and urges change in order to create a more joyful, peaceful, just, and harmonious community (Joldersma).

Tinder (1989) places these attributes on the Greek term *agape*, which is a Biblical word for *unconditional love*. This non-romantic love calls believers to aspire to perfection in relationships with others. This love requires action in the attending to peoples’ well-being, whether that is in service to others or working against systems that dehumanize and oppress people. Although this love may appear similar to other intentions to assist the marginalized, the motivation for *agape* is the divine command for such love and not the inherent care of others. Since sin is at the root of all injustice and oppression, the work that battles this is viewed as significant only as it relates to spirituality.

Although liberation is commanded by *agape* and pursuing it is essential to our spiritual integrity, it would be of no benefit to others were it not the human work that accompanies divine work. Liberation is the task human beings are allowed and commanded to undertake in connection with the divine task of redemption. Thus, political action is significant only through grace. If this is ignored, either social reform is
confused with redemption, giving rise to revolutionary arrogance, or it is dismissed as meaningless. (Tinder, 1989, p. 165)

Bell and Golden (2008) equate the Biblical book of Exodus with a call to liberate the oppressed. In Exodus God’s people, the Israelites were oppressed as slaves in Egypt, which was the political superpower empire of that day. God heard their cry of suffering and responded by liberating them from Egypt and their slavery. Christians, in turn, are expected to be aware of the pain and suffering of the oppressed and to seek to liberate them. “God measures their faith by how they treat widows, orphans, strangers-the weak-among them. God’s desire is that they would bring exodus to the weak, in the same way that God brought them exodus in their weakness” (p. 35). Such activism becomes a mandate to Christians modeled by a higher power to alleviate suffering of the oppressed.

Christian Higher Education Context

In order to attempt to understand the context of Christian colleges and universities, it is necessary to study the unique qualities of their campus cultures. By design, these types of institutions are fundamentally different than their public secular counterparts in mission and practice (Holmes, 1987). According to Piper (2002), there has been some confusion of how to understand these types of Christian colleges. Piper defines such an institution as,

One that models a way of thought, a way of life, and a way of faith. An evangelical Christian college is not a place of thoughtless indoctrination, but to the contrary a place of serious study, honest questions, and critical engagement, in the context of a humble allegiance to the traditions of the evangelical Christian church. (p. 167)

Thomas and Guthrie (1997) argue that leaders of these Christian institutions must display open and mutually supportive characteristics to remain distinct, and to avoid a
narrow focus that tends to separate them from other Christian colleges and universities.

The idea of integration of faith and learning is important at these types of colleges, while not exclusive to Christian institutions. This integration is the connection of knowledge of faith to knowledge of learning in consistent and coherent ways (Harris, 2003). The assumptions that underlie Christian integration is that “all truth is God’s truth;” “there is no conflict between God’s truth and other truth;” secular learning is incomplete and often distorted;” “Christian integration is based on a Biblical framework of reality;” and “truth is the most important goal of learning” (p. 3). These claims are in opposition to two prominent worldviews in secular higher education: scientific naturalism, where knowledge is limited to the observable and able to be gained through scientific experimentation; and postmodernism, where there is no absolute truth, and knowledge and values are relative (Harris).

Arens (2004) asserts one of the objectives of nearly all Christian colleges is to “educate and train sophisticated leaders for the church and society,” (p. 1) and they take great pride in fulfilling the mission as preparers of Christian leaders for future generations. Christian higher education leadership often values individual character formation and creates campus rules and cultures that seek to protect the individual in that character growth. Christian institutions often have extensive and far reaching codes of conduct to maintain order and shield students in their moral and spiritual growth rather than having to respond to the potential community disruption and messiness that certain types of student activism brings. Christian college leaders sometimes have a particularly difficult time balancing choice and freedom of the individual with community behavioral standards, in large part due to a resistance to banish the idea of an in loco parentis philosophy (Lau, 2005).
Schuman (2010) separates Christian colleges from institutions that are “historically religious or traditionally Christian” (p. 19) by their religious mission and Christian character. Schuman also differentiates these colleges from Bible colleges and seminaries in that the curriculum extends beyond religious and biblical training for careers not in professional ministry. Benne (2001) describes institutions that go beyond mere historical ties to a religious denomination as genuine and “publically relevant” Christian colleges and universities. First, these institutions have a *vision* that interprets all knowledge and truth through the lens of Christianity. Second, they express an *ethos* that guides community behaviors that are consistent with the institutional vision. Third, the *people* at the institution subscribe to the vision and ethos in words and deeds.

All three of these components of a religious tradition must be publically relevant in the lives of colleges and universities if they are to be genuine Christian colleges and universities. The vision must be relevant in the intellectual life and give theoretical justification and guidance for the ethos. The ethos of the tradition must in some relevant way condition and affect the life of the college or university. And persons who bear the vision and the ethos must participate influentially in the life of the school. (Benne, 2001, p. 8)

Two institutions, Calvin College and Wheaton College, are consistently seen as publically relevant Christian colleges and are often both recognized and compared to each other in studies of such institutions (Benne, 2001; Riley, 2005; Schuman, 2010). A fuller description of these two institutions is in chapter three.

Generational History of American College Student Activism

For the most part student activism in the United States has not been respected. Students have been expected to engage in academic pursuits and not in illegitimate dissenting activities (Altbach, 1999). Opposed to that viewpoint are some in the
academy who believe student activism should not only be tolerated, but also encouraged to help promote community improvement and instill civic responsibility in students. An investigation of the history of student activism in the United States should help in understanding the context of our current reality.

To best understand the current context of student activists it is helpful to identify their generational traits. Depending upon a person’s generation and accompanying perspective, it is easy to have a preconceived idea of how a student activist looks and behaves. Descriptions of student generational characteristics help to contextualize social and political actions, thereby discouraging preconceived ideas of student activism. These descriptions allow for an understanding of how activism has originated and changed throughout the generations. With this understanding, some basic assumptions of the general sensibilities of the current generation of student activists are apparent.

Pre-1900 Student Activism

Ropers-Huilman, Carwile, Lee, and Barnett’s (2003) definition of activism fits well with the earliest forms of student protest at the birth of secular higher education in twelfth-century Europe. According to Boren (2001), at that time the term universitas, or university, referred to informal fraternities of scholars and students. These were first organized in Bologna and Paris, where without the protection of an educational institution students were left to the mercy of the local townspeople. Frequently, the locals victimized students with high rents and costly supplies. Students realized that with collective bargaining they were able to negotiate more favorable financial terms. As these student groups grew the cities which hosted them increasingly relied on the revenues of universities, and students, came to understand
their newfound position of power and threatened to move the entire educational institution to a more economically favorable town. Many times they followed through on their threats (Boren).

According to Cartwright (1995), the earliest recording of student protest in the United States was in 1766 at Harvard University over dissatisfaction of the quality of butter served on campus. However, this escalated into an argument between the students and the board of overseers at the institution of what the students viewed as an unfair requirement that they submit to an unjust authority. This mirrored the political conversation taking place in the greater colonial community (Moore, 1976). Student unrest of this type gave way to a more serious confrontation in 1768 between students and administrators, where students organized and rallied against administrative oppression and what they recognized as a university government that failed to treat them as adults with decision-making abilities (Boren, 2001).

Over the next 100 years student unrest and activism on campuses at institutions like Columbia, the University of North Carolina, Yale, the University of Georgia, and the University of Virginia, were primarily due to extremely inflexible university policies of student behavior, including restrictions against drinking alcohol, low-quality meals served on campus, and little student influence in institutional policy-making. Combining these attributes with the colonial mindset of independence and liberty, complete with the tendency for violence and force against oppressors promoted by the supporters of the American Revolution, gave students energy in finding their voice on campus (Boren). Although some student movements focused on national affairs, such as antislavery actions at many northern institutions and anti-draft activities around the Civil War, they did not significantly alter life and governance on campus (Altbach, 1973).
1900 to 1980 Student Activism

According to Altbach (1973), it was not until around 1900 that student activism on campus started taking the modern form easily identifiable today. While student movements occurred before the turn of the twentieth century, “after 1900 ideologically oriented student political groups emerged, and students began to be consistently concerned with issues such as the depersonalization of the university, ROTC, peace, and social change” (p. 3). Although there was a general decline in this overt kind of student protest in the United States in the 1940’s and 1950’s, students still protested communism, championed student rights, and laid the groundwork for movements against racism and sexism (Boren, 2001).

According to Cartwright (1995), student activism exploded in the 1960’s, with an estimated 50% of college students participating in at least one anti-Vietnam War demonstration by the end of the decade. Protests involving the civil rights movement, which occupied the nation’s consciousness, were prevalent and sometimes deadly. Toward the end of the decade student concerns largely focused on civil rights, the Vietnam War, student representation, social revolutions, and equal gender rights. These movements continued into the 1970’s (Boren, 2001).

Until the late 1960’s, students congregated as special interest groups and activities, largely unable to create much change on their respective campuses. “Acts of resistance and protests inspired many students, but what united studentry in the United States more than anything else was the defining of the opposition. In 1968 students on campus all over the country answered a popular call to arms based more on the resistance to ‘the establishment’ than on specific, attainable goals” (Boren, 2001, p. 172). Mass protests at South Carolina State, Howard, Bowie State, Columbia, North Carolina and Kent State often involved physical altercations, injury,
and even death. A series of cause victories and the end of the Vietnam War in the mid-1970’s signaled the splintering and collapse of much of the student activist movement in the United States (Boren).

Post-1980 Student Activism

To fully understand activism after 1980, one must understand the two generations of college students on campus during this time. As a definition, Howe and Strauss (2000) identify Generation X as people born between 1961 and 1981, and Millennials, the following generation, as those born from 1982 to the present. As those generational birth dates translate to college attendance, the earliest of Generation X student would arrive on campus around 1979, with Millennials taking their place starting in 2000. While Howe and Strauss argue there are distinct differences between these two generations in their political involvement, Blackhurst and Foster (2003) write there is no empirical data to support the argument that the students Howe and Strauss define in the early Millennial generation are distinctly different from late Generation X students in terms of political and civic attitudes and actions. Even so, the following descriptors and characteristics of each generation and its activist issues and approaches point to generalizations that may be helpful in understanding and working with them.

Generation X Student Activism

According to Levine and Cureton (1998), Generation X has been characterized by some as “slackers” and has also been referred to as the “me generation” and the “lost generation.” This may be due to the fact that this generation grew up in a time of profound change, demographically, economically,
technologically, globally, and socially. Generation X children were raised in a time in which was ever changing, many times negatively. They grew up in this environment that failed to provide them the protection and support of traditional support systems, of school, family, and church that protected previous generations (Levine & Cureton).

The United States’ birth rate declined with the arrival of this generation. In addition, children of this generation encountered an attitude of aversion and exclusion from the nation’s consciousness and attention. “Kids came attached to new adjectives, like unwanted, at-risk, throwaway, homeless, latchkey. Parents found comfort in experts who reassured them that little Gen Xers thrived best when left to their own wits, to grow up tough and self-reliant…” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 33). Unlike previous generations, they lacked a significant historical occurrence to define and unite them. Some events that did occur during that time (e.g., the space shuttle Challenger explosion, the Rodney King riots, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and AIDS) helped to foster negative and dire attitudes among this generation. Students generally possessed a pessimistic view of the nation’s increasing troubles without apparent solutions in view (Levine & Cureton, 1998). This pessimism helped to feed this generation’s lack of confidence in the country’s social institutions. Generation X students were also marked by an individualist and consumer mentality, and a culture of busyness that resulted in a growing cynicism and tribalism (Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Daloz Parks, 1996).

In Levine and Cureton’s (1998) study, student protest among this generation flourished. Because of their distrust in government and other social institutions, they chose to involve themselves personally and locally in their immediate community. Their vision was small and practical, focusing on the manageable and in their direct
line of vision. This equated, in many cases, to community service and volunteerism. Sometimes this mentality manifested itself with the formation of support and advocacy groups, shunning traditional student government structures, focused mainly on local issues, primarily of multiculturalism and consumer concerns of rising college costs, and whose reformist activities were largely invisible on campus. Unlike previous generations who used more disruptive tactics to protest, Generation X students sought out the media for public exposure of their issue. Consumer tactics like petitions, demonstrations and litigation emerged on campus as a viable method of public protest (Levine & Cureton).

While most protest voices were quiet, Rhoads (1998) cites examples of disruptive activism that took place around the issue of multiculturalism in the 1990’s, such as the Chicano studies movement at the University of California – Los Angeles, the Mills College strike for women’s issues, the American Indian protests at Michigan State University, gay liberation activities at Pennsylvania State University, and the African American protests at Rutgers University, as perhaps the fallout of unfinished business from the civil rights movement of the 1960’s. Campus activism in this decade can be viewed as a period in which those marginalized seized an opportunity to realize their democratic rights of opportunity in society, politics and the economy (Rhoads). This mirrored the larger society, with multiculturalism starting to be a focus of the national media. Many articles on multiculturalism were printed in newspapers, books, and magazines, and were the topic of several movies and network news stories in the 1990’s (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Altbach (1999) likens this student activism to a canary in a coal mine in that it “may signal a social explosion to come or a budding political crisis” (p. 57).
Levine and Cureton’s (1998) study points to four student characteristics that exacerbated multicultural tension on campuses during that time: A preoccupation with differences between groups, mitosis of student groups, segregation on campus, and a growing sense of victimization. Generation X students described themselves in ways that emphasized their uniqueness and difference, including race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Students who were interviewed by the researchers in the 1970’s tended to identify themselves with common characteristics and values of their generation. This new attitude resulted in the growing feeling of difference among students, campus clubs and groups. These collectives started to multiply and transform into narrow and focused groups and clubs around specific differences, shrinking the idea of others being similar to each individual and growing the number of those who are different. On campus students tended to voluntarily segregate themselves by creating areas on campus, including different tables in the cafeteria, frequented and “owned” by particular groups. These groups did not merely divide the racially different, but also separated groups like athletes and those involved in the theater arts. The emphasis on difference also led students to feel as if others were being given preferential treatment at their expense. Gender, racial, economic, and religious groups often felt that the advances of other groups were causing them disadvantage on campus (Levine & Cureton). Adding all these characteristics together created environments dangerously close to “Hobbesian worlds of each against all” (p. 91), where selfish and unrestrained competition flourished.

Much less visibly, students felt victimized by rising college costs and job prospects for the future. Levine and Cureton (1998) found students’ concerns about finances overwhelming, despite their overall satisfaction with college. Rising tuition outpaced inflation and the rate of federal aid dropped, forcing many students to work
and borrow more to stay in school. In response, students took on the role of consumer and expected their campuses to treat them as such. They demanded fast and efficient student services available to them at convenient hours, good parking, and high quality teaching, and were prepared to take their business to another institution to obtain it, or at least use the threat as leverage.

Millennial Student Activism

Howe and Strauss (2000) cite that, in contrast to the way and environment in which Generation X students were raised, Millennials have grown, and are growing, up in a time that emphasizes child and youth issues. The nation’s fertility rate has risen, and in turn the focus on children has become an important political issue in the United States. Instead of being expected to be independent, children of this generation are protected and given attention and social marketing that convinces them to behave. The entertainment media has followed suit and has transformed the media to include major offerings to children and youth, including a resurgence in Disney movies and an exploding children’s book, magazine, and music industry (Howe and Strauss, 2000).

Howe and Strauss (2000) list seven common beliefs and behaviors for Millennials that distinguish them from previous generations. They are: 1) special, where older adults have convinced them they are vital to the country and their parents; 2) sheltered, and are the benefactors of this country’s largest youth and children’s safety movement; 3) confident, with optimistic and trusting attitudes; 4) team-oriented, from children’s television programming, team sports, and schools’ emphasis on group learning; 5) achieving, with school accountability and an emphasis on educational standards they are likely to be the nation’s most educated and best-
behaved; 6) *pressured*, where they feel an obligation to push themselves to succeed and take advantage of opportunities offered to them; and 7) *conventional*, achieving great satisfaction in their positive behavior and feeling comfortable adopting the values of their parents. Millennials support social structures and rules and live in a well-connected world, whether that is socially or academically. They prefer to learn in teams and with structure, experiential activities, and technology (Oblinger, 2003).

According to Howe and Strauss (2000), each rising generation rebels by attempting to change society in accordance to its values. Each generation “solves a problem facing the *prior youth generation*, whose style has become dysfunctional in the new era; corrects for the behavioral excess it perceives in the *current midlife generation*; and fills the social role being vacated by the *departing elder generation*” (p. 62). For Millennials, they solve the problems of the prior youth generation, the Generation Xers, of independence and organizational distrust by attempting to organize, form teams, and set high expectations in volunteerism. They correct the perceived behavioral excesses of the current midlife generation, the Baby Boomers, of argumentation over action, narcissism, and impatience by focusing on action over talk, valuing community, and displaying patience and trust. Finally, Millennials fill the social role being vacated by the departing elder generation, the WWII or G.I. generation, of the community leaders, team players, and builders of institutions (Howe & Strauss).

It appears that Millennials have carried forward the consumer mentality at college first displayed in the Generation X students. Today’s students expect exceptional customer service on their campuses, and often those expectations differ from the institution’s (Oblinger, 2003). If these expectations are not met Millennials have no trouble acting upon their convictions. During the 2000-2001 academic year at
the University of Texas – Austin, students were dissatisfied with the use of their social security numbers within the educational system, with the possibilities of identity theft. With the university at first reluctant to institute a costly technological system change, students acted by producing a four-part series on identity theft in the student newspaper and introduced a measure into their student government. The president of the student government association also made it part of her election campaign and met with administrators over the issue (Foster, 2002).

In 2000 University of Colorado – Boulder students started a trend in energy conservation on campus by voting to purchase wind power, agreeing to pay higher activity fees to satisfy their collective consciousness. A year later three institutions in Pennsylvania followed suit to use alternative energy to power their campuses. Between the years of 2001 and 2004 at least 50 colleges purchased wind and other forms of alternative energies for the first time, with many more are showing interest in them (Meline, 2004). Many of those institutions were encouraged to pursue alternative energy by student activists, with several using increased student fees to do so.

One of the more explosive issues protested in the previous two generations involved race relations. While these generations often had first-hand experience in the struggle for racial equality, Millennial students are politicized by what they are taught from educational influences (Hamilton, 2003). To Millennials, race has become less divisive given the many different variations of culture and skin color in today’s society. To them, race has ceased to become very relevant, giving the fluidity and complexity of today’s racial makeup. They see less purpose in old racial struggles as a result (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Instead of working on the racial agenda of the previous generations, their agenda is to strive for inclusion instead of focusing on
separateness imposed upon them by previous generations. By the time their generation came along the conversation of race represented the past rather than describing what they see as the present reality. While racial rights are important to them, other issues like literacy, homelessness, and sexual identity issues compete for their attention (Howe & Strauss).

How will these Millennial characteristics continue to manifest themselves as activism on our campuses? Indications point to their support for institutions and structures rather than a resistance to them (Howe & Strauss, 2000). When they disagree with an ideology or practice, they are more likely to work within the system to create change than to disrupt the workings of the institution. According to Ropers-Huilman, Carwile, and Barnett (2003) activist students of this generation articulate a desire for institutional leaders to explain the roles and processes through which students could become involved with decision-making. They desire clear guidelines for this involvement, mostly due to their belief in the necessity of the system, however flawed it may be. They are eager to work through systemic channels to improve their lives on campus as well as how institutional decisions influenced larger society (Ropers-Huilman et al, 2003).

Howe and Strauss (2000) prefer the term “revolution” to “rebellion” in describing how Millennials push against the established order, valuing the idea of community to the individual. This participation in community starts by improving upon systems by communicating with those who govern them. Ropers-Huilman et al, (2003) find that student activists generally view institutional administrators as antagonists who are inaccessible and withhold vital information about campus issues. In response, the student activists desire regular dialogue with decision-makers, access to information about their function, and rationales for their decisions on campus...
issues so they can better understand the restraints of their job functions and to work more effectively with them. Most of the activists understand the difficulty and limitations of administrators to create significant change from within the organization. To understand these limitations better activists know they have to become better-informed students in attempting to improve upon the campus community (Ropers-Huilman et al, 2003).

Sociologist Christian Smith conducted a study of “emerging adults,” or 18 to 23-year-old Americans, that revealed a less-optimistic view of this generation’s characteristics. In addition to findings about this group’s morality, consumerism, intoxication, and sexuality, the study found a civic and political disengagement among its participants. 27 percent of study participants described themselves as apathetic regarding civic and political interests and activities. 13 percent were uninformed, 19 percent were distrustful, 10 percent were disempowered, and 27 percent marginally political. Only four percent of participants indentified themselves as political and “expressed substantive knowledge of political matters, genuine interest in participating in politics, and specific descriptions of meaningful ways that they are civically or politically engaged” (Smith, 2011, p. 208).

The data also showed in the same proportion that these emerging adults are not volunteering or giving charitably. Despite the hopeful media stories about a renewed focus on civic responsibility, Smith argues that this optimism is “based on anecdotal media evidence and on observations focused on very specific events, such as election-day turnouts” (Smith, 2011, p. 212) and that “most emerging adults, by contrast, feel apathetic, uninformed, distrustful, or disempowered when it comes to politics and public life” (p. 213). This is due, in part, to this group’s “moral confusion and disorientation” (p. 215), “mass consumer materialism” (p. 216), “individualistic
relativism” (p. 219), and “technological submersion in interpersonal relationships in private settings” (p. 223).

Student Development Perspectives

*A priori* student development and leadership theories help create meaning of student actions and reflections of that activism. Activism can be viewed through a host of developmental frameworks, including cognitive, psychosocial, and person-environment theories. Lawrence Kohlberg’s Moral Development Theory (1976) and Alexander Astin’s Involvement Theory (1984) are notable in their application to student activism and are further developed.

Moral Development

Kohlberg’s Moral Development Theory (1976) is a cognitive-developmental theory that describes sequential and hierarchical stages of moral development in adolescents, ranging from the lowest level of simple punishment avoidance to the highest level of a principled conscience. According to Kohlberg, “the principle central to the development of moral judgment…is that of justice. Justice, the primary regard for the value of equality of all human beings, and for reciprocity in human relations, is a basic and human standard” (Kohlberg, 1972, p. 14). Chambers and Phelps (1993) report in their research that student activists and protesters measure higher on Kohlberg’s Moral Development stages relative to other students. The authors also conclude that this moral and ethical reasoning drives student activist engagements, making their activities an essential part of student development and the greater higher educational enterprise.
Pascarella and Terenzini’s (2005) meta-analysis of college moral development shows evidence of a “statistically significant and positive association between principled moral reasoning and principled moral behavior” that includes “political and social activism” (p. 350). They cite studies that demonstrate largest freshman-to-senior gains in moral reasoning happening at private liberal arts colleges, with the smallest at Bible colleges, suggesting “conservative religious ideology may sometimes inhibit growth in principled moral reasoning” (p. 352). While some of the private liberal arts colleges in these studies were religiously affiliated, the authors conclude “what apparently counts in terms of their strong impact on students’ growth in principled moral reasoning is that the religious orientation of these colleges was integrated within a genuine focus on liberal arts education” (p. 352).

Many leaders at Christian colleges and universities see themselves, in part, in the morality development business. Hickerson and Laramee (1976) argue that these colleges actually unintentionally work against those goals with their morality-based regulations and policies and, in fact, delay this development. Most Christian colleges and universities require an agreement with these regulations and policies as a condition of admission and continued attendance (closely related to Kohlberg’s level three stage, Interpersonal Normative Morality), despite the student’s own individual moral development stage. This incongruence is not only problematic for those in lower moral development stages, but also to students who have reached higher stages. Such mandatory prescriptions can force a regression to lower stages where students are not utilizing their principled morality, but being forced to agree to a lower-level social and behavioral contract on institutional-defined morality. Hickerson and Laramee (1976) openly question whether or not Kohlberg’s theory is amenable with such religious ideology found at these types of colleges and universities.
Dirks (1998) wrestles with that question and acknowledges studies showing low scores of Christian student moral development relative to their secular school counterparts. Although Dirks offers Biblical parallels with moral development, ultimately leading the believer from a self-focus to one of emphasis on justice, mercy, and compassion, there are several reasons why this does not necessarily translate to moral development at Christian colleges and universities. Dirks identifies one reason being Christians often blindly accept the teachings of the church without challenge. This process could extend to the selection of a college for a student who has grown up in such a system, making the natural choice to an institution that reinforces their current belief structure. Another reason is that the educational pedagogy at many of these institutions encourages one of knowledge dissemination instead of a rigorous posing of questions or encouragement of students to challenge ideas. Dirks claims the faculty at these institutions have been studied and many have been observed to have not reached higher levels of moral development themselves, making it difficult to promote that development in their students.

The final two suggestions Dirks (1998) offers for low morality scores for Christian college and university students is with campus homogeneity. The first point is that most of the time the students at these institutions are from relatively similar family, church, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds. There are fewer opportunities for cross-cultural interactions and role-taking that stimulates moral development. The second related point states that insufficient challenges to students’ worldviews at these colleges creates an insulated and safe environment that does not encourage growth born out of challenges in a world of differing values. Despite these challenges, Dirks urges a resistance to the natural temptation to ignore this problem, but to boldly take the risks necessary to remedy this incongruence.
Student Involvement

Research has shown that there is a correlation between the degree of a student’s involvement on campus and cognitive and affective development (Astin, 1984). Astin’s theory of student involvement shows, in an updated study (Astin, 1996) of a national sample that included 82 outcome measures that the strongest source of this development is the student’s peer group. The nature of those groups and the amount of interaction within them has the potential to greatly influence a student’s involvement on campus, leading to significant development in virtually all aspects of a student’s experience. This study also identified non-involvement, such as being a part-time or commuter student, watching television, working an off-campus job, or working full-time, as having a negative effect on this development.

Astin’s (1996) work also links positive peer group interaction with the likelihood a student engages in community service work and volunteerism, which are significant aspects of active citizenship. “Some of the specific forms of student-student interactions that have positive effects on volunteer participation include participation in religious activities, involvement in campus activism, and socializing with members of different ethnic groups” (p. 130). It is also clear that faculty strongly committed to social change do well in influencing their students to become involved in community service activities.

Leadership

Chambers and Phelps (1993) equate student activists with student leaders, assuming the aims of the activist are not for nonproductive disruption and destruction. The key component linking leadership and activism is the desire and action for change. In order for such change to be sustainable it must be based in morality with a
system-wide purpose (Fullan, 2005). Burns (1978) calls for leadership to be transformative and morality-based, focusing on “end-values, such as liberty, justice, equality” (p. 426) to positively transform the leader and follower.

According to Bird, Ji, and Boyatt (2004) in their study of 116 student leaders at 12 Protestant colleges and universities, the way leadership looks may depend on the individual student’s religiosity. They find that Christian student leaders with high levels of intrinsic religiosity, “characterized by conformity and internalization of religious creeds that guide everyday life” (p. 230), are “more likely to emphasize goals, efficiency, and formal relationship as well as to develop shared religious symbols and a sense of mission and identity than those with a low level of intrinsic religiosity” (p. 247). They also find that quest religiosity, or one with a tolerance for doubt and a searching out of complex issues, is more associated with political leadership.

Leadership for Social Change

One way to view leadership is through its ability to connect values of the individual, the group, and society. One leadership perspective is the model of Leadership for Social Change that sprung out of a study of female college student leaders and (Astin & Leland, 1991) and developed in 1993 by Helen Astin and a cohort of researchers at the Higher Education Research Institute, housed at the University of California, Los Angeles. This model focuses on “clarification of values, development of self-awareness, ability to build trust, capacity to listen and serve others, collaborative work, and change for the common good” (Astin, 1996, p. 5).

This leadership model is designed to send students through a service project that teaches and enables them to practice seven core competencies, or “Seven C’s of
Change,” which are contained within three constructs: “personal or individual values (consciousness of self, congruence, commitment), group values (collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility), and a societal and community value (citizenship)” (Astin, 1996, p. 5-6). A particularly important aspect of the model is the connections between the individual, group, and society. Within each pairing are feedback loops that are illustrated by the arrows in the model diagram. Each group influences and is influenced by the other two groupings.

According to the model of Leadership for Social Change (Astin, 1996) individual values of consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment grow by effective group work that values collaboration, common purpose, and controversy with civility. In turn, those same individual characteristics are key components of such group teams. Likewise, societal and community values of citizenship also enhances individual values, and those individual values creates a responsible citizenship.

According to Astin (1996), this model differs from other leadership models in that it places an emphasis on values, social change as a vital component, the process nature of leadership (instead of position), the potential for all students to be leaders, and the introduction of service programs or projects as a leadership development tool. The examples given as possible service projects or programs often fall within traditional institutional systems, such as residence life, service-learning, work in the community, and student organizations; however, this does not have to be the case.

The idea that spurred this study was Astin’s previous work with Carole Leland, studying women leaders of social change. This study (Astin & Leland, 1991) finds that social change emphasizes collective action and commitment to social justice, among other attributes. Astin (1996) asserts the Social Change Model can be
utilized by any person or group on campus if the following characteristics are present: 1) a problem is identified and tasks are defined; 2) personal and shared values are identified; 3) research is conducted on tasks or needs; 4) labor is divided among student participants; and 5) group functions reflect a commitment to debriefing, personal reflection, and interpersonal feedback.

Institutional Support for Student Activism

Instead of being threatened by activism and dissent, campus educators should be taught to recognize and design learning outcomes for these types of student engagements for the benefit of the campus community (Biddix, Somers, & Polman, 2009). According to Quayle (2007) there are three learning outcomes of student activism in this generation: “appreciation of differences, cultivation of students’ voices, and connection to global society” (p. 3), and that colleges should encourage student activism to foster hope and student learning in this age of cynicism. In order to move past cynicism or relativism higher education has the potential to move students “from naiveté through skepticism to commitment” (Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Daloz Parks, 1996, p. 223).

Assuming that student activism is a positive outgrowth of a maturing civic attitude and a personal and corporate investment in social justice issues, it is important to understand how higher education administrators and faculty can best support it. To do so, it is important to understand the characteristics of the students with whom they work. One institutional administrator with direct contact with the students is the student affairs officer, who assumes a role as advocate and friend to the student (Gaston-Gayles, Wolf-Wendel, Nemeth Tuttle, Twombly, & Ward, 2005). This role provides students a person within the decision-making authority structure
with whom to share ideas, dissatisfaction, and struggle. While it is sometimes
difficult to balance the perceived needs of the students and the institutional mission
the trust built among the students is valuable in providing them an outlet for their
frustrations. This interaction also gives the students insight into the inner workings of
the system and how change is best enacted (Gaston-Gayles et al, 2005).

A more powerful role of a student affairs officer, as well as faculty members,
is initiator and change agent in building and supporting socially conscious programs.
One example is the federal TRIO program, which serves historically
underrepresented students. Such programs, often created by student affairs
administrators, continue to be supported by various faculty and staff throughout the
country. This support can also be seen as many staff and faculty legitimize, support,
and participate in student initiatives to create positive change on campus, enabling
students to be successful learners (Gaston-Gayles et al).

It would seem one of the best positions within the student affairs hierarchy to
support student activism would be the advisor to the campus student government.
This staff person often interacts with other campus groups and clubs and is frequently
an instrumental role model in educating students about effective change processes.
This hands-on professional is often in the prime position to regularly communicate
with these students, but is generally low enough in the staff hierarchy for only limited
pressure or direct influence from upper administrators about the nature and content of
these student interactions.

Service-Learning

Given the religious heritage of the institution and the people of the
institutional community, how does activism become manifest among these students?
According to Riley (2005), students at religious colleges have not generally become active in political activism due to, in part, the politically isolated nature of their institutions, the studious nature of the students attending these schools, and the purpose in life these students find from their faith, as opposed to political causes. Community service has become the new activism for many of these students.

Beyond simple community service is service-learning, which is a program that connects community service with an institution’s academic curriculum and instruction. Pan (2002) identifies service-learning as one way institutions can support student activism. These kinds of activities engage students and help them develop and refine their passions, build knowledge, and instill a sense of action over dialogue. This not only serves the students well, but also the campus and greater community by encouraging them to act on their convictions for the betterment of society. According to Hamrick (1998) “campus dissent can be seen as service-learning or community improvement work” (p. 457) and that “dissent is also citizenship in action” (p.458).

Warren (1998) draws a distinction between social service and social change in designing service-learning opportunities that educate for social justice. This distinction is the difference between providing people with immediate help for their needs, or addressing the social, political, and cultural structures that create unjust systems that create these needs. It is important to not narrowly define success of service-learning by a single definition of civic engagement. When civic engagement is defined by more than just political action, like more nuanced social actions, service-learning has shown to have a greater influence on civic learning outcomes in college students (Prentice, 2007). In fact, various studies have shown involvement in social activism to be a significant and positive factor to growth in civic and community attitudes among students, especially those at Catholic and Protestant
colleges (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). According to Schaffer (2004), Christian action within neighboring communities is foundational to the ideals of a Christian college or university and its students’ experience.

According to Morton (1995), much of the literature of service-learning describes activities through a service continuum, from charity, to project models, to social change. Within this understanding of service-learning, students advance through this continuum as they mature, from charity to social change. Morton argues that although this continuum framework provides analytical understandings of community service, it fails to address the actual work providers do. He instead introduces three paradigms of community service: charity, project, and transformation, each containing “a worldview, a problem statement and an agenda for change” (p. 24). Instead of progressing through a paradigm of community service, integrity in service-learning involves “working with increasing depth in a particular paradigm” (p. 19).

“Each paradigm has ‘thin’ versions that are disempowering and hollow, and ‘thick’ versions that are sustaining and potentially revolutionary” (Morton, 1995, p. 24). Thin versions are paternalistic, imposes services on unreceptive “others,” “magnify or institutionalize inequalities of power, produce outcomes that are worse than the original problem, or lead to unrealistic and unsustainable dependencies” (p. 28).

Thick versions of each paradigm are grounded in deeply held, internally coherent values; match means and ends; describe a primary way of interpreting and relating to the world; offer a way of defining problems and solutions; and suggest a vision of what a transformed world might look like. (p. 28)

Thickest versions of the three paradigms allow them to complement one another or even intersect (Morton, 1995).
Summary

This study is understood through the framework of symbolic interactionism, which is a sociological concept that describes that people’s personal identities and actions are based on the meanings made about their environment through a process of interaction and interpretation (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Culture is created through this interaction of a group’s membership (Sanderlands & Stablein, 1987) and through the artifacts they create (Yanow, 2000). Christian culture in the U.S. is varied, but generally encounters the dualistic problem of understanding how to live in the world, but living lives that are distinct from non-Christians (Woods, 2013). As a result, activism within Christian culture is heavily influenced by issues and methods that are consistent with a traditional Christian worldview, although these are changing with the rediscovery of a social justice tradition among present-day Christians (Rice, 2008). This generation’s Millennial students easily make biblical connections to social justice and activism, embracing social justice as a Christian ideal and rejecting previous generations’ activism issues and methods (Sullivan, 2010).

These students are coming to Christian colleges and universities that seek to consistently and coherently integrate faith and learning, making them distinct from secular institutions in perspectives of knowledge, values, and student behaviors (Harris, 2003; Lau, 2005). While higher moral development is associated with student activism (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and is one goal of Christian institutions, studies have shown that these environments may actually work against moral development (Dirks, 1998; Hickerson & Laramee, 1976). The exception to these findings are at Christian institutions that have successfully integrated their religious orientation with a genuine focus on liberal arts education (Pascarella & Terenzini). Cognitive and affective developmental benefits have been associated with
participation in student activism, as understood through Astin’s Involvement Theory (Astin, 1984, 1996).

Student activism can be seen as leadership development through the linkage of desire and action for change (Chambers & Phelps, 1993). One leadership model congruent with these ideals is the Leadership for Social Change model, which focuses on social change values of the individual, group, and society, as well as service to others (Astin, 1996). Student activism can also be understood and enacted through formal service-learning programs (Pan, 2002; Riley, 2005), which have been shown to increase civic learning outcomes in college students (Prentice, 2007). What has not been demonstrated in the literature is the impact of Christian campus culture on this generation’s college student conceptions of, participation in, and meaning derived from activism, which is the intent of this study.
CHAPTER III

The previous chapters provided an overview of Christian college and university cultures through a conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism and student activism through the lens of organizational culture, history of college student activism, generational characteristics, leadership, and student development theory. This chapter describes the methodology of this multi-case study. The two case studies of student activism at Christian colleges were analyzed using these conceptual frameworks, theories, and models, with thick descriptions and analysis of each bounded case (Creswell, 2007).

Emergent themes were drawn out of the data, aided by the conception of categories drawn from the research questions to create a deeper understanding of campus culture and student activism within the case. The results provide interpretations from the description and analysis, attempting to find meaning within the case. The results also provide advisors, administrators, and faculty a deeper understanding from which to operate when interacting with student activists on their campus. This understanding could prove useful in the creation and modification of institutional policies and procedures.

Principles of case study research were used in the design in this study, as case study methodology is often used in higher education research since work at colleges and universities is easily segmented into and described as cases (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). The study is a tightly bounded design on a multi-case study. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend tighter designs, especially for beginning researchers, providing clarity and focus. This tight design allowed for assertions to be more easily made, rather than utilizing a loose design that could have been chaotic and difficult to synthesize. A prescribed interview protocol was used as a basic
framework for interactions with participants, who were identified from a fairly narrow criterion. Although this was not needed, this design would have allowed for the addition of more participants if needed.

A multi-case study research design was used in this study, as multi-cases studies are recognized as generally superior to single-case studies, outside of some specific conditions (Yin, 2003). Although studying multiple cases creates the need for additional resources, it protects against the vulnerabilities of a single-case study, such as access challenges or how effectively the researcher may be able to draw conclusions on the unique or unexpected evidence found in the single case. Multiple-case studies allow for a literal or theoretical replication in comparing and predicting contrasts, making the study more closely resemble an experimental model. The ability to generalize findings is more powerful as the conclusions will arise independently amidst each case’s variances and unique contexts and are available to be measured against each other (Yin).

Two Case Study Contexts

This multi-case study was conducted at Calvin College and Wheaton College during the 2011-2012 academic year. Although both members of the CCCU, each institution possesses a unique mission and vision, ethos, and people that contributes to how they interpret and live out their educational purposes. Below is a short description of each case context.

Calvin College

Calvin College is located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and is an institution of the Christian Reformed Church. This college is highly recognized in terms of
Christian commitment and academic rigor within the membership of the national organization, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU).

Vision

Their vision statement declares “Calvin College is a comprehensive liberal arts college in the Reformed tradition of historic Christianity. Through our learning, we seek to be agents of renewal in the academy, church and society. We pledge fidelity to Jesus Christ, offering our hearts and lives to do God’s work in God’s world” (Calvin College, 2012, Vision section, para. 1). At Calvin there is an emphasis on the outward push to apply a Christian worldview to fields of study for the renewing of society for Christ through these academic disciplines (Benne, 2001).

Ethos

It is expected that faculty integrate faith and learning through their classes and disciplines. In turn, students are mentored to apply this same ethos in their studies and to “integrate their Christian convictions with their worldly fields of knowledge and activity so that they might live as whole Christians in the world, not as persons bifurcated between Christian and secular claims” (Benne, 2001, p. 100).

People

Administrators and faculty members must be members of the Christian Reformed Church or partner churches, as well as profess an allegiance to the Reformed tradition in their work. Each administrator and faculty member is expected to be theologically articulate in respect to his or her professional specialty and academic discipline (Benne, 2001).
Wheaton College

Wheaton College is located in Wheaton, Illinois, which is a Chicago suburb, and is an Evangelical Protestant institution founded by the Wesleyan Methodists, although it is now denominationally unaffiliated. It is also recognized by members of the CCCU as being committed to academic rigor and Christian commitment.

Vision

Their mission statement states “Wheaton College serves Jesus Christ and advances His Kingdom through excellence in liberal arts and graduate programs that educate the whole person to build the church and benefit society worldwide” (Wheaton College, 2013, Our mission section, para. 1). “Wheaton’s vision has enabled it to successfully meld faith and learning, faith and action, through a unique blend of lively evangelical piety and rigorous Christian intellectuality that is actively modeled by its faculty and absorbed by many of its students” (Benne, 2001, p. 110).

Ethos

“With its evangelical tradition of activism, Wheaton is not content with imparting knowledge and integrating faith and learning on the theoretical level; it also intends to form its students so deeply so that they will affect the world” (Benne, 2001, p. 107). The general education requirements reinforce this by the “twin purposes of nurturing Christian belief and piety and of integrating faith and reason” (p. 109).

People

Wheaton ensures the evangelical orientation of all associated with the college, including the Board of Trustees, administration, staff, and faculty, although not from
a specific religious denomination. Instead of membership in a denomination, administrators and faculty must sign the institution’s creedal and behavioral statements, the Statement of Faith and the Statement of Responsibilities (Benne, 2001).

Student activism was studied at each of these two institutional case contexts, with data collected from each using conventional case study research methodologies.

Data Collection Methods, Procedures, and Instrumentation

According to Creswell (2007), case study research draws upon multiple streams of data. For this study data were collected through five streams of data. Student individual interviews were the primary source. Focus group interviews were then held afterward from a selection of those students. Individual interviews were also conducted with staff and faculty. Additional data were collected through general observations of student interactions, campus postings and advertisements, and other campus activity. Finally, a review was performed of archival records, including student newspapers, institutional and publications and web sites, and online content from media outlets and other outside sources.

This study consists primarily of individual interviews, with the addition of one focus group in each campus context. In-depth interview techniques were used to ensure what emerges is the *emic* perspective, or the viewpoint of the participant, and not the *etic* perspective, or how the researcher views it (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I had planned to conduct participant observation during student activist gatherings and events, but there were none scheduled at either institution during campus visits. Instead, general campus observation enabled the data collection of other campus artifacts relating to student activism. The collected data primarily consisted of events
and participant perspectives that occurred within the past five years, or within the typical current student’s college career. The individual interviews were conducted face-to-face in a comfortable and natural locations, either in the campus student center, meeting rooms, or faculty/staff office, and were limited to approximately one hour in length to maintain participant focus.

The Calvin College Service-Learning Center acted as host to the researcher, providing the initial list of participant names and helping arrange for the use of campus space for the study. The interviews at Calvin occurred in several public places, including in the campus student center, campus coffee shop, and various locations in the main administrative building. The focus group was held in a reserved meeting room in the basement of the student center. Efforts were made to make the study participants feel comfortable and provided appropriate privacy protections. Staff and faculty interviews were most often conducted in their respective offices.

The interviews at Wheaton College occurred in a reserved room in their student center, reserved by the Campus Activities Office, which served as a host to the researcher and provider of the initial participant contacts. Most of the student interviews were held in this location, with the exception of two interviews that required a meeting on a different part of campus to accommodate a student’s schedule, and for the focus group that necessitated a much larger conference room. The students always had the option to utilize the reserved room or to suggest a more favorable meeting place. The faculty and staff interviews were conducted in their offices.

Each interview started with a semi-structured interview protocol with students, staff and faculty, and the dean of students or chief student affairs officer (Appendix A, B, & C) of open-ended questions (Creswell, 2007) to encourage
participants to open up and discuss the phenomenon of student activism on their campus and its impact on the student college experience. Emailed transcripts of each interview were sent to participants to check for accuracy and additional comments on the topic. The interviews were always bounded with the concluding question, “Who should I talk to in order to learn more about this topic?” (Creswell, 2007, p. 133). This was critical in the identification of other potential study participants.

Broad themes that emerged from the interviews were compiled into a focus group question guide, used at the end of the week to interview some of the same students collectively. Faculty and staff opinions of student activism within the campus culture were also included in the focus group guide. The information received through the focus group interviews contributed to the building and refining of themes and categories.

This data were then triangulated through campus observation and through student newspaper archives and institutional and external web pages. Topical searches of student newspaper articles were generally available online and were conducted after the campus visits. Additional topical searches of each institution’s website provided data to provide additional program and event detail and institutional perspective on varying issues. Finally, external web searches provided additional activism event details and insight outside of official institutional web pages.

The researcher was the primary instrument in collecting the data, utilizing various tools to do so, such as a digital voice recorder to record interviews and appropriate computer software to manage the data files. A professional transcription service was hired to translate the voice files to text for in-depth analysis. The researcher solely collected all of the interview, observation, and newspaper and web content data.
Sampling, Subjects, Access, and Setting

For a qualitative study, researchers should use purposeful sampling in order to interview participants who can “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). The initial sampling strategy used in this study was elite sampling, or choosing participants who were especially knowledgeable or involved in the issue being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), which in this case was student activism on their campus. From there, snowball or chain sampling was employed to identify additional participants to be examined, leading to homogenous sampling, which helped to focus the data, reduced variation of responses, and helped to simplify data analysis (Patton, 1990).

This elite sample of student activists and relevant staff and faculty was identified with the help of various student development staff and subsequent participants at each institution. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest, access was gained to these participants by authentically approaching institutional contacts with complete openness on the interest and intent of the study’s topic. These contacts ended up being very helpful in identifying a small specific group of students who were involved in student activism, as well as of knowledgeable staff and faculty. A snowball or chain sampling technique (Patton, 1990) was then used to further the student, staff, and faculty pool, resulting an elite sample of participants knowledgeable of student activism.

A defined informed consent process (Appendix F) was used with each participant to fully inform them of the nature of the study and the interview process. Each person was contacted via email (Appendix D & E) and invited to participate in the study. Each was assured that participation was completely voluntary and their choice of participation would not be known to anyone else and would not affect their
standing at the institution. For those who indicated interest in learning more, a follow-up email was sent with an attempt to schedule a date, time, and location to meet to review the consent document.

Interviews were conducted only after participants reviewed and signed the consent form (Appendix G & H). Sufficient opportunity and time was built in to answer any questions regarding their participation and consent. Only those choosing to participate were required to sign the consent form and were able to opt out at any time.

For this study, the participant sample was limited to current students, faculty, and staff at each institution. The initial design was to interview 10 to 12 students at each institution over the course of one week. While selecting a specific number of participants falls in a positivist perspective that is more appropriate to quantitative methodology, it was important to provide enough data to achieve thematic saturation (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). This allowed for the replication of themes to occur and to justify the cessation of sampling. This sample size allowed for multiple perspectives in the limited time frame allotted for this study, but the protocol was flexible enough to sample toward saturation, whether or not that occurred within the initial sample size plan. Thematic saturation occurred at each institution within the planned participant group size: 11 student activists at Calvin College and 12 student activists at Wheaton College.

The design called for a focus group interview of 7 to 10 people (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) at the conclusion of the individual student interviews. This group collectively processed questions asked from a focus group guide that was derived from data drawn from the individual interviews. This guide was comprised of themes, theories, and additional questions that arose from the individual student, staff, and
faculty interviews. A consistent recruitment and enrollment procedure was followed for student individual and focus group interviews (Appendix J). The focus groups consisted of seven Calvin College students and eight Wheaton students.

All of the participating students were at least 18 years old and were able to provide consent to be interviewed. Junior and Senior status students were only invited to participate for their anticipated ability to be more reflective in their responses, as well to be able to speak to the campus culture in a more informed way. In all cases, interview settings were selected to be comfortable and naturalistic to the participants, also providing a suitable and quiet space for voice recording. No risks or costs for participants were anticipated or identified through their involvement in this study, especially after explaining their identities would not be given in the reporting of the data.

Faculty and staff participants were recommended for participation by having knowledge or experience directly working with student activists, whether each was a student development officer or faculty member who advises students. A limited number of these participants were identified by the institutional contact and was further populated through snowball sampling from other participants. The design called for five to seven staff/faculty interviews, including the dean of students or chief student affairs officer, at each institution to gain their perspectives of their campus culture and student activism. Seven Calvin College and eight Wheaton College staff/faculty members were interviewed after being identified by others as involved and knowledgeable about student activism. There were also no anticipated or identified risks or costs for staff/faculty participants, as their identities were concealed.
Although this was not needed, precautions were taken to respond to any participant becoming upset with the nature of the interview. Plans were made to immediately conclude the interview, if needed. Also, printed campus counseling resources were on hand to alleviate those feelings if they had emerged, including making a referral if that person needed counseling or assistance about the topic (Appendix K).

Although questions were generally focused on campus cultures, some questions revolved around participants’ personal involvement with activism on and off campus. As such, there was sensitivity to participant responses in not pursuing topics or details of which the participant was clearly uncomfortable speaking. Interviews were also held in locations comfortable and private for the participant, with a flexibility to switch locations during the interview if the participant desired. Assurances were also offered that their identities were confidential and protected.

The privacy of the subjects and confidentiality of the collected data was ensured by assigning each participant a pseudonym to be used throughout study in lieu of their name. Personal names were not used in the interview transcriptions nor linked to any reported data. Additionally, the only data provided to institutional administrators will be the confidential published manuscript.

All data collected at the conclusion of the study will be kept in electronic form and burned to a compact disc and stored for three years in a locked file in the office of the primary investigator. After the three years the compact disc will be destroyed. Likewise, at the conclusion of electronic transcription and data entry of all notes all physical data will be destroyed, including voice files of interviews.
Data Analysis

As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2006), the initial research questions and reviewed literature were used as a guide to analyze the collected data. The authors identify seven phases of typical analytic procedures that were used:

(a) Organizing the data; (b) immersion in the data; (c) generating categories and themes; (d) coding the data; (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos; (f) searching for alternative understandings; and (g) writing the report or other format for presenting the study. (p. 156)

The approach to the within-case analysis of the data involved a coding scheme of categories in each case study. Each research question had a unique method of data streams and analysis. As suggested by Creswell (2007), a detailed description of the case and its setting is presented using categorical aggregation. After analyzing patterns and making generalizations, the two cases are compared and contrasted using these emergent themes. Yin (2003) describes these techniques as pattern making and cross-case synthesis. With each case overarching emergent themes are described with the assistance of categories conceived with each research question.

The first research question is: How do current students, studying at a Christian college or university, understand the concept of activism? This data were primarily collected through student interviews and the focus group. From the emergent themes that arose out of the individual interviews, a deeper probing on those ideas occurred in the focus group. This data were triangulated with faculty/staff interviews, student newspaper archives, and through institutional and external web pages. The categories used to reflect on this data were of the participant activist concept of activism, their peer concept of activism, their reflection of activism methods, and the issues they connected to the concept of activism.
The second research question is: What are the institutional facilitating factors or barriers in relation to student activism and how do they shape student activities? This data were primarily collected by in-depth student individual and focus group interviews. Faculty and staff interviews also helped contextualize and add a different perspective to this data. This data were further triangulated with student newspaper archives and through institutional and external web pages. These streams of data helped to achieve a clearer picture of current activities on their respective campuses. The categories used to reflect on this data were of facilitating factors for their campus activism, barriers to activism in their community, and methods of activism on their campus.

The third research question is: How do students make meaning of their activism within the Christian campus culture as they think about their future activism? Data were primarily received from individual in-depth interviews, since this information is personal in nature and required careful reflection of the individual student activist. This data were triangulated with faculty/staff interviews, student newspaper archives, and through institutional and external web pages. No pre-established categories were used on this question, instead entirely relying on emergent data.
CHAPTER IV

Overview

This study focused on the impact of campus culture on student activism at two different Christian colleges: Calvin College and Wheaton College. Through multi-case study research I responded to three research questions:

1. How do current students, studying at a Christian college or university, understand the concept of activism?
2. What are the institutional facilitating factors or barriers in relation to student activism and how do they shape student activities?
3. How do students make meaning of their activism within the Christian campus culture as they think about their future activism?

Through a process of categorical aggregation, themes emerged to aid in the understanding of student activism in these environments. These findings are reported first through in-depth description of the most comprehensively described example of activism by participants and other data sources (primary incident of activism) and additional activism vignettes to demonstrate various forms of issues and methods of student activism. Second, data are shown through a summary of major emergent themes. Third, a cross-case analysis is presented the themes identified through the within-case analysis. Finally, research question findings are offered through this single and cross-case analysis of the emergent themes. Chapter five connects the findings to relevant literature and theories presented in chapter two through a discussion of study implications, limitations, and recommendations for further research.
In this chapter findings from interviews at Calvin College and Wheaton College around the impact of institutional culture on student activism are presented. Upper-class student activists, staff, and faculty were interviewed over a five-day period on each respective campus during the 2011-2012 academic year to learn more about student activism in their environments. The interviews sought to understand how current students on these two campuses understand the concept of activism; what the barriers or facilitating factors are to student activism and how they influence activities; and how the student activists make meaning of their activism. Data are triangulated through campus student newspaper archives and other online sources. Major themes emerged through a rigorous coding scheme and a process of categorical aggregation.

At Calvin College data were drawn from individual interviews with 11 students and seven faculty/staff members, as well as a focus group of seven of same students from the individual interviews. In addition to the interviews, data were gathered from the archives of *Chimes*, the Calvin College student newspaper, as well as other online sources. At Wheaton College individual interviews were conducted with 12 students and eight faculty staff members. Eight of these students later participated in the focus group.

**Case 1: Student Activism at Calvin College**

I visited the Calvin College campus between November 28 and December 2, 2011. A campus contact in the Service-Learning Center allowed me to use office space there as a place to conduct the student interviews. Because of the time in the semester, after the Thanksgiving Break and before the Christmas break, I had the
challenge of getting student participants willing to take the time for an interview in the midst of their preparations for fall semester final exams.

I initially contacted three students suggested to me by my campus contact in the Service-Learning Center. Through those participants and subsequent participants I received names of additional people whom they thought would be able to contribute to the study, including students, staff, and faculty (snowball or chain sampling). Each of the 11 student and seven faculty staff participants was chosen because they were actively involved in or knowledgeable about student activism at Calvin College. A chart (Appendix O) shows all of the study participants’ pseudonyms, sex, class standing, and campus involvement.

I interviewed 11 Calvin College students, of which five were Seniors and six were Juniors. Eight of the students were female and three were male. Eight of the students were White, one was Hispanic, and one was of Asian descent. All of them were currently, or had been, involved on campus in a capacity considered activist either through self-identification or by the person who suggested their inclusion in the study. While most of the students had been involved in many different groups and activities during their time at Calvin, I identified one or two of their primary areas of interest or focus in their activism. Five of the student activists were involved in service-learning; four in social justice activism; two in residence life; and one each in human rights activism, immigration activism, environmental activism, and organizing a conference. At the end of my week on campus, after each participant had been interviewed individually, seven of the students participated in a focus group interview.

Out of the seven faculty/staff participants in the study, five were staff members and two identified as both faculty and staff. Five of the participants were
male and two were female. All of the faculty/staff participants were White.

The data from the student interviews were triangulated with the faculty/staff interview data, archived issues of the *Chimes* student newspaper, institutional and department web pages of Calvin College, and other online organization and media sources. The data are first animated through a primary incident of activism. This is followed by three activism vignettes given to provide an illustration of the range of student activism described by the study’s triangulated data.

Stories of Activism

Primary Incident of Activism: Wood Lot

In 2007 trees were being cut down from a wood lot on the Calvin College campus to make room for a new wellness center, a sizable addition to the existing field house. The addition would enable the college to have a sports complex with a full-size swimming pool, a 5,000 square foot arena, a track and tennis center, a health and recreation center, and new facilities for the Health Services department. While it is not unusual to lose trees in a building project, these trees were different. These very old trees were in a wood lot that contained high-value native flora, which also happened to be used for study in the science department.

Two years earlier, original plans for the building project were released, showing a loss of half the wood lot. Once the building plans were released, students and faculty who had studied in this wood lot mobilized to save the forest. One concern was for the value of the wood lot strictly in terms of the loss of some aged trees that served as a natural classroom for the sciences, as well as a place of refuge on campus. Others were outraged because they did not interpret this sacrifice to be faithful environmental stewardship. They claimed that a core value of Calvin College
is to become “agents of renewal” in our world; which they interpreted as inconsistent with destroying the environment, God’s creation. One student was quoted in *Chimes*, the student newspaper.

How hypocritical is it of Calvin College to honor its creation theology, and then turn around and decide to mow down a forest behind the current P.E. building, which is deemed by the Michigan DNR as worthy of state protection, for the sake of a climbing wall, split level track and indoor tennis courts? (*Chimes*, Wood Lot, 2005, para. 4)

Not everyone agreed with this stance and saw the opposition as an impediment to progress. One student was quoted in the student newspaper,

Where will the college be able to build on if every place is declared a protected sanctuary because it has some rare plant? If the environmentalists do not want this area to be built on so badly, then they should be willing to make concessions in return, and accept that the college needs to grow and in order to grow it needs land. (*Chimes*, Wood Lot, 2005, para. 3)

In 2005 a joint statement from the leadership of the Environmental Stewardship Committee and its wellness center subcommittee highlighted the importance of campus community input in the project.

The rest of the world will judge Calvin by the administration’s decisions. Let’s join in this process and help the administration make decisions that reflect the will of the students and faculty. Let’s follow Calvin’s calling in deed as well as in the words on Calvin’s Web site, and bring shalom to our relationships with God, humans and nature. (*Chimes*, Wood Lot, 2005, para. 2)

Influenced and supported by key faculty members who were very vocal about the issue, including some in the Biology department, students collected over 2,000 student, faculty, and staff signatures to prevent the deforestation. Letters were written and comments were made to *Chimes*, the student newspaper. "This is our campus and we have a voice in what happens here. Let’s make a positive impact on our campus
and allow this integral beautiful woodlot to stay healthy as we do as well" (Chimes, Wood Lot, 2005, para. 8), stated two students in the newspaper.

They also requested a meeting with the administration, which was granted. The internal pressure from students, staff, and faculty led to a negotiation that changed the plans to the building and retained a portion of the wood lot. It was decided the field house would sit slightly rotated on the site in order to save more of the wood lot.

They also influenced the administration to undertake a reforestation program that moved many of the old trees and added new ones to other parts of campus. While it was not a complete victory, the negotiations led to a reduction of the loss of the wood lot and the budgeting of institutional funds to reforest part of the lost trees and wildflowers. Biology professor Dave Warners stated in the student newspaper,

There has been a healthy dialogue over the last few years, but it felt at the beginning like we were a minority voice and it felt like pulling teeth trying to get anything done. At the same time, that minority voice was not ignored; we were heard. Now it isn’t anybody versus anybody anymore. The cases have been made, and those who make the decisions have come up with this plan. (Duemler, 2007, para. 13)

According to Elizabeth, faculty participant in the student activism study, much of the dialogue was driven by students who were concerned about the connection of what they had learned through classes they took, the research that they had done, and the relationships they had with faculty who believed in its importance. She said they were “convicted by Christian Biblical action, despite the resistance from the administration when this was brought up.”

Staff member, Phillip, added,

There were a group of students who were deeply troubled that this was going to have a negative impact on this wood lot and so they resisted, they voiced their concerns, they wrote in the student newspaper, they
met with administrators. They were trying to exercise what they had learned here about caring for the creation and being good stewards, resisting the “let's just mow everything down and let's call that progress, let's call that culture or development.” We had some students who really took that, put that squarely on their shoulders and said this is our issue and we're not happy about the way these conversations are going. I think that they were listened to. I think that even though the decision eventually was made to go ahead with it there were adjustments, and again this was not just students -- there were faculty and other staff who were also applying pressure. Their pressure did make a difference; it didn't halt the construction or change the plans. They adjusted it so as to take less of it and then they did a litigation process where the things that were going to destroy they worked really hard to move them.

In March and April of 2007, students and faculty mobilized to rescue 1,200 pots of wildflowers that would be lost to the building project, at the same time work crews were transplanting some of the trees from the area. The student and faculty effort concluded in a chapel service held in the wood lot, led by Warners and fellow Biology professor, Randy Van Dragt. According to staff member, Ryan, “those students and faculty designed a chapel service of mourning for the loss of the wood lot when they were just going to start doing the construction, so that was a neat part of that legacy.”

In January 2009, the $49.5-million Spoelhof Fieldhouse Complex, of which the wellness center was a part, opened with a men’s and women’s double-header basketball game with Tri-State University. While hoping to have the building LEED-certified, that was unfeasible because of the complex’s energy usage due to its scope and size, according to Henry DeVries, co-chair of the building planning committee and vice president of administration, finance and information systems. He stated that they did they best they could.

We were very intentional with the architects to be stewardly and try to balance all of the competing demands. The campus will benefit largely. It’s easy to say it’s just for athletics, but no, it’s for the dance
program, it’s for kinesiology, it’s for human performance and it’s for recreation and wellness. You have to weigh all those benefits. (Van Baren, 2008, para. 10)

The lack of LEED-certification disappointed some, including Warners.

I wanted the whole project to reflect our stated commitment and our doctrinal convictions that we need to be caretakers of creation. There are a lot of things that could have been done with the wellness center. The way it’s constructed, I don’t think it’s a clear expression of our commitment to creation care. (Van Baren, 2008, para. 3)

Staff member, George, a study participant, stated that many students were also unsatisfied with the lack of certification.

The party line is that it was almost and it did a lot of things, but it wasn’t LEED-certified, so I think a lot of students saw inconsistency in what they were being taught and told to think about and then ultimately what was decided by the administration.

Student activism study participant, Heather, reflected on the issue,

Calvin has a policy on sustainability and yet none of the most recent constructions have been LEED-certified and we still water our grass on days that it rained. When you stop and listen to explanations like the field house isn’t LEED-certified because the requirements for LEED-certification were changed halfway through constructions and the watering of the lawn actually helps pump some of water out from underneath so it doesn’t get waterlogged, some of it makes sense. Yet at the same time when we had our sustainability week they printed a thousand pamphlets on glossy, non-recycled paper. Like there’s irony here, and students are very good at finding it and pointing it out and saying, “if we want to be faithful you ought to be honest with what you’re saying.”

In the end concessions were made on both sides of the issue to bring about a resolution. The compromise agreed upon ended up costing the college additional funds to draw up new building plans and reforest part of the wood lot. The campus environmental activists were able to make some changes to the original building plans and save part of the wood lot, although some believed not enough was done.
Student activism played a part in enacting change around this environmental issue. Students were able to be participants in a negotiation that might not have happened without their involvement. This involvement was led and inspired by faculty members, who expressed their concerns through their academic disciplines and invited students to partner with them to communicate their concerns to the administration. Students were also able to integrate the institution’s stated commitments with their personal beliefs systems and recognize inconsistency. Also, a campus culture of freedom to question campus policy in college-sponsored publications, like the student newspaper, empowered students to act on their convictions. Finally, an administration willing to meet with students and other concerned groups contributed to a dialogue where a compromise was possible.

Activism Vignette: Immigration Rally

On March 4, 2009, members of the Michigan Organizing Project, initiated by Calvin students, held an immigration rally on the grounds of Calvin College. The rally was inspired by a passionate group of students educating and advocating for immigration reform within the Residence Life program after learning about an Arizona immigration bill that was being considered by the state of Michigan. According to Alex,

At the end of our sophomore year [a friend] and one of her friends led a discussion group on my floor about immigration. And what stemmed out of that was we had a small immigration rally on campus. We had a conversation on Thursday and this thing happened the next Thursday. It just happened, and it was crazy and it happened in the heart of the residential area of campus.

Several Hispanic residents of Grand Rapids and other community members came to campus for the rally, as did local media. About 70 students participated in the
rally and heard from two Calvin professors who discussed immigration from biblical and historical contexts. They also listened to Sergio, who told of his long separation from his mother who came to the United States from Mexico to find employment, as well as his struggles to marry an American woman because of his immigrant status. Another man, Carmen, spoke of the arrest and forced deportation of a friend. After an appeal to the students to get involved in immigration reform, the rally concluded with the performance of a hip-hop artist whose lyrics described the plight of this country’s immigrants (Michigan Organizing Project, 2009). Heather, who participated in the rally, described the rally from her perspective, “We just had like we prayed and sang and had some speakers and yelled ‘Sí se puede! [Yes we can]’ a lot and it was good.”

A year later another rally took place on campus, growing to 150 people, to support the rights of immigrants. This gathering featured speakers, singing songs, a liturgy, and a prayer to “welcome the alien in a foreign land” (GRID, 2010, para. 2). Stories were told about the history of immigration policy in the United States, personal challenges in getting proper immigration paperwork, and difficulties in enrolling in college without proper immigration papers. Finally, they urged rally participants to sign letters to elected officials to promote immigrant rights.

Activism Vignette: Memogate

In August 2009 college employees were surprised to receive a memo informing them that the Calvin College Board of Trustees determined that it was unacceptable for faculty and staff to write, teach, or advocate on behalf of homosexual issues and same-sex marriage. Some were outraged by this position, as well of the fact that the decision was handed down without input from the college community (Estep, 2009). According to a Chimes editorial, which called for student
action to advocate for a reversal of the mandate, the position from which the memo
was written was a departure from positive steps in recent years to be welcoming to
homosexual students. This included, all in 2007, the welcoming of a group of
homosexual students traveling to college campuses to resist religious oppression,
called the Soulforce Equality Ride, and the resulting establishment of a Calvin
College student organization, Sexuality Awareness, Gender Acceptance (SAGA). The
Board’s action was prompted by a play that was performed that fall called “Seven
Passages: The Stories of Gay Christians,” which included stories, many from Calvin,
that reflected on what it means to be gay and Christian (Meredith, Action, 2009, para.
8). The resulting controversy came to be simply known as “Memogate”.

Heather, who was a freshman at the time, recounted the issue from her
perspective.

There was a memo written by the Board of Trustees about
homosexuality and its role in the Christian life and at Calvin College
and it’s policy, which really didn’t change Calvin’s policy, but brought
it to light and addressed some of the issues, like the nuances there, in a
pretty unfeeling, generalizing sort of way. And it totally rocked the
boat. People were really upset and so there were endless letters to
Chimes, to the editor. One day students lined the walkway to the
chapel with signs, kind of in protest.

Faculty members and students challenged the Board’s mandate through
discussions and debates, including on social media sites. After someone shared the
Board’s statement online a “Facebook group calling itself ‘Calvin Students, Alum,
Faculty and Staff Questioning ‘The Memo’…”attracted more than 500 members and
more than 100 postings. Similarly, an article about the statement published in
the Grand Rapids Press generated more than 175 responses” (Bell, 2011, para. 20).

Chimes published another editorial that challenged the college’s president for his lack
of leadership on the issue.
The ugly, awful and honest perception comes down to this: President Byker has done nothing to show the LGBT or allied community that he is devoted to fighting the continuing homophobic climate on campus. It’s easy enough to put in print that you are “committed to keeping Calvin a place that is hospitable to gay and lesbian persons” and keep on doing nothing to actually achieve this goal when the staff and faculty have effectively been gagged on the matter. (Meredith, Board’s, 2009, para. 12)

Samuel chose to participate in this issue with an active protest, which he described.

I wasn’t one of the leaders, but I put together a triangle, like a pink triangle out of fabric. And I put it out on the lawn. And it’s just, students sitting on it all day and passing out flyers. “Like hey, this is what the [homosexuality] memo says.” Just trying to inform people. So, I did that for a few hours, kind of, between classes.

Activism Vignette: Service-Learning Center

Calvin College’s Service-Learning Center (S-LC) has served as a hub for student activism since 1964, starting as an initiative of two senior students who began a tutoring program in their Grand Rapids community. With the help of a Calvin professor, in the fall of 1965 the program became an official organization that served in additional ways, including helping with blood drives, emergency moving services, and activities of Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Whitcomb, 2006). This service organization became known as Kindling Intellectual Desire in Students (KIDS), and was birthed “during the turbulent years of Civil Rights, Vietnam War, and feminist movements, but also when the College migrated from a small, landlocked urban campus to a sprawling suburban estate campus” (Service-Learning Center, Strategic Plan, 2009, p. 1). In 1980 the group expanded and was renamed Student Volunteer Services, becoming a formal college administrative department. In 1993, the named
changed to the Service-Learning Center to reflect its further expansion into academic-based service.

Today, the Calvin department exists to,

Engage and equip Calvin College students, faculty, staff, community partners, alumni and other friends of the college in and for the pursuit of God’s shalom in learning together, primarily through community-based service-learning, social justice activity, and civic participation in Grand Rapids and other partner communities. (Service-Learning Center, About Us, 2013, para. 1)

It is often the first introduction of service and activism for students and the hub connecting activism through several other departments. This includes Residence Life, which collaborates with the Service-Learning Center to create community partnerships for their residents. Most of the college’s students participate in one or more of the S-LC’s service programs, starting with StreetFest during new student orientation. StreetFest sends out all participants during orientation for a one-day service project with external partner institutions, laying the groundwork for a culture of service to the community.

Service is then reinforced by service-learning requirements through many of their courses throughout their college careers, where many professors partner with the Service-Learning Center to build service requirements into their course requirements. According to staff member Phillip, the academic focus is demonstrated by the S-LC’s motto, “Serving to Learn.” “We want to students to see that their education isn’t just to set them up to get bigger salaries in life. We see education as a way to help you serve better.” Wendy described her experience with academic service-learning.

A lot of times [the Service-Learning Center] encourage[s] faculty to have a requirement in their Core classes. So all students are required to take Core. Then a lot of the Core teachers, I know English 101 often does it; and I took a Sociology 100-level class, and they both required service-learning as part of it. So they try and get you as you're a first-
or second-year student interested and then hopefully you get involved more.

Several student activists describe their activism beginning through one of the programs connected to the S-LC. The Service-Learning Center articulates service-learning as a form of activism, particularly within a Reformed worldview. In fact, the director of the S-LC teaches a course in Reformed activism at Calvin (Service-Learning Center, Strategic Plan, 2009). It is no surprise that the student activists in this study who were associated with the Service-Learning Center articulated their activism as an integration of learning and service to their local community, all within a Reformed religious worldview.

According to staff member Richard, The Service-Learning Center is “kind of an epicenter for student activism” at Calvin. Staff member Mark stated that activism at Calvin “starts in radical places like a professor’s head, or curriculum, or a course, or a syllabus and the Service-Learning Center” by stirring up an idea in a student, who then finds like-minded students and either forms or joins a group. Mark stated that the idea might also be reinforced in a freshman dorm by a community partnership coordinator, which is a student position in the S-LC, who then connects the student with an organization in the community, where that student learns about broader issues in the community and then becomes an activist.

Themes

The Calvin College student activists were insightful in their approaches to and meaning of their activism, as well as their campus culture. While many were reluctant to identify themselves as activists, they were eager to share their thoughts and descriptions of their activities. The data from the individual student interviews were triangulated with a student focus group, interviews with Calvin faculty and staff, and
content from the archives of *Chimes*, the Calvin student newspaper. The following overarching themes and subthemes (Figure 1) emerged from the data: Fighting injustice; institutional culture of risk management; and becoming agents of renewal.

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<th>Institutional Culture of Risk Management</th>
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<td>Empowerment &amp; Agency</td>
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*Figure 1.* Emergent themes and subthemes of student activism at Calvin College.

**Fighting Injustice**

All but two Calvin College student participants cited seeking justice in describing their concept of activism. This included identifying injustice; challenging unjust structures; speaking out against injustice, forming just relationships, and speaking up for the oppressed. Subthemes that emerged were a discovery of power systems, and recognition of students’ own power and agency. Many connected issues of justice, primarily identified as with the environment, race, food, immigration, and homosexuality, with activism, as well as with their faith.

One reason social justice was often mentioned might be from the reinforcement of the idea in Prelude, a first-year program and course Calvin students
take as an introduction to the college’s mission and community. The course’s supporting textbook is written by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., former president of Calvin Theological Seminary. In it the author lists justice as one of 14 Calvin “core virtues.”

Students at Calvin should learn about the principles of justice, the cases and causes of injustice in our society, both global and national; and they should be encouraged to form a commitment to the cause of justice, of doing what they can in personal, professional, and political life to ensure fair treatment of all those who belong to the household of the human community. (Plantinga, Jr., 2002, p. 238)

The students seem to have gotten the message. “Well, I guess I don’t know if I would qualify myself as an activist. I think I do feel more strongly that doing justice is important for all Christians,” said Wendy. Heather also described activism in terms of her own Christianity.

As models as who Christ is, we have to try to embody His kingdom in this world as best as we can and I think part of that is challenging structures that are unjust – seems that is the core of what activism really is.

In an opinion article, written by Chimes staff writer, Kayla VanderPloeg, she takes to task the student body for their lack of unity.

Of all the things to possibly unite us as a student body, the power and love of God and his mission to reconcile the world should provide us with cohesion, should call us to action in bringing justice and peace to the city we’ve been sent to. (VanderPloeg, 2011, para. 4)

Instead of framing activism with her faith, Grace identified her idea of activism with justice issues in her own community.

I live in an intentional community, which is working on forming just relationships in one of the pretty sketchy neighborhoods, and I take the bus not because it’s convenient, but because they are just something our community needs. They need faithful people taking the bus and buying our food locally, not because it’s convenient or cheaper, but because this is something that we think our community and maybe the world needs.
**Subtheme: Learning about power systems.** The student participants stated that their activism has taught them about systems and power in a way that inspires them to continue to promote social justice. The way faculty/staff member, Elizabeth, framed it, “activism is being truthful and honest about the way privilege works in this society and recognizing that we need to make some changes so that all people have access to the same power.”

Students experience the campus as an environment to practice activism and learn about power systems as they planned for lives after college, like a training ground for navigating power systems in making change. As Elizabeth described it, students who have an idea need to figure out to whom to present it within the Calvin power structure. Although it can be student initiated and driven, “they usually need to have the support of someone that knows the system to help them figure out who else should I talk to, who can help me make this a reality.”

According to Heather, she has matured from her initial high school confusion and realized that something was wrong and was not sure what to do with it.

And just be like, ‘ah, broken things!’ to having a much more mature understanding of systems and systemic constructs and power and healthy ways to deal with that, and effective ways to deal with it while being supported by a community that both nurtures and encourages that and challenges me to be gentle.

**Subtheme: Empowerment and agency.** Four of the eleven participants identified activism as empowerment and agency, including the ability to act on convictions, a sense of agency and voice, and the understanding of oneself and own capabilities. Lydia stated, “I think that student activism pushes you to a better understanding of yourself and your capabilities.” As did Adam, “I think [activism] definitely empowers you.”
According to Betsy, a staff member consistently reminded her of the fact that although she is young and a student she has good and interesting insightful thoughts that she should not be afraid to express.

I think him and many other people at Calvin reiterate that over and over and over again to students and that, translated into activism, sort of assured students of yes, you have a voice, yes, you can be an agent…

Lauren provided a staff perspective.

I think that activism has to do with recognizing your agency and the agency of other people as citizens in our country, in our city, in the kingdom of God. So to me this is just about recognizing the full potential of myself and other people.

Faculty/staff member, Elizabeth, described how activism helps empower students.

I think one of the ways activism helps students is it gives them a sense of their strength and their resilience in their agency to make change. They don’t, as students, come in with a mature understanding of who they are personally and what their place is in the world. It’s exciting to watch them realize, “Hey! I can make a difference. I can make change happen.”

Institutional Culture of Risk Management

Despite the overall feeling of support students have for their activism, many of the participants described Calvin’s practice of being risk-averse as a barrier on their campus. This included perceived limits placed on students by the administration and board of trustees through bureaucracy, requirements to get permission for activities, and the threat of repercussions. Subthemes of this theme are the management of these risks through structural support to student activism and within the facilitation and mentorship of key staff and faculty.
Faculty/staff member, Mark, cited the administration as being a barrier to student activism on campus, especially because it “seems to be peculiarly attuned to constituent desires.” Any criticism of donors or related companies or industries is “off limits.” Staff member, Richard, stated there is a “culture of risk management,” working from a model of risk reduction and attempting to avoid controversy.

We don’t give students enough agencies to do things, take some risks. Our institution is not unique in that regard. It seems as if we are risk averse, and I think risk averse works against activism because it doesn’t encourage students to take initiative and do something that might not work.

One example given by students was the 2010 cancellation of the on-campus concert of the rock band, The New Pornographers. Despite being booked by the campus department, Student Activities Office, the band’s name became troublesome for some. The administration forced the cancellation of the event. According to a letter to the editor of the student newspaper,

It deeply troubles and disheartens me that Calvin College would forsake its own mission to engage culture thoughtfully — not to mention fail to stick up for its own students and paying customers — because it was burdensome to defend. What good is a mission of active engagement and service when it can be so easily left by the wayside whenever enough ill-informed people complain? The press release makes it clear that neither the college nor the band is guilty of any wrongdoing — that is, the college was in the right to book the band in the first place — but are canceling because too many people were drawing incorrect associations. What cowardice! Way to stick up for doing the right thing. (Chimes, Letters to the editor, 2010, September 17, Letter 3, para. 3)

Faculty/staff member, Elizabeth, shared that although Calvin does a good job encouraging and promoting student leadership the top administration and some faculty has had some failings.

I feel that the college is being driven more by fear than by a solid trust that God holds our future and we need to be faithful and stay the
course, and not get reactive and try to control everything and be based on fear.

Although there is some resistance to issues the administration does not agree with, “I also think if a student is convicted of something and can articulate a Biblical concern of why they’re concerned about whatever it is, I think the administration generally will listen.”

Betsy blamed the administration for many of the burdensome systems students have to work through to plan their activities. In addition to successful occasions of student activism, she described hearing stories of failure and intimidation when students challenged the administration to bring change to campus, in part due to the college’s relationships in the community.

I think most students at Calvin are aware of this that's there sort of a disconnect between the higher up administration’s ultimate goals for the college and what the college is going to be about, which I understand because they're dealing with communities outside of Calvin and money and things like that. But there's a disconnect between that and students, maybe not all students, but many students in social justice, environmentalism, etc. That can often be discouraging to a student to have to jump through administrative [hoops] to hold a rally or try and get a rain garden in the middle…a big part of this green lawn that they seem to love. It comes to this huge difference of opinion and then all these administrators, people who are really frightening for a student activist dealing with higher up adults. It's hard to know how to navigate that, so I think there's a level at which student activism goes up to in this campus and very rarely does it jump up to actually bringing physical change to this campus.

Samuel stated that the board of trustees creates an environment that creates barriers to activism.

We have a board that has put forth a number of things or made enough decisions that directly discourage, or told people don’t rock the boat or bad things will happen to you. Anyone who is speaking out or against or trying to think about things differently in our world, there are repercussions for that. That’s discouraging for activism.
Heather mentioned that both the college administration and board of trustees create barriers to student activism on campus.

Some events and campus wide events do need to be approved by them and I've never encountered opposition. If you explain yourself well and talk about why this is a part of discipleship or justice, then they are very receptive. But I think some students just fail to do it well and then they encounter some opposition from board members or administrators who are like, “Whoa, that's going to ruffle feathers,” and you are not coming across as somebody who's going to talk about this gently in a nuanced way. So that becomes a point of opposition and that affects students actually being able to do whatever they want to do. I would say the board of trustees though is probably seen as the biggest adversary because they're the ones who have to try to answer back to the CRC [Christian Reformed Church] and come with more conservative groups and aren't directly connected to the conversations that are happening at Calvin.

According to staff member, Phillip, although he is generally supportive of activism, there is a specific college policy and procedure for organizing protests and demonstrations. Interested students must first file an application to register the activity that must also be authorized by the Student Life department, Campus Safety, and the Communications Department. Failure to complete the necessary paperwork will lead to the demonstration being canceled. According to Phillip, these procedures are in place to minimize the chances of chaos, loss of civility, vandalism, or violence that could lead to someone’s physical or psychological damage. “I’m glad when [a demonstration] happens and happens peacefully, and the police aren’t called, and there aren’t students being removed by Campus Safety.”

In contrast, Alex reflected upon a demonstration during some public lectures held on campus.

There’a a guy who, he was an RA in my building my freshman year. During January Calvin has a bunch of lectures, and during one of those lectures – I forget who was presenting – but I think he was someone who was connected to a big oil company or something like that. He
went to the top balcony of the Fine Arts Center and let down this big sign during the prayer, before the lecturer comes out. It said something like; it said something about it being shameful for Calvin to be connected with folks who are exploiting other people or tons of natural resources. I heard he was like taken out of the building before the prayer ended.

Many of the student activists understood the rationale of orderliness and safety for procedures, but resisted the amount of paperwork and required authorization, including Alex.

Like, you have to get permission for everything. I understand that, but it’s just a hassle. And if you…like, the guy who throws down a banner that’s arguing for something that, you know, the college probably wouldn’t be behind, like he’s [snaps fingers] quickly dealt with and taken away.

Lydia agreed that it is problematic having to work through the established systems, especially when it appears the rationale is to monitor student activity and minimize controversy.

There are a lot of [hoops] you have to jump through and hoops and stuff that you got to do to have an event. You have to clear it with campus events first, then rent the space, plan a time, advertise it. For posters you have to submit them to an office and they have to make sure they’re appropriate before they pass them on. I have gotten in trouble in Student Events before for not thinking I needed to plan an event out on the lawn and they say that I do. They are really monitoring what you are doing even though it seems like foolish steps we need to go through. It's kind of the way for them to insure that they're knowing what's going on so they don't have a surprise, like a super controversial event going on. So it's a way for them to keep tabs on us that I find annoying, but I guess they're necessary for the faculty to know what's going on.

*Subtheme: Structural support of student activism.* Student activism was primarily described through its relation to institutional structures and influenced from the people associated with them. At the college, a structural approach was employed to motivate students toward action and to guide them through it. Out of the
institution’s mission, deriving from the sponsoring denomination, the Christian Reformed Church, there was an overall sense of freedom from the student activists to get involved in issues of interest. Part of that came from their perception of a culture of academic freedom. In their estimation the faculty is free to pursue their academic interests and encourage students to pursue theirs. While there was a vague sense of concern for certain sensitive issues by the upper administration and board, they did not feel particularly inhibited in their pursuits to engage in activism. Elizabeth reinforced that notion of the campus culture,

I think that almost anything could be done. A Reformed vision for life, a Biblically Reformed vision would basically say there’s no parts of life that are not tainted by sin and there’s no parts of life that can’t be redeemed by the grace of what Christ has done. I also think if a student is convicted of something and can articulate a Biblical concern of why they’re concerned about whatever it is I think the administration generally will listen. They may not agree with it, but they generally will listen.

Participants cited Calvin’s formal institutional structures and systems, particularly academic programs and the Department of Student Life, as helping support student activism on campus. The academic structures and systems that support activism are faculty advisors, the semester abroad program, and course content and requirements. Participants listed the Department of Student Life’s beneficial structures as the Service-Learning Center, Residence Life, Campus Ministry, Student Programs, Student Senate, student organizations, and various leadership opportunities.

One significant formal mechanism for student activism is through the student organizations, which generally uses awareness campaigns as a mechanism for activism. Many of the activist issues on campus have a corresponding student organization from which activism often springs. According to staff member, Phillip,
although the college supports the student organizations with staff, funding, and leadership training, Calvin places a lot of the responsibility for the activities of the club on the students. They are all “student-centered, they’re student-led, student-initiated – it’s the passion of the students.”

One of the more prominent student groups on campus is the Environmental Stewardship Coalition, dedicated to environmental issues or what they call, “creation care.” This group partners with institutional departments, like Residence Life, for shared residence hall programs. Grace indicated that Service-Learning and Residence Life activities help students serve their community through invited partnerships in the community. Madison mentioned the Department of Residence Life as a carrier of student activism.

The Residential Life office is like a huge, like right now Mad Farmer Food Fest is this weekend. That's like all local foods and organic foods and food rights and hunger issues and all of that. They sponsor Kilowatt, so using less electricity and we talk about like electricity from the world and for the rest of the world and where it comes from and all those issues.

Just over half of the participants used the term service-learning when describing activism. In particular, they referenced activities they have been involved with through the Service-Learning Center (S-LC). Alex described it as providing a more sustainable mechanism for activism. “Service-learning is something that is…really radical, like to actually care about someone else’s needs and to care about you learning about them…in a quieter and more stable sort of way…it’s like backing up those big moments with stability.”

Student Melanie Roorda contributed to a student newspaper article about the Service-Learning Center.
It has taught me about activism and revealed my weaknesses and shortcomings in understanding all there is to know about politics and social change. It is taught me how to identify places of inequality and then take the steps to address it. (Chimes, Service Learning, 2011, Testimonials section, para. 2)

Subtheme: Faculty and staff facilitation. Participants described individual faculty and staff from these institutional structures as helping to facilitate student activism at Calvin. These included faculty supporters and mentors, and staff and administrative mentors. According to Betsy, she had experienced nothing but support from faculty and staff in her activism.

I think student activism here generally happens within a well-thought-out reflective context, and the students who are supporting these issues are reflective people. So I think there's that piece of talking with the faculty, maybe a club faculty mentor or something, that they can get advice and maybe temper frustration and things like that.

Betsy mentioned that there are also a group of Biology professors who are supportive and passionate for environmental activism and are willing to work her and her fellow Biology majors. Alex agreed that many of the Biology professors are inspiring activists committed to sustainability and preserving the ecology around the area campus, city, and county. He described how that faculty involvement influences other parts of campus and grass-roots efforts.

In my Biology class we were doing the unit on food systems and we had, like, a class assignment to get in groups and submit an action plan for sustainability. I think they put them in Chimes. I think they put the winners in the newspaper. And then I think they were going to start to take action on them if they could. But what that made me think of was how naturally there is going to be grass-roots, there’s going to be a certain number of students on Calvin’s campus who are more sustainably-minded with the way they eat and wear clothes and get to school and stuff like that. But if you start to institute actual policy changes or plant gardens by every dorm, somehow that’s going to start to change the culture in more a wide-spread sort of way.
Madison also described the academics, and faculty in particular, as very influential in promoting student activism. She described how many of the faculty live lives of influence by being an example to their students, like her 75-year-old professor and his wife who decided to eat vegan because they learned about a statistic that one vegetarian uses as much energy put into food preparation as eight who eat meat. She described another professor who just returned to campus from doing a Fulbright Scholarship in a southern African country on citizenship rights for those with HIV.

I bet I can go through every one of my professors and say they all do something. So they very much lead by example and it very much comes up in class and they often offer credit for, offer extra credit for going to events. A lot of our papers revolve around domestic and global issues like controversial issues.

Staff member, George, opined that individual entry and middle level staff, as well as some faculty members, have the most influence on student activism due to their high level of student contact. These people often initiate mentoring relationships and participate in boundary-breaking activities, like inviting classes to their homes for dinner. Staff member, Lauren, agreed that mentors heavily influence student activism at Calvin. “It has a ton to do with mentors. There are some faculty members, because of who they are and their commitment and passion, they contribute to student activism because they model it, they lead it, they expect it.” Lydia found that faculty who serve as club sponsors especially help facilitate activism on campus.

All the [student organizations] have a professor who is their advisor, and ours is in the history department. He is great and we love him. He's really helpful to a cause, too, and likes to know what's going on and really helps us out. So it's another way to ensure the faculty is up to date on what's going on and to have leaders for resource, which I think is important.
Becoming Agents of Renewal

The third theme that emerged was that students perceived their activism helping them become agents of renewal, with subthemes being activism as a foundation of faith and a focus and care for their local community. While students recognized different concepts of activism, their own activism was more than a purely humanitarian effort and was almost always described as a living out of the mission to be agents of renewal in the world.

Participants stated that Calvin College’s mission to create “agents of renewal of God’s world” was influential in framing and supporting student activism in their community. This mission is communicated in formal institutional documents and through the first-year seminar course called Prelude. According to staff member, George,

Our mission is very explicit about saying we’re creating agents of renewal to do God’s work in God’s world and do God’s service, to serving society, church, and culture. Students are kind of hit over the head with that quite a bit. We’re not here to just get you a job. We’re trying to make you agents of renewal.

Faculty/staff member, Mark, added that the mission is,

To engage all of creation, and when you choose a vocation you’re not choosing a job, you’re choosing a calling. It’s a vocation to be an agent of renewal. So you figure out ways to restore. So you remove barriers, you fight against injustice, you fight against privilege, you fight for the person who is victimized by the broken systems.

Faculty/staff member, Elizabeth, said the world is broken and not the way it was intended to be. She stated the first step is being honest about its brokenness, then becoming convicted to be “challenged and responsible to take action.” Finally, taking that action to “bring change where it’s needed,” in all areas of life. “We’re trying to be agents of renewal and bring healing where there’s brokenness.”
The student activists, like their faculty/staff counterparts, easily integrated the institution’s mission into their activism. Sarah shared,

Well, Calvin’s whole thing is that we are to be agents of renewal, and I think that activism is showcasing the things that are broken and that need restoration. So that allows students to learn what things are broken and what they can do to fix them and make them to the way they are supposed be.

According to Grace,

[Activism is] absolutely what we should be doing because we believe this world is not the way that it should be, and we are part of the work of renewing it, of bringing it back into a right relationship the way that it's supposed to be. And so it's kind of cool that God lets us participate in His work of renewing everything.

According to Heather,

I think it's part of our duty as Christians to be aware of those structures that we find ourselves in and the way our actions affect other people and their lives, because God is not just, the gospel…promises eternal rewards once we're dead, but it's also about the transformation and renewal of this place. The idea that God is making all things new and that the Kingdom is already, but not yet, so it is our role as Christians to live into the coming Kingdom and to live in ways that are faithful to the coming Kingdom. Not that we can bring it about. Only God will bring it about, but as models of who Christ is we have to try to embody His Kingdom in this world as best as we can, and I think part of that involves challenging structures that are unjust seems that is the core of what activism really is.

While the student activists had divergent interests and activities in particular issues, it was usually the mere animation of being agents of renewal in the world. Thus, their activism was never defined in terms of destruction, or even triumphing over a foe. Rather, it was a restorative concept bringing relationships and systems into order first established by God. Therefore, there was always an emphasis of their activism of being loving and respective to people in the midst of a broken world. Specifically, their activism usually played out as a personal change, followed by a
passive awareness campaign with an invitation to their friends and peers to participate with them.

**Subtheme: Activism as foundation of faith.** About half of the student activists stated that they had come to understand activism as the foundation and action of their faith. “My big push is because that is my faith. My faith leads me to that. It leads me to be active and believe in what I preach. It needs to be a foundation of your faith,” said Ariana. Heather also identified her own involvement in activism as faith-centered.

I see activism as a pretty necessary out-flowing of my faith. I think it’s pretty evident in scripture that God is a God that cares for the poor and the oppressed and the little guy, and I think oftentimes in America, especially, we’re not really aware of the way our actions oppress people, especially like the systems that we are a part of.

Lydia also described that her faith directs her to activism.

I think that the Bible and the ministries that we hear are calling us to activism. It’s just like a way that God wants us to live, to not just sit by and see bad things happen and accept it for what it is, because as Christians we shouldn’t do that.

Faculty/staff member, Mark, called these Christian activists “righteous trouble makers” as they engage in activism “that asks hard questions that challenges the status quo that tends to be prophetic and sometimes dangerous.” Alex indicated that kind activism is a core part of being a faithful Christian living out Biblical principles.

If we say that we’re Christians and that we uphold the Bible as the highest, the standard of living – the other standard of guidance and living is the Holy Spirit – then these are things the Bible speaks about. And there are just like huge passages in the prophets in the Bible where God is just, I don’t know if you can perceive it as angry, you could perceive it as begging these people to understand, “I don’t care about your worship and piety if you’re not seeking justice. I desperately care about the redemption of this world because I made it. And it breaks my heart that it is fallen and it should break your heart,
too. And if it doesn’t we have a problem.”

That message of activists connecting their activism to their faith is not apparent to all students. According to a student in an opinion article written to Chimes, although the topic of social justice is pervasive at Calvin, he thinks the campus appears to value it over evangelism. “The main issue at Calvin is that I never heard of evangelizing through social justice, or using social justice to evangelize. All I heard was that you should do social justice, without a word of evangelism” (Christiansen, 2010, para. 3).

Simply working for social justice will not bring about change unless living for Jesus is a central goal in everyone’s lives. This is what makes the original position on social justice flawed, because it uses social justice to evangelize, when social justice cannot truly come about without Jesus in our lives. (para. 5)

In another letter to the editor in Chimes, a student makes the same point in response to a chapel service organized by a group of service-learning students. She wrote that their emphasis on the environment and reducing poverty was misguided, “because if you spend all your time ministering to their earthly needs and none ministering to their spiritual needs, they will end up as one of the environmentally-friendly, prejudice-free, sustainability-focused citizens of Hell” (Chimes, Letters to the editor, 2010, April 9, Letter 1, para. 6).

Subtheme: Focus and care for local community. The participants stated that their activism has taught them to focus and care for other people, particularly in their local community. Elizabeth stated that because people are made in God’s image they are God’s representatives on earth called to serve and help heal others. “We have caused a lot of the suffering and pain because of our disobedience, but we also have a responsibility and an obligation and a joyful opportunity to try to bring healing. And so activism is connected to that.”
According to Grace, “I think in general [activism] make[s] you think outside yourself and [it] is a way to participate in what’s going on in the world and in your community.” Lydia added, “I think it’s made me a more compassionate person. I’m more interested in the well-being of those around me than myself.” Alex agreed, [Activism] puts you outside of yourself so you don’t just care about studying or that test that’s happening. If that’s what you leave college with is knowing how to take tests and realize literature and how to relate to a group of friends who are like you, I don’t know. I mean those things are probably valuable, but I think that college would have failed you if that’s all you get out of it. So, like teaching you to care about the city you live in. It teaches you to care about the people who you wouldn’t normally care about. It forces you to look beyond yourself and to wonder as you walk, or run, or ride your bike around the city, like what’s going on here? And why is it like this? And who lives here? Who are they?

Summary of Themes

Student activism at Calvin College was most apparent through its three emergent themes: fighting injustice, institutional culture of risk management, and becoming agents of renewal. Students conceived of activism as fighting injustice, learning about power systems and becoming empowered to do so. The institution was described as minimizing risk through intentional designed structures for activism, as well as with faculty and staff to guide students to and through these structures. Finally, students saw themselves as agents of renewal, which is promoted by the institution and sponsoring church denomination, and is how students made sense of their faith-based activism, generally becoming manifested as a focus and care for their local community.
I visited the Wheaton College campus between January 30 and February 3, 2012. Almost all of the interviews took place in a small room in the basement of the student center, which had been reserved for me all week by my campus contact in the Student Activities Office. I initially contacted three students suggested to me by my campus contact. Through those participants and subsequent participants, I received names for additional people whom they thought would be able to contribute to the study, including students, staff, and faculty (chain sampling). Each of the participants was chosen because they were actively involved in or knowledgeable about student activism at Wheaton College. A chart (Appendix P) shows all of the study participants’ pseudonyms, sex, class standing, and campus involvement.

I interviewed 12 Wheaton College students, of which eight were Seniors and four were Juniors. Seven of the students were female and five were male. 10 of the students were White and two were Black. Each of them were currently, or had been, involved on campus in a capacity considered activist either through self-identification or by the person who suggested their inclusion in the study. While most of the students had been involved in many different groups and activities during their time at Wheaton, I identified one or two of their primary areas interest or focus in their activism. Four of the student activists were involved in diversity activism, four in international development, three in social justice activism, three in environmental activism, two in student government, and one each in food activism, residence life, feminist activism, and urban ministry. At the end of my week on campus, after each participant had been interviewed individually, eight of the students participated in a focus group interview.
Out of the eight faculty/staff participants in the study, four were staff members, three were faculty members, and two identified as both faculty and staff. Six of these participants were male and two were female. All of the faculty/staff participants were White.

The data from the student interviews were triangulated with the faculty/staff interview data, archived issues of *The Wheaton Record* campus student newspaper, institutional and department web pages of Wheaton College, and other online organization and media sources. The data are first presented through a primary incident of activism: the OneWheaton alumni group advocating for a more welcoming position from Wheaton of the LGBTQ community. This is followed by two activism vignettes: the Forum Wall and the Wheaton’s HNGR Program, given to provide an illustration of the range of student activism described by the study’s triangulated data.

Stories of Activism

Primary Incident of Activism: OneWheaton

On April 29, 2011, a group of alumni calling themselves OneWheaton showed up on the campus of Wheaton College. This group of LGBTQ alumni and allies formed this group in response to feelings of isolation over issues of sexuality, and specifically a recent chapel presentation they felt marginalized them. The chapel service was part of a Sexuality and Wholeness series that “addressed pornography and abstinence and included a sermon from Wheaton alumnus Wesley Hill, author of *Washed and Waiting*, who spoke from the perspective of a Christian who experiences same-sex attraction but has chosen to pursue celibacy” (Banks, 2011, para. 8), according to Wheaton spokeswoman, LaTonya Taylor.
On that April day they showed up to campus unannounced, right outside of chapel, and handed out letters to the student body that stated, “We must affirm the full humanity and dignity of every human being regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity” (OneWheaton, 2013, para. 2). This letter also invited students to interact with them through their website and email address, and to join their cause. According to Carlos, a staff member at Wheaton, the OneWheaton activists where thoughtful, kind, and respectful as they passed out their letters.

One student activist described that Wheaton officials ushered the OneWheaton group off campus when they saw what was happening. Student, Zoey, described the administration as graciously engaging the group, even though they disagreed with the OneWheaton’s stance and the fact it surprised the campus by simply showing up without regard to the formal processes for events. Following the event the response from students on campus was mixed, from people showing support, to anger, and confusion. According to staff member, Charles, “there wasn’t anyone who came out and was disrespectful to them personally, but I know there was a level of frustration.”

Later that day, Wheaton’s president, Philip Ryken, sent a campus-wide email to issue a college response to OneWheaton and state an institutional position on homosexuality. In it, he affirmed the group members as “member(s) of the human family as created in the image of God himself, and thus each of immeasurable value” and acknowledged those who had “experienced insensitive or callous responses in this community, for which we repent and seek forgiveness.” He also stated commitment to Christian values on sexuality through several biblical passages and the historic stance of the church of this issue. While offering solidarity with LGBTQ students, Ryken held firm to the college’s traditional position.
We carry a burden for our students, faculty, staff and alumni who experience same-sex attraction because of the pain they so often experience, and pray that we can be a community that loves those who identify as LGBTQ. While we recognize that Wheaton’s stance may be unsatisfying to some of our alumni, we remain resolved to respond with truth and grace. (Ryken, 2011, para. 6)

According to Charles, OneWheaton gathered about 600 signatures from mostly alumni, but also some current students. The administration took notice of who signed the letter and called in the handful of current students on the list to discuss their position and intent with their signatures. All of the students claimed they had friends who were homosexuals and they had signed the letter to show them support. None of the students challenged the college’s position on homosexuality, that there is incongruence with a Christian lifestyle and homosexual conduct.

As a follow-up, the OneWheaton group decided to make their presence known at the next fall’s homecoming. According to Charles, in preparation for homecoming President Ryken wrote a letter to the campus that commented with the analogy “when you go to a family reunion you don’t agree with all of the members of your family. Here are people in our family that we don’t necessarily agree with, but we love them.”

Homecoming happened over the weekend of October 7-8, 2011, without incident. OneWheaton alumni were able to participate in all of the weekend’s events while also promoting their group. One way they did this was by wearing OneWheaton t-shirts to identify themselves as members of the group. While they were welcomed back to campus as individual alumni, they were not authorized to use campus facilities for an event they hosted, being forced to hold it at an Episcopal church near campus. Christian singer Jennifer Knapp, who had come out as a lesbian a few years earlier, performed a free concert at the church gathering (Dias, 2011).
The OneWheaton group still exists to serve as a resource to identifying LGBTQ Wheaton College students, as well as at other Christian colleges and universities. Since that time, Wheaton College has offered community programs and chapel presentations to address issues of faith and homosexuality. According to Zoey, she believes these events were,

Probably a response to the fact that there was informal discussion and activity, or grassroots movements that are saying, “Hello, will you talk about this?” So there is a response, and the response is, “OK, let’s talk about it.” Here is some formal lecture series or resources we can hook you up with.

According to faculty member, Jonathan, since the OneWheaton events two other faculty members hosted a workshop to discuss the question: Is Wheaton homophobic? They expected no more than 30 students would show up; however, 200 students attended the workshop. According to student activist, Owen, “Ten years ago that wouldn’t have happened.”

The college now supports a community group, Refuge, for those students who are same sex-attracted. According to staff member, Allison, it is a support group and not an advocacy group because of the constraints of the college’s behavioral code. She said the purpose of the group is to provide for these students community, resources, confidentiality, and safety. As an officially recognized student group, Refuge now has access to resources, may plan events on campus, and legitimacy to engage the issue. According to one unnamed Refuge member,

There is no reason to fear talking about such topics, and I hope that our campus can approach conversations about the LGBTQ experience in a humble and loving way. We should be eager to talk honestly about it and not be afraid of perspectives that may be different from our own. I don’t think we should shy away from any conversation no matter how difficult it may seem to us. (Young, Ryan, & Spewak, 2013, para. 44)
Activism Vignette: Forum Wall

All day long Wheaton students huddle together, positioning themselves and straining to be able read the printed political articles, social commentaries, public confessionals, hand-written manifestos, cartoons, and news clippings of current events hanging on a small section of a brick wall in the basement of Wheaton’s Todd M. Beamer Student Center. Notes, comments, and criticisms are scribbled over or are attached to most of the artifacts tacked to the wall. Many of the postings are anonymous, but some encourage engagement by posting their contact information.

This is Wheaton’s Forum Wall, a place for students to exercise free speech on campus, and is an ever-changing palette of opinion that helps shape the student discourse on campus. According to staff member, Charles, it used to be called the Forum Board because of the bulletin board previously affixed on that same spot of the wall. That changed when “someone stole the board in protest because they were mad about what people were posting. Someone tried to shut it down. You can’t shut down free speech.” Now students express themselves directly to the Forum Wall “because no one can steal a brick wall.” Charles described the wall as a place that the administration oversees, but generally allows to the students to determine the nature and content on the wall. “If something is really bad, there is kind of self-policing. It’s kind of like Wikipedia. People will tear things down if they think this is just character assassination.”

Student, Brooke, described the Forum Wall as where you go to see “what’s going on in people’s minds and what they are thinking about.” She remembered how someone once posted something that praised TOMS, a shoe company that sends a pair of shoes to poor child for every shoe they sell. Someone else wrote a response on the post that criticized the shoe as unsustainable and, therefore, no good. That simple
comment on the Forum Wall started to create noticeable change of opinion around campus about TOMS, she said.

Some students use the Forum Wall as a venue to write about their dissatisfactions with Wheaton’s behavioral codes and policies, according to student Ethan. Often, these students write an “angry, pissed-off note that’s not really thought through and posted on the Forum Wall.” He said that when something has been posted on the wall from an “activistic point of view or it’s controversial” people would often write “stupid comments on it.” Some comments include questions and statements like, “Is this Biblical?” and “This is stupid.” According to Zoey, such student “strong push back, sometimes too strong verbal push back” is often written in response to postings that are “too harmful, too isolating, too harsh to the point of being…what some people would say, ‘that’s not really acting like Jesus.’”

According to Ethan, one day in January 2012, someone caused an uproar on campus by circling a passage of an article posted to the Forum Wall and writing, “This is n***** talk.” Although someone quickly took it down, the effects of the posting lingered for months. Shortly after the offensive post, Wheaton student Danny Aguilar wrote an opinion article in the student newspaper, the Wheaton Record, informing the broader community of what was posted and challenging fellow students to change the way race is discussed.

I was still hurt, disturbed, and discouraged by some of the words I read on the Forum Wall. Transforming the way we think and talk about race with one another is essential to moving forward in addressing broader systematic racial disparities (Aguilar, 2012, para. 8)

Later in the article he challenged his fellow students. “Will you be silent, or will you join the conversation?” (para. 9). Aguilar’s newspaper article helped spread the news of the racist post, generating a campus-wide discussion.
Faculty member, Kimberly, stated that the administration did not publically address or condemn the offensive post, which shocked her.

The lack of a public response, to me, means that there is some protection of that kind of speech, which is hate speech. I don’t think that should be allowed and it’s really disturbing to me that I’m on a Christian campus and that that happens and that it is acceptable somehow.

One group that did respond was Wheaton’s Solidarity Cabinet, a student group that focuses on racial identity and systematic racism within a biblical worldview. A week after Aguilar’s newspaper article ran they hosted a round-table discussion titled, “How can we change the way we talk about race?” Out of an insensitive and racist comment on a free speech board came a much-needed campus discussion about best ways to engage in public discourse around race issues. According to Charles, “that was a really positive end to a really inflammatory statement.”

Activism Vignette: HNGR Program

For 36 years Wheaton students have been scattered across the globe on six-month service-learning internships to address issues of international development. Since 1976, Wheaton College’s Human Needs and Global Resources (HNGR) interdisciplinary certificate program has supported students as they have worked on a variety of “community based initiatives that have grown around a local vision and have indigenous leadership” (HNGR Program Overview, 2013, Host organizations and placement section, para.1). Students live with a host family, serve the local community, learn, and apply their work and experiences to a curriculum back at Wheaton. Since its start, 750 students have participated in internships that have included economic development, education, environmental stewardship, HIV AIDS,
human trafficking, and human trafficking, among many others. Three essential elements of the HNGR program are cross-cultural experience, service, and an academic project (HNGR Program Overview).

HNGR participants often come back to campus changed, eager to share what they have learned. One way is through the programs the HNGR department organizes. An example was the co-sponsorship of a campus screening of the documentary, “As We Forgive,” which is a film that explores the complex issues of post-genocidal Rwanda (Ruberwa, 2012). Another example was the Symposium in Human Needs and Global Resources, an annual endowed program that was started in 2005 with the goal to “advance the critical thinking needed to address world hunger through agricultural and economic development” (HNGR Symposium, 2013, para. 1). The symposium features plenary speakers from around the world, panel discussions, and breakout sessions. Also part of the HNGR symposium week is a dedicated community chapel, where HNGR interns share with their peers their first-hand experiences through presentations, songs, and photographs.

Some consider participation in the HNGR program and resulting campus education a form of activism at Wheaton. Student Daniel stated that while not all students participating in the HNGR program get involved in formal campus events, “just by virtue of their presence and them talking about their experiences they are really challenging Western conceptions of Christianity and love and justice. I think that kind of creates a sentiment of activism just from their presence.”

This perspective-altering experience often changes how these interns are perceived on campus when they return. Faculty/staff member Jonathan described the program as having a catalytic effect on campus, not just through the resulting programs, but also through the reputation of its students as being,
A crazy cohort group that’s doing weird things like downward mobility, identifying with the poor, living in slums, working in areas of desperate poverty [and] post-conflict situations, etcetera. It sort of seeps through this whole college, with students in classrooms and dorms and living situations [and] conversations.

Faculty member Owen added, “There’s definitely a stereotype of the HNGR student as this kind of discontented, anti-capitalist, peacenik type who is going around tearing their clothes and lamenting the state of the world.”

Themes

The data from the individual Wheaton College student interviews are triangulated with a student focus group, interviews with Wheaton faculty and staff, content from the archives of the student newspaper, The Wheaton Record, and other online sources. The following themes (Figure 2) emerged from the data: structural supports to activism, activism as a threat to campus culture, and ministry activism.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Supports to Activism</th>
<th>“Activism” as a Threat to Campus Culture</th>
<th>Ministry Activism</th>
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<td>Homogenous Campus Environment</td>
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<td>Faculty and Staff Guidance</td>
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Figure 2. Emergent themes and subthemes of student activism at Wheaton College.
Structural Supports to Activism

Formal structural support to activism was an emergent theme that arose from the data, with emergent subthemes of growth opportunities, leadership training, and encouragement from Wheaton’s faculty and staff within these structures. Study participants reported that Wheaton College supports student activism through formal programs and organizations. Parker said that the campus “structure itself really helps students be involved,” allowing for student leadership through “adult” guidance.

According to Justin,

The College does a good job in terms of gauging student interest. Like, if there’s an interest on campus and you’ve got a lot of students interested in it and you push for it, the College will most likely help you.

Study participants frequently mentioned two educational programs that support activism. These programs were seen as mechanisms to create change in their participants, who, in turn, influence their peers when they return to campus. One was the HNGR program, a 36-year-old Wheaton College program that sends students all over the world for six-month internships. Another was the Office of Christian Outreach (OCO), which is a department that houses seven different ministries, domestically and internationally, involved in service-learning. OCO ministries take place during the school year, over spring break, and in the summers. Three other offices, the Residence Life Office, the Student Activities Office (SAO), and the Chaplain’s Office were also described as involved in student activism.

According to The Wheaton Record, the Residence Life Office was planning to open a living-learning community in Fall 2013 focusing on racial reconciliation. These two houses of upper-class students will be called the “Shalom Community,” will all take a Sociology course on racial and ethnic relations, be required to
participate in related activities on and off campus, and attend a diversity conference at another Chicago Christian university. “The Shalom Community aims to not only spur on conversation and action centered on racial reconciliation within the houses alone, but also to bring the campus and outside community into the conversation” (McDonald, 2013, para. 10).

While these programs and offices were seen as contributors to activism on campus, the most-described mechanism for student activism at Wheaton was through student clubs. Wheaton’s Student Activities Office oversees student clubs, as well as the Student Government. The SAO has an established system to help student create clubs and offer participating students funding and guidance in their activities.

Most of the students in this study had actively participated in a wide range of these clubs, as well as on the Student Government, at various times in their college careers. Nearly all identified their own activism through programs recognized and overseen by this office. These students reported positive experiences with the staff in Student Activities Office and within the club structure. Dylan said, “The SAO is very supportive and well supported by the school. It’s where all the clubs [reside], there’s good staff support in there, a decent amount of money.” According to Daniel, “There is such a strong, entrepreneurial climate in that office. Students are really encouraged there to do what many people would say is undoable.”

According to Carlos, the key to successful student activism at Wheaton is by starting an official campus organization.

There is one significant gate that any activism on this campus has to enter into. Once it enters that gate, there is another world there, but if it doesn’t enter that gate typically it doesn’t get anywhere. And that gate is chartering as an official organization, which means they have to submit a constitution and a list of members and have a faculty advisor. And so for them to have any rooms on campus for meetings, to
promote, to have access to funding or any institutional support, they have to be officially recognized by [the SAO]. If that doesn’t happen, institutionally, it is shut down in every way possible.

Carlos said student groups who choose to operate outside of this structure are sometimes encouraged to hold their activity off-campus, “but they don’t have resources here and then it never succeeds.”

While the student participants described that they felt supported within this system, they had challenges with the system’s bureaucracy. They understood the rationale and were willing to adhere to it because of the resulting benefits of institutional support, but often found it difficult to navigate. This is problematic to faculty member, Kimberly, who described this system as paternalistic, authoritative, and difficult for students to complete. “I think that our students are not very much empowered. They are taught to ask permission for everything that they do, and as a result many things don’t happen” she said. She characterized Wheaton students as much less active than students on other campuses. “Their passivity should lead us to question, what is going on institutionally that they are so passive?”

Owen said he tries to teach students to move beyond this passivity and to make their voices heard. He contrasts Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, in which he identifies King as being a moderate, conciliatory, and reconciling voice. “We’ve got a lot of Martins [at Wheaton], but not too many Malcolms. And so we could use a few Malcolms around here.”

According to Kimberly, the upper administration does not “like people doing things that would reflect badly on the institution, so there really is a top down control of student activities.” One focus group participant said the institution has created a system “because they want to have some sort of process to vet clubs.” Another focus group activist said, “I just get the feeling that this campus is very scared of what these
topics could mean if they were done in such a way that wasn’t necessarily approved of.”

A focus group activist asserted “I think it’s important for us students to have enough autonomy to actually be able to form a club without needing the college’s stamp on it.” The student said that by not getting that approval they feel like “we are doing something wrong.” Although that focus group participant was very proud of the student clubs on campus, “I think it’s not sufficient because it is healthy to think outside of that traditional institutional means.”

According to Carlos, the formal structure of club creation and oversight might inhibit student activism.

There are systems in place that if students don’t know about them, they just get discouraged and limited in terms of their success. So if they don’t get to the right people to help them, they are constantly just going up against stuff that they don’t know is there.

He added,

I think sometimes the bureaucracy and the process is so daunting to the student. And there are probably some messages out there that Wheaton is just slow to change, and Wheaton is so bureaucratic that you can’t get anything done.

**Subtheme: Growth opportunities.** Wheaton student activists saw this activism as contributing to their personal growth in identity development, learning new ways to think and talk, developing stronger passions and convictions, refining leadership skills, becoming more open to different ideas and people, and receiving practical experiences. Carlos stated that the college supports this personal development through “educationally-purposeful activism,” helping students grow in self-awareness, intellect, identity and skill development, passion for issues, and a focus on
others. “I think it’s a ripe world for learning what it means to be a whole person in some ways… We are preparing them, not just teaching them.”

Wheaton student activists primarily described their concept of activism as being aware of certain issues emphasizing their learning about societal issues and mechanisms for change, rather than actions in which they have been involved. Half of the student activists described awareness campaigns in their conceptions of how activism is made manifest. They also largely described most of the work done by their activist campus organizations as raising awareness. The student participants in this study identified three issues that most of the activism they are aware of revolves around: racial reconciliation; social justice, especially around environmentalism and human rights; and homosexuality. Other notable issues mentioned were of reproductive rights (primarily abortion), international development, food, peace, and feminism.

Maya called this type of activism “really good training for students,” that has helped her grow as a leader. Charlotte said students benefit by becoming more aware of issues and learning to act on the behalf of others. She said this is necessary to “balance your experience at college because you need to have something you want to fight for, have something you want to change, or have something you want to impact.” Parker said he is “so energized for the future” because of the community support he has received through his involvement. Because of it, “I feel so secure in my identity and purpose in life,” he said. Jocelyn said “the greatest benefits happen internally within the person” when engaging in student activism. For Jocelyn, it has increased her community presence and investment.

Growth often happens through campus awareness campaigns that often take the form of lectures, seminars, conferences, informational meetings, campus posters,
emails, and through social media. According to Sophie, the most popular type of activism is controversial lectures led by well-known professors everyone respects and wants to take their classes. It is even more enticing for students if you of these well-known professors debate each other over a controversial issue. “People come to see a show, I guess.”

Charlotte stated that when she thinks of student activism, she thinks of awareness groups.

In order to be an activist you have to be aware of something. I think it can look as simple as, you know, hosting a screening or the kind of events that in and of themselves are to raise awareness or to support that kind of mindset of proposing something that needs to change or kind of raising awareness.

Daniel stated that he thought activism is “drawing awareness to certain issues,” or to simply “bring to light certain things, inform people about a particular issue.” Added Allison, “It’s a very mind-oriented community, in terms of making an argument for, gatherings support from within, processes within the community.”

According to Justin, “Honestly, a lot of clubs on campus aren’t really looking to make that big a change in terms of the issue itself. You see a lot more clubs promoting more awareness than actually doing something.”

Other participants also identified growth happening in learning how to interact and contribute to a community. Sydney said her activism has “given me an opportunity to engage other people in other types of communities and given me first-hand experiences, rather than just learning or talking about it, or head knowledge.” These experiential experiences “have made me more willing to be controversial with people or willing to engage people in discussions.” According to Daniel, activism helps students develop the courage and ability to share their opinions without the fear of offending others. He said students need to engage in activism “because if they
don’t, they will always be apprehensive about voicing their opinion and feel like they
don’t have the language and means to do that.”

**Subtheme: Leadership training.** According to the study participants, the
stereotypical Wheaton student has a “Type A” personality and is full of ambition.
They are image-conscious and look for opportunities to position themselves post-
college for positions of influence. This can often take the shape of assuming formal
positions of power and leadership in traditional systems. According to Maya, her
involvement has helped her become “a stronger leader and a stronger person,”
allowing her to interact with people different than herself.

One student activist in the focus group interview indicated that activism at
Wheaton College is influenced by people’s aspirations for leadership.

*(Wheaton) is full of fighters, but you fight to be the one making the
rules, not to be the one who is challenging the rules. So you fight to
be…that leader. You will be the one in government. So now, you
aren’t going to challenge the government because that is going to
interfere with your political career.*

This mindset was also apparent in the students’ respect for authority.
According to a focus group participant, “we’ve been taught in many cases that
authority should be respected.” Many of the student activists subscribe to notions of
compliance to authority and positioning themselves to be the beneficiaries of that
respect once they have assumed their own positions of power. This results in
Wheaton students being attracted to institutional leaders and desiring a connection to
them, not to challenge them. While the students were interested in challenging ideas,
they did not seem particularly inclined to challenge an opponent’s positional power.

Participants often saw that assuming positions of leadership and authority in
campus organizations gave them additional access to institutional decision-makers,
resulting in more success in their activism. One focus group participant said that students who want to work on an issue would typically start a petition or schedule a meeting with the College’s president or other institutional leader. “A lot of us know important people, and so were are used to going through these modes of getting what we want accomplished, rather than just protesting and hoping someone listens to us.”

When asked to describe their own activism, most of the student activists described student leadership and active involvement in the Wheaton Student Government and campus clubs and organizations through the Student Activities Office. On the SAO departmental website the first value listed is “dynamic leadership experiences,” where intentional leadership development helps prepare student “to become more fully who God has called them to be” (Student Activities Office, 2013, para. 1). As a result, the stated goal for this leadership development at Wheaton is “to encourage the intention of the heart and mind helping students grow in Christ-like leadership as servants in God’s kingdom” (para. 1).

According to staff member, Charles, most campus change happens through its student leaders, particularly within the structure of Student Government.

We take our student leaders very seriously. We go through rigorous hiring processes. And when we get people in those positions, if they come to us and say “we don’t think this is happening very well, we think we can do better,” I think without fail…everyone across the board at the college really listens.

Carlos said that the Student Government is a “powerful machine for change at Wheaton. They are really valued and have a significant voice.” Justin said that while other student groups have an influence of what happens at Wheaton, “if you are wanting to do something on campus or you want to talk about an issue, you would go through Student Government.”
One critic of this systemization of leadership is Owen, who said that only legitimizing leadership through official clubs creates a leadership vacuum on campus. “When student leadership is all sucked up into the official organizations, it leaves less room for spontaneous student activism to arise because they are too busy.”

**Subtheme: Faculty and staff guidance.** Wheaton provides students faculty and staff for guidance and mentorship within established structures of activism. Study participants indicated that encouragement from faculty and staff was instrumental to the success of student activism at Wheaton. Being a small residential college, there are opportunities for interaction with large parts of the campus community, including faculty across different disciplines and the college’s upper administration. According to Carlos, the institution is proactively “setting educationally-relevant topics to get students energized and aware of what’s going on, and we are responding and partnering with them.”

Maya said she appreciates the mentoring and investment Wheaton’s administration, faculty, and staff offers to students, but also acknowledges that students who want to be active must be able to navigate the College’s strong focus on community and relationships.

I think that in many ways that our relationships with the administration and the faculty and staff make or break our activism. When we feel encouraged or empowered by those around us and by those in authority over us, we tend to flourish. And those that feel less connected to the faculty, administration, or staff very likely will not be active at all.

Study participants described faculty members as the most significant source of support to student activism at Wheaton. “I think our faculty are a huge source of influence, and they are bringing a lot of these issues up in the classroom already. And that’s where students are getting these ideas,” said Carlos, who also saw a correlation
between the level of faculty and student interaction and the effectiveness of the activism. Student activists are primarily connected to faculty members through the advisement and classes of their academic major, as well through their campus clubs. For any club to be recognized officially there has to be a faculty member who has committed to advising the club. Faculty member, Kimberly, said she senses the weight of her influence when she challenges her students in class to engage in a particular issue in a particular way, generally, “they go do it!”

Staff members, particularly in the department of Student Development, were also seen as supportive in helping promote student activism. Dylan stated that staff supported activism by their active interest in students and willingness to help them with their events. The Student Activities Office and its staff were described as most directly involved with this activism. Allison said she believes there is a strong message of encouragement to activism “with establishing a whole area for social justice clubs under the Student Activities Office.”

Even though this office was seen as one of the biggest sources of red tape in student clubs and activities, they were also seen as one of the most supportive. According to Brooke, although there is a lot paperwork and bureaucracy associated with the SAO processes (“that’s just how it works”), the “people at the Student Activities Office want to make sure that students are participating what they think is relevant and they are very active about trying to help you in doing that.” Other supportive departments were the Office of Christian Outreach and the Office of Multi-cultural Development.

Campus administrators were seen as supportive of student activism as long as that activism did not create controversy for the College. They were seen as conservative and protectors of campus tradition, but were willing to listen to student
concerns. They were also promoters of activism through certain programs and in chapel. Charles said that while Wheaton’s vice-presidents were the gatekeepers for change on campus, students with issues to discuss were always welcome to meet directly with the president.

Most of the student activists stated an appreciation for and a comfort with the President Ryken’s approach with students. According to Allison, with Dr. Ryken the students “feel like they have a partner administration” in their activities. Ethan said,

President Ryken is pretty awesome. He knows lots of students by name and will stop and say “hi” to you on campus or after chapel, or have people over for game night, so he’s got a really good rapport with students.

Brooke recalled feeling encouraged from an interaction she had one time with the president. “I’m really excited to see what you guys are going to be doing this year!” he exclaimed when he learned of her club leadership.

“Activism” as a Threat to Campus Culture

The second theme that emerged was that the term “activism” is often seen as a threat within Wheaton’s conservative Christian campus culture. With largely homogenous campus environments, patterns of belief and behavior can be threatened with a push for change inherent with activism. Many within these communities also associate activism with liberalism. Finally, many people on these campuses have an aversion to conflict, which they describe as typical of broader evangelical Christianity. Student activist, Maya, said only conservative types of activism succeeds at Wheaton. “I think sometimes people fear change will destroy the foundation that we have.”
For Jonathan, the fundamental tension at Wheaton is the question, “What is the Good News? Is our concern mostly for social justice or is it for [saving] souls?” He said some have a concern that social justice issues are “moving people away from the conviction that you have to be born again,” and that a salvation about “redemption and reconciliation is much harder to get a handle on.” He identified Wheaton as a place of “bounded faith,” which is easy to situate yourself in the world. “Either you have been transformed [by salvation] or you haven’t.” But he challenged that activism has a place within this framework. “Activism can mean not only social activism, it can be activism in terms of understanding and sharing your faith, too.”

According to Allison, “Within the broader Christian world there’s not a great understanding of what social activism is.” Owen said that in Wheaton’s culture “activism apart from evangelism is problematic.” He gave the example of the time the former Wheaton president, Duane Litfin, noticed a rise in the amount of student activism on campus. Owen said he responded to that rise by making evangelism the focus in his chapel talks for an entire year, “because, I think, he felt like activism was replacing a verbal proclamation of the Gospel.”

Owen also shared the time President Litfin was featured in a story in the alumni publication, *Wheaton Magazine*, about current student activists. In the article, Owen said Litfin sent the message, “Don’t worry alumni. These students are activists, but they are still really Christians and they are still actually sharing Jesus with people. So don’t think they are out there just trying to change the world for the world’s sake.”

Owen said that although this is improving, Wheaton leadership is still “very image conscious” and are very aware how the institution is perceived. “We feel that we are representing the Gospel and our mission, so we should care.” But that concern becomes “a bit debilitating because we get oversensitive and worry too much that our
students are going to do something to offend people. Well, they are college students. They should be offending somebody!”

According to faculty member Kimberly, “Sometimes at Wheaton people do have this sort of pietistic strain…sometimes they will pray rather than act.” She gave an example of working with a national advocacy group and a related campus student group. The national organization regularly asks her why can not she get her students more involved, to which she responds, “because they are praying. They are so busy praying.” Kimberly has also asked that same student group to invite her to speak at their meetings on some important issues related to their organization, but they have chosen not to because “it would push them towards a sort of alternative form of engagement with which they are not terribly comfortable.”

*Subtheme: Homogenous campus environment.* According to the study participants, most of the students who attend the College come from similar backgrounds, hold similar personal views, and behave in ways consistent with the mission, structure, and activities of Wheaton. One focus group participant called the campus community a homogenous group of White, middle-class, and suburban students from Christian families, believing the same way, having “nice disposition[s],” and who are “complacent with authority.” Daniel stated there was a “scarcity of differing beliefs” on the campus and “there is really not a whole lot of diversity of thought here.” According to Owen, “A lot of students are pretty invested in the status quo, the social and religious status quo, and so don’t see the benefit in challenging these things.”

According to staff member, Ian, many of the speakers in the College’s chapel program “are challenging students to activism;” however, some participants in the study believed there needed to be more diversity in the selection of chapel speakers.
According to Daniel,

We haven’t heard from a Hindu or Jew or, you know, a Democrat, not to equate those three, but that discourages student activism because it says that while we want you to be a group of people, a group of students, an institution that thinks well, we’re not going to show you every side. We are going to be heavy on one side. So I think that discourages student activism because then you just don’t want to fight for anything that is unpopular. You don’t want to fight for anything that the institution doesn’t agree with. I think that discourages student activism on campus, anything that would give you a scarlet letter, really.

The homogenous nature of the campus is quite apparent when it comes to race. According to staff member Owen, “Race conversations are difficult on this campus because we prize unity,” which often gets interpreted as the need for commonality. According to Parker,

You get a lot of push back from the majority, the average majority student on campus here…I’m just trying to be a voice as a majority member to other majority members and also trying to communicate solidarity with minority members. I very much see this as an issue that we need to be engaging with this better. So that has been something in the last five years that I’ve seen a lot of progress with. But you also still see a lot of tension that’s still consistent, but it’s gotten better since my freshman year, for sure.

Subtheme: Association with liberalism. According to several study participants, there is a Wheaton culture of associating activism and activists with liberalism. Dylan said a lot of students come to the college with a negative conception of activism, associating it with “those crazy liberals” and with “issues with other things they don’t like.” Ethan said some students might not want to get involved in activism because they do not want “to be associated with a liberal issue.” Jocelyn said that students usually see activism as political or liberal. “This is a very conservative campus, so it’s not necessarily a popular thing.”
Brooke said that she thinks the majority of students on campus would negatively associate the term “activism” with “protesting in front of abortion clinics or Occupy Wall Street,” but are almost all interested and supportive of pursuing justice. Ethan also said that some students on campus view activism as liberal and negative, often associating it with organizations like Greenpeace, PETA, and Occupy Wall Street. He said that these students are not necessarily the majority, with many others on campus viewing activism as a “component of our Christian identity.”

Activism around issues perceived as liberal does not work well on campus. Ethan expressed this through the hypothetical formation of a pro-choice group on campus. That creation would have “some barriers” among the student body and “would just cause tension, for sure, in every step in the process.” He was unsure whether or not students would even be able to charter the club on campus or find enough people to be involved. “Creating that kind of activism, that kind of movement, would be problematic.”

Subtheme: Conflict avoidance. According to Charles, there is an underlying tone in the campus culture to maintain the status quo and avoid the uncomfortable nature of conflict sometimes inherent in activism. “So I think there is an ethos at Wheaton that we don’t know what to do with activism…. It’s symbolic of the fact that we, as an evangelical subculture, don’t know how to handle conflict in general.” Sophie agreed that many Christians have difficulty with disagreement with fellow believers.

We have this mindset, this understanding of being unified in our religion. So there’s this tension between disagreeing on issues, but still wanting to love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, knowing that we have more things in common than we have differences.
She said that how people engage each other over disagreement is more important than the issue itself. Charles said one goal for the institution is to create a safe environment where Christian community members can engage in conflict with civility. “If we can find a way to model and teach civility in the midst of conflict, then I think that will be an indirect and a direct way to encourage more activism.”

While students on campus may believe in certain causes, they generally do not publically express viewpoints that are different than those held within the campus culture. Daniel said that while some of this is typical of his generation (“We are just so nice.”), there should be more freedom at the College to explore alternative viewpoints.

I just think there needs to be kind of an opening up of the doors at Wheaton to let in more dissenting views or challenging views. People that would really push us, serve as a devil’s advocate, if you will, for this campus. But I think the administration is so committed to protecting the students. There is only so much we can know.

Some of the other student activists said they desired more difficult or controversial topics discussed on campus. Ethan said that those at the College “could afford to be a little more abrasive at times.” According to Charlotte, Wheaton community is sometimes too fearful to fully engage some topics well, afraid of the difficult and uncomfortable. “I wish the campus put more pressure, as a whole, to engage in some conversations that need to be had, in raising awareness for some things that needs to be raised.”

Kevin stated that there is an idea on campus that speaking out negatively is unacceptable for Christians, despite the Biblical story of Jesus, “the ultimate activist,” angrily turning over the moneylenders’ tables in the temple.

Everybody’s still got that old sense of pietistic paranoia…so when students get involved it’s not usually out of this real sense of rip-
roaring rebellion. Again, they are not rebelling against what they see at the college. Sometimes I wouldn’t mind if they found out some of the things that the college does and rebel against it. It wouldn’t hurt a bit. But they’re a very mild-mannered bunch, so it’s usually low-key.

Ministry Activism

The third theme that emerged from the Wheaton data was the idea of ministry activism. Half of the study participants indicated a connection between their activism and preparation for and participation in ministry. Ministry was seen as both how their activism was animated and the purpose for it: ministry as activism and activism for ministry. Students felt a call to minister to others through their actions as part of their faith commitments. A global outreach focus was a subtheme that emerged from the data.

For some, their activism has led them to select majors that will help them pursue a ministry career, particularly in non-church community organizations or in formal church roles with an emphasis on community organizing. This involvement has influenced Charlotte to work in “Christian community development.”

I do feel like I am called to activism and ministry in a way that is apart from the institution of the church, or anything like that, because I find it has the most impact a good bit of the time.

Daniel said that all of the activism on campus is well intentioned and “meant to really bring light to the humanity of all people and the fact that they are made in God’s image.” Dylan described four specific beneficiaries of ministry activism; those who are directly “impacted by the issues” being addressed; the students who are learning how to think, care, and act to bring change; students and the church who are changing the way they see the world; and those being witnessed to in the broader church.
Most of the students articulated their activism as helping them influence society through their personal faith and resulting ministry. Ethan said that his activism and theology defines how he views and approaches his life. He said that he believes that God has a redemption plan for the world, and although God is the only one who can bring it about Christians are to be “signs that are pointing towards that truth.” According to Daniel, some Christians are so internally minded that they feel it would be a waste of time to work on societal problems that can only be resolved by God. “This won’t happen on this side of eternity so we won’t busy ourselves with it,” he said of that perspective. So they wait and “pray fervently” for Christ to come back and redeem the world.

According to Brooke, her activism cannot be unconnected to her faith. She said she wants to be “relevant” with her “gifts and abilities that suit that unique situation that they need me within or that God places me within.” She added, “I want to be a part of change, but not just for change’s sake, but altering a worldview for people.”

Many of the students connected a vision of ministry to the concept of social justice. Dylan said that a “call of the Gospel to justice” is a “hugely undervalued aspect of Christianity, particularly in evangelical circles,” although he sees that changing. According to Sophie, Christians are called to be active in social justice issues, “whether that is caring for the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, or just putting more abstractly, being truth-seekers.” She described social justice as being vital and “probably necessary to a Christian’s life” in attempting to “live like Christ.” “And how did Christ live? He cared about the social justice issues of his time.”

Student Brooke said that student interest and curiosity about justice issues is increasing at Wheaton. While this is “very cerebral and intellectual at the moment,”
she stated that she sees potential for more as these students become more educated on these issues. “I think we are still in the cultivating stage right now, but hopefully soon it will lead into action.” Several clubs at Wheaton College focus on making the campus community aware of social justice issues.

Many of these social justice student clubs have joined together to form a group called Justice Coalition to “think critically about justice issues from a Christ-centered perspective, to create programs that raise awareness for justice-related issues, and to collaborate with other groups (and member clubs) with the Wheaton College community” (Justice Coalition, 2013, para. 1). This coalition is comprised of six member clubs covering justice issues of environmental sustainability, feminism and gender inequality, human rights and victims of violence and sexual exploitation, nonviolence and conflict resolution, public health, and an anti-abortion position. The Justice Coalition describes their activities as regularly meeting together “to facilitate awareness and collaboration among students” around justice issues, creating spaces to reflect and pray about justice issues, and occasionally creating events “for the student body to encourage development as instruments of God’s justice” (How we work section, para. 1). Their primary event is Justice Week, a weeklong “diverse set of opportunities for students to be aware of student groups” that are working “to advance justice and to think critically about and take action for justice in the world” (Justice Week section, para. 1).

Subtheme: Global outreach focus. Wheaton College activists described a campus environment that focuses more globally than locally. According to study participants, Wheaton has a rich history of international missions that influences the collective mindset. A focus group participant said, “We are famous for our missionaries, so if you have a legacy like that you tend to focus in the areas that you
have a legacy in.” According to Sophie, the result is a community culture that promotes and values “missional opportunities.”

One particular program, the Office of Christian Outreach (OCO), was consistently mentioned throughout the interviews as being influential in student activism, running local and international missions programs, of which the international opportunities are the most popular according to the student activist participants. Sydney described all of OCO’s ministries “are seeking to either promote activism or engage students in the actual act of activism.” Another often-mentioned program was the Human Needs and Global Resources (HNGR) program. Sydney also commented on the value of the HNGR program as being an opportunity to be immersed in another culture and being able to learn their differences in “perspective” and “worldview.” In that context, students learn about how their own talents can contribute to this culture.

The emphasis on global outreach is apparent in Wheaton’s mission statement. “Wheaton College serves Jesus Christ and advances His Kingdom through excellence in liberal arts and graduate programs that educate the whole person to build the church and benefit society worldwide” (Wheaton College, Mission, 2012, Our mission section, para. 1). This global mindset permeates the entire campus, serving as a priority of the college’s president and cabinet. One of the institution’s stated “strategic priorities for Wheaton’s future” is to “globalize a Wheaton education” because “we belong to a global church and want to better reflect the Kingdom of God” (Wheaton College, Globalize, 2013, para. 1). Part of that plan is to double the number of students engaged in cross-cultural academic experiences by the year 2020 and by “developing a theological statement that values globalization and initiates a shift in how our community understands itself and engages others” (para. 2), as well
as a host of other academic, structural, and financial changes that will promote this plan.

According to faculty member, Kevin, many of his faculty peers also have a global focus as it relates to activism. He added that in his program faculty members encourage students to do research and international outreach.

We are very encouraging in that kind of outreach activism. I’d say across campus there is a strong encouragement in that. We do have strategic faculty members in almost all our departments who have a very circumspect and global perspective. So the global perspective activism is something we are really working towards.

Participants described students who participate in Wheaton’s international programs as changed people when they return. These students are often the conveyers of issue awareness on campus, particularly in a global context. While the international programs are reportedly quite popular among Wheaton College students, local community programs struggle to get participants and sometimes have to be canceled due to a lack of interest. Some activists questioned why it was so difficult and scary for Wheaton students to leave their suburban Chicago campus to the inner city, but have no hesitancy to travel across the globe to underdeveloped locations that are often more dangerous for tourists. According to Daniel,

I think a lot of the students are scared to go to Hyde Park or the South Side [of Chicago]. They will willingly go to some indigenous community in like, I don’t know, Cameroon, but if you tell them to go to some neighborhoods on the South Side, they are like, no. Which is weird. I don’t know why there is that discrepancy.

Student activist Jocelyn was more critical of the globally minded Wheaton students who are “inactive” and only interested in “fashionable problems of the world.”

We like to sit down over coffee and solve AIDS orphans, child soldiers, and perhaps terrorism, natural disasters, problems of lack of
infrastructure in third-world countries... You know, we like to talk about these sorts of global issues and solve them over a nice cappuccino because we don't go out for beers here. We are less comfortable with things closer to home.

Sydney said that students at Wheaton desire international experiences over local ones because that is the “sexy thing,” the “cool thing to do.” She said many students want to go evangelize to people in Europe because it appears more attractive and fun. This tension is interesting to her because “they are very apt to love somebody in another country who is living in the slums, but they don’t want to love their Chicago neighbors.” Charlotte also described a frustration with the lack of attention to local issues. She wished her peers would realize “you don’t have to be an activist for international issues. Please just look at what is outside your back door.”

Summary of Themes

Student activism at Wheaton College was most apparent through three emergent themes: structural supports to activism, activism as a threat to campus culture, and ministry activism. Structures of student activism were described as providing growth opportunities and leadership training through the guidance of key faculty and staff. Activism was seen as a threat to many community members within Wheaton’s conservative and homogenous campus culture, negatively associating it with liberalism and conflict. Finally, students understood their activism as a ministry, helping them to live out their faith and prepare for lives of global influence.

Cross-Case Analysis

While much can be learned from each individual case, the comparison and contrast of the cases through a multi-case analysis allows a degree of generalizability and power unavailable through a single-case study (Yin, 2003). A process of pattern-
making and cross-case synthesis was employed across the themes and subthemes that have arisen independently amidst each case’s variances and unique contexts. While large, sweeping generalities are not possible through this analysis, nor in any qualitative study, this cross-case analysis moves the researcher closer to ideas of the nature and character of similar Christian college environments around student activism than each single-case analysis would.

The two cases were compared and contrasted using their emergent themes by analyzing patterns and making generalizations. After a careful analysis of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the case data within the Calvin and Wheaton contexts, several thematic consistencies and variations became apparent through pattern-making. It was determined the best way to present the cross-case analysis was through the three research questions.

Research Question 1: How Do Current Students, Studying at a Christian College or University, Understand the Concept of Activism?

Student Activists at Christian Colleges Understand Activism the Way Their Institutions Teach Them

Although there is familiarity with the term “activism” among Christian college students, there is no shared understanding of it among students beyond vague notions of the 1960’s protest-style activism and the more recent Occupy movement. While some view that style of activism with admiration and almost an idealized notion, most students are mystified by the term or recognize the negative associations within their campus, families, and home church communities. These students are pragmatic in their belief that this type of advocacy would not work in their environments. Instead they prefer the concept and term “social justice” to describe their commitments.
With no shared understanding of activism, they are generally open to institutional influence in shaping this concept. With strong college mission statements that closely integrate academic and campus life in support of them, as well as generally employing faculty and staff and enrolling like-minded students consistent with them, the educational enterprise itself shapes this activism. This activism becomes embedded through the structures of the college and in the relationships with faculty, staff, and students. The structures established by each institution set the stage for students to engage in and understand this involvement. These structures provide students a conception of activism issues and methods and provide them a framework in which to act.

Through these structures and people students are guided to and through their activism, engaging issues and methods that are safe within the campus community’s theological framework. This support is offered to activism through formal institutional structures and about issues they deem appropriate, essentially controlling the conversation and its participants or presenting and promoting one particular view of an issue. The students who actively respond to this influence become activists who have engaged in the formal structures and have been mentored by the faculty and staff within them. By the time the activists are upper class students they share and are able to articulate the institution’s concept of activism.

Student Activists at Christian Colleges Understand Activism Through an Educational Paradigm

As a result of the institution’s influence, Christian college student activists often understand activism while on campus through an educational paradigm, both as preparation for and method of activism. This goal and method of activism is
promoted and reinforced by institutional programs and structures, which is hardly surprising within a culture of an educational institution. While students sometimes felt constrained by these structures, they fully embrace the associated benefits of support and mentorship that aids in their personal growth.

For the individual activist the very process of engaging in activism involves becoming more aware and knowledgeable about a specific issue. In addition to education around a specific issue, growth also happens in developing skills in leadership and learning to be an effective activist. In this respect, this involvement becomes a training ground for activism within the safety of a protected and supportive campus environment. There they are able to develop specific skills like determining best methods to engage particular issues in a particular context, effective community organizing, leveraging relationships with campus leaders, and working within and overcoming barriers of the existing structural and cultural environment. Growth in the individual activist also happens at a personal level, serving as a catalyst for their development of identity, voice, and agency, and instilling in them confidence to affect change. Students also make discoveries of new passions and learn ways to interact with people who are different from them.

Education is also identified as their preferred method of activism, specifically through issue awareness. While they are aware of other methods, student activists almost always view the dissemination of information about issues as the most effective method of activism in their campus communities. Promoting education through issue awareness takes various forms at each institution, some active and others more passive. The active forms, like demonstrations or petitions, are generally merely mechanisms to achieve awareness about a particular issue. Common passive activities to promote learning about particular issues happens through expert
presentations, panel discussions, documentary screenings, and awareness events designed to expose participants to new ideas or cultures, often for the first time.

Research Question 2: What are the Institutional Facilitating Factors or Barriers in Relation to Student Activism and How Do They Shape Student Activities?

Institutional Structures Control Student Activism

Campus community encouragement is offered to student activists for acceptable issues and approved methods of activism. This support is given to activism through formal institutional structures and about issues they deem appropriate. Students believe most topics can be discussed on campus, but the institution’s involvement most often either controls the conversation and its participants, or presents and promotes one particular view of that issue. This approach is often seen as protection of students from worldly influences, and concern for the institution’s public image and the desires of institutional supporters.

This support is most often shown through the establishment of and financial investment in campus programs and structures to support student organizations. The Student Development Office is the primary institutional support for this activism, committing staff to leadership training, service-learning, student government, and a comprehensive system of student clubs. Defined systems are established to help students navigate institutional barriers, maximize student involvement, minimize risk, and create well-designed events. Activism that works outside established college systems is not supported and is almost always prohibited on campus. The trade-off to this support is that it often only supports that limited concept of activism, one that can fit within each college’s theological, cultural, and constituent commitments.
Administrators and staff control activism on campus through these structures by assuming the role of interpreters of acceptable issues to be engaged and their methods of engagement. Student activists recognize, respect, and empathize with these gatekeepers for their challenging roles on campus. The manner in which these employees create policy and respond to situations significantly influences how student activists view them: as barriers to be overcome or partners to collectively work through a difficult issue.

Both Calvin and Wheaton were described as contexts with leaders who often responded fearfully to controversy, which, in turn, had implications for student activism on campus. While all colleges and universities are concerned with their image, both case contexts were noted for how this concern affected its approach to student activism and, in effect, created a barrier to it. Some perceived this culture of fear less dramatically within the bureaucratic design of systems and structures of student activism, where policies, paperwork, staff and faculty advisors, and the vague sense of repercussions keeps student activism safe, prescribed, and monitored. Study participants described the dissonance between what they are taught and what is modeled.

Calvin was described as being “risk-averse,” “working from a model of risk reduction,” “attempting to avoid controversy,” and “peculiarly attuned to constituent desires.” Any criticism of donors or related companies or industries is deemed “off limits.” This fear was described through examples such as heavy-handed responses by the Board (Memogate), the last-minute cancellation of a scheduled band on campus due to the band’s name (New Pornographers), and the ushering away of a student protestor displaying a banner. With strong denominational ties, the board of trustees and upper administration were seen as especially sensitive to any actions that would
cause controversy and have to be explained to the Christian Reformed Church. This sensitivity sometimes leads to policy and institutional responses that are incongruent with how some participants interpret the college’s mission. Students are encouraged to become activists as long as they receive permission and are able to articulate a Biblical and theologically Reformed rationale for that activism.

This culture of control at Wheaton was most apparent in regard to diversity, liberalism, personal and institutional image, conflict, and a perceived threat to conservative Christian culture. As one student stated, “People fear change will destroy the foundation that we have.” Some participants described the institution working against diversity in the name of Christian unity, which creates unintended effects on how racial differences are viewed on campus. Many students are also fearful to work against “anything that is unpopular” or for “anything that the institution doesn’t agree with,” or “anything that would give you a scarlet letter.”

Wheaton was also seen as struggling to reconcile conservative Christian norms and values with activism, a tradition that declares, “activism apart from evangelism is problematic.” Some people were described within these cultures as holding the view that activism is liberal or worldly, with an incongruence of liberalism and Christianity. Without explicitly stating it, the implicit message was that some do not believe liberal beliefs are Christian ones. By extension, for those who associate activism with liberalism, activism is not an acceptable Christian behavior. Therefore, students desiring to engage in activism not only have to navigate bureaucratic campus barriers, but are also faced with the prospect of having their Christianity called into question. This potential judgment is a significant barrier; given the strong evangelical campus culture and the desire of students to fit in, connect with campus leaders, and train for lives of influence. Many students end up
learning to safely work within sanctioned and promoted structures and organizations and minimize the risk of a damaged reputation.

Faculty Members are the Most Influential on Campus in Promoting Student Activism

Faculty members have an important role in the lives of student activists, through their courses, advisement in campus clubs, presentations and programs on campus, participation in and invitation to students to join in activism through their disciplines, individual mentorship, and the observable lives they lead. While these faculty members generally work through the formal systems and structures of the institution, they reflect an independence that sometimes challenges students beyond those systems. In fact, some faculty members promote ideas and methods that sometimes run in opposition to the campus cultural norms. The most effective faculty members invest in students’ lives and promote an idea of faithful activism. Demonstrating activism that integrates Christian faith and an academic perspective, and models a personal commitment and investment in an issue serves as an inspiration to student activists.

Student Development professionals are also seen as a major source of influence of activism on campus, although not as influential as faculty. Their influence is primarily exercised through the programs and structures they oversee. These structures provide a framework from which students can organize and receive funding. Key staff in these departments also serve as educators in contextualizing their activist activities, and as providers of interpersonal support and mentoring. These departments also served as gatekeepers to activism, making determinations about what issues and methods were acceptable on campus.
Administrators, as well as other high level campus leaders including vice-presidents and institutional board members, were seen as influential, but less so than the rest. They were often seen as nameless and faceless makers of policy that controlled the direction of the campus, ruling what is proper to engage. There was a common perception that while these campus leaders were open to addressing most issues, they did so with some fear of how this engagement would be viewed by college supporters and outsiders.

The college president was most often associated with this authority, and much of this influence to activism tied to their personality and philosophy of education and leadership. Despite the actual stances or policy decisions made, the community reception and attitude of them depended on the president’s leadership style and personality. For example, at Calvin the president was not seen as a leader the campus community embraced and with whom they desired a relationship. His resistance to certain activism was more offensive to the Calvin activists and seen as something to overcome. At Wheaton their new president had already made a good impression on campus by active involvement with students. While some of his messages also resisted activism, the manner in which he conducted himself endeared him to the campus community. This made them empathize with his decisions in difficult situations, making them want to work with the president around areas of disagreement. For students effective presidential leadership around activism was seen as more connected to personal and leadership style than policy decisions.
Student Activists Embrace and Work within the Institutional Systems of Activism

Students are reconciled to work within institutional systems in their activism. While they recognize the limits of these systems and are sometimes annoyed by the bureaucracy associated with them, students empathize with administrators’ roles in leading a college and managing constituents. They are also pragmatic in their desire to benefit from these systems, accessing funds for their clubs and organizations and receiving support from college personnel, especially Student Development staff and faculty mentors. Some students strive for leadership positions within these structures in order to have access to campus leaders and influence their decisions through these relationships.

Student activists readily adopt the institution’s cultural attitudes and understandings of activism. The type of student who would be accepted and enrolled in Christian colleges and universities may already hold these beliefs prior to college or be predisposed to readily adopt them. These students primarily come from conservative Christian backgrounds and respect roles of authority. Joined with the Millennial student characteristic of working within systems and desiring to be active participants in decision-making, these students simply accept the existing system without challenge. Although these student activists push beyond their peers in issue awareness and action for change, most are content to work within the models and understandings presented to them by staff and faculty, even in the face of dissonance.
Research Question 3: How Do Students Make Meaning of Their Activism within the Christian Campus Culture as They Think about Their Future Activism?

Christian Student Activists Make Meaning of Their Activism through Their Institution’s Constructed Meaning

While there is no evidence of a shared concept of the term “activism” for students coming to these colleges, students adopt the institution’s constructed meaning of activism, which is influenced by the sponsoring religious denomination and religious and cultural traditions. Study participants described that only faith-inspired activism is legitimate for Christians. The characteristic of this activism is one that cares for others and promotes the Christian faith. Many articulated this through Christian social justice, emphasizing that it is necessary to not only work for justice for people as an end to itself, but primarily for the changing of worldviews.

The culture of student activism is different at every institution, resulting in different attitudes and corresponding methods. This is apparent in how the student participants viewed themselves as activists at the two case study contexts. Several students at each college were reluctant to describe themselves as activists, but for seemingly different reasons. Calvin student participants generally had a positive association with the term “activism;” however, their reluctance with the term seemed to come from their humble opinion that they had not yet earned the title of “activist” with their own modest engagement.

At Calvin, the activists’ focus is on being agents of renewal in the world. This language of renewal is used within their denomination, the Christian Reformed Church, and is contained in the institution’s mission statement. As a result it is heavily promoted throughout the culture and frames its activism. In fact, there is a campus course specifically about Reformed activism. In all, activism was seen as a foundation of their faith that called them to act to help restore the world to this ideal.
With this backdrop activism is viewed as participating in the renewing of the world to God’s original intent and creation. This is seen as a world of shalom, where relationships and system are in their proper order and are in harmony with each other. These student activists see themselves as ambassadors to this vision to restore the world, using their activism to bring God’s love and justice to others and to invite others to share in this vision. This leads these activists to order their personal lives in accordance to this vision, often living and investing their time in poorer Grand Rapids neighborhoods, using public transportation, and making other intentional choices in living sustainably.

Activism at Calvin was conceived of as gaining awareness of societal power structures and practicing active and local engagement on specific issues. This leads activists to engage in lifestyles of community activism, encouraging several to make current active choices in where they live, what they eat, the type of transportation they use, and whom they engage. Some of their choices were made or altered as they learned more about power and oppressive systems, but this learning did not prevent them from current action. One participant described activism with the appropriate but overused phrase, “think globally, and act locally.” Several students described that their neighborhood activism would likely continue after graduation.

Wheaton students appeared to have a discomfort or negative view of the term “activism,” or were very aware of the negative connotations held by others close to them. These students desired to avoid a negative label and, therefore, were hesitant to identify with it. The institution’s conservative history and current culture instead framed activism as social justice, ministry, leadership, and societal influence.

Most of the Wheaton participants articulated a vision of activism as helping influence society through their personal faith and resulting ministry. This vision also
views the world as broken and not as God designed. While these students do not believe their participation aids in the restoration of the world, something that only God can do, they believe their actions are a reflection of God’s plan. This is seen as a ministry to care for the oppressed as modeled by Jesus and, therefore, be a witness of God’s love. This mindset was often described as missions and community development where Christian activists care for others with the idea that they would, in turn, have an opportunity to witness to a better way of living through Christ.

Wheaton promotes the concept that activism is gaining awareness of global issues and practicing ministry and leadership within positions of power, influence, and authority. As a result, these students grow in knowledge about societal issues through campus-sponsored or approved educational programs while they participate in the available leadership positions within the college’s formal structure. This participation also provides them mentorship from and influence with campus leaders. These students participate in global internships and ministry opportunities for personal growth and to add to their repertoire of college experiences. Wheaton conceives of their entire educational enterprise, including student activism, as producing students who are able to influence societal needs. As a result, many students describe a desire and intent for future positions of influence, for which this activism was offering training.

There is a Growing Cultural Acceptance of Activism Conceived as the Pursuit of Christian Social Justice

Current Christian college students use the term “social justice” to describe why they are involved. While being part of the lexicon in the broader and secular culture for a while, almost to the point of becoming devoid of meaning, the term and
the idea of social justice has been embraced by these students. While there is recognition that this term is still associated with a liberal political agenda among some people, these students are able to articulate that pursuing social justice allows each of them to be an instrument of God’s justice in a broken world. This is aided by a rise in Christian community organizers and writers, like Colson, Perkins, and Wallis, who have emphasized a social justice gospel and a call to work on behalf of the needy and oppressed. These students are also educated and helped by key faculty and staff on their campuses to connect their education, faith, care for others, and citizenship.

Injustice is seen as rooted in the disordering of the world from God’s original intent and creation. Thus, student activist work for social justice is a response to that brokenness. While there is theological disagreement about the nature of the restoration of the world and believers’ participation in it, there is agreement in a Christian call to work on behalf of the Christian view of justice. All bear the responsibility to care for the powerless, oppressed, and needy.

This activism, or social justice work, is seen as a natural out flowing of a person’s faith, and a necessary part of it. Student activists view this work as foundational to living out the faith and witnessing to others. This often manifests in service to others and caring for their immediate needs. Sometimes it involves learning about the systems and structures that are the root of injustice. Whether it results in an incremental renewal of the world or merely serves as a witness to the Christian faith, all see their work as faithfulness to God’s plan for their lives.

Some study participants identified baggage on their campuses with the term “social justice,” especially with the association with liberal political agendas; however, the idea of social justice within a Christian context was fully embraced by
the participants of both cases. Although there was a slight difference in how social justice themes were approached, the idea to seek justice on behalf of others was deemed an important part of a Christian life. In fact, a direct connection was made at each institution through the description of the Bible as a “social justice gospel” and attributing Jesus’ character as one of a person seeking justice.

The differences within each context involved the focus and approach of justice. At Calvin the focus was on the more negative and urgent aspects of injustice, with participants articulating a need to fight injustice. As a result, Calvin students described activism as actively seeking justice for people in real and present disadvantage. This idea was infused through all of the activism issues they identified, believing small and local actions can help fix the “brokenness” of this world toward a more just society. To them social justice was more of process in the “renewing of God’s world.” In fact, Calvin participants saw their ministry to be “agents of renewal” to this broken world. This restorative concept urged them to work to bring relationships and systems into order first established by God.

At Wheaton the focus was more on the concept of social justice in a universal sense, with participants speaking about it in intellectual, Christian, and idyllic terms. Wheaton student activists also tended to group issues of activism under the broad umbrella of social justice in their descriptions, with a few exceptions. The resulting activism promotes the concept of social justice as a world of desired equity and fairness, one originally designed and intended by God. Thus, Christ can only achieve true social justice through an earthly restoration, with people participating through their faith and a hope for Christ’s return. In fact, the idea of social justice unconnected to faith was insufficient and even negative and liberal to some in their campus community. In the Wheaton culture social justice is seen as more of a utopian
state for which to faithfully prepare through more knowledge, increased faith, and ministry to others.

Conclusion

The study findings showed that student activists at Christian colleges understand activism the way their institutions teach them and through an educational paradigm. Also, college faculty members are seen the most influential on campus in promoting student activism. The findings also show there is a growing cultural acceptance of activism conceived as the pursuit of Christian social justice. Finally, student activists embrace and work within institutional systems that control student activism, and that they make meaning of their activism through their institutional construct. These findings are discussed through the study’s conceptual framework and relevant literature in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER V

Summary

This study examined the impact of environments and cultures on student activism at Christian colleges, with a particular focus on the understanding students have of activism, the barriers and facilitating factors to this activism on campus, and the meaning students have for their own activism. Using case study methodology in the context of two institutions, Calvin College and Wheaton College, data were primarily received through a total of 40 interviews, individual and focus group, with student activists, staff, and faculty at these institutions. Data were further triangulated with student newspaper archives and through institutional and external web pages.

Discussion

This study’s findings are now discussed through two lenses. The first lens is through the study’s conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism and organizational culture, particularly within campus structures. The second lens to be discussed is activism as student development. Student development is explored through Lawrence Kohlberg’s Moral Development Theory (1976) and Alexander Astin’s Involvement Theory (1984). These theories and models are viewed in light of the generational characteristics of today’s college student within the context of Christian colleges and universities.

Symbolic Interactionism and Organizational Culture

Student activism at Christian colleges, demonstrated by these two case study institutions, can be viewed through the sociological concept of symbolic
interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 1979; Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1980) and through the study of organizational culture (Musolf, 1992; Polletta, 2008; Sanderlands & Stablein, 1987; Schein, 1996; Smircich, 1983; Yanow, 2000). This can be especially pertinent to how a campus culture, primarily based on interactions with others, can influence how a student activist conceives of herself, acts in response to these social interactions, and makes meaning of these actions. Studying organizational culture helps to pragmatically understand the environment from which individuals interact socially, make meaning through interpretation, and choose to act.

The two case study institutions show members’ homogenous communities and Christian backgrounds influencing their activism. They mostly define student activism as social justice work, with characteristics consistent with the broader Christian culture’s view and process of activism (Todd & Rufa, 2013), and interpreted through their college’s mission and tightly integrated into academic and campus life. This process creates organizational cultures of activism with shared assumptions that direct members’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Schein, 1996) that are defined by the interaction of its members (Sanderlands & Stablein, 1987).

At Calvin, student activists generally base their actions on their understanding that they are to be active agents of renewal in society, working for Christian social justice, and toward shalom (Joldersma, 2001; Plantinga, Jr., 2002; Wolterstorff, 1983), which would closely align with Niebuhr’s (1951) “Christ the transformer of society” type of Christian culture. Calvin’s mission to train student to be “agents of renewal” in the world positively reinforces this, essentially serving as what Charon (1979) describes as a symbol that is commonly understood by all members of the campus community. Students are indoctrinated with this idea early in their college careers with artifacts, such as the textbook written by a former president of its
seminary is used in a first-year course that frames this renewal as seeking justice for humanity. This understanding is also gained through numerous interactions with staff and faculty of their theological tradition who teach them through their courses, student organization advisement, and other formal programs, like the Service-Learning Center, which is run with an activist mentality. The director of the Center even teaches a course in Reformed activism.

The theological message and associated language frequently used on campus, and consistently cited in the study interviews, supports an idea of active engagement, service to others, and the ability to make a real difference in society. The constructive character of the relationship between these artifacts and their creators (Yanow, 2000) is, as a result, that student activists can and should make an active contribution to societal transformation as part of their Christian faith. What can be viewed as a symbolic character of these artifacts and their creators is that Calvin student activists do not readily take on the role of activist, reserving that term for those much more accomplished than they, and through romantic notions of activism in past eras. In this sense, the term activism itself becomes a symbol of idealized activity. The resulting role conflict (Charon, 1979; Stryker, 1980) comes from disunity in symbol interpretation. Instead, their campus culture describes their role not as activists, but agents of renewal in society.

At Wheaton College, student activists see their activism as being witnesses to their faith and by promoting Christian social justice by structural leadership and influence to global society, which would be identified with the “Christ above culture” type in Niebuhr’s (1951) typology and would fit within the political Christian Center (Toews, 1991). This understanding is gained through an institutional history of Christian conservatism, celebrated through their most famous graduate, Rev. Billy
Graham, and through the legacy of involvement in world missions. The college prides itself on its high academic standards, and activism is emphasized in terms of knowledge attainment prior to action. Strong structures and systems are built for activism and leadership development, where students receive guidance and mentorship by staff and faculty to promote this idea of activism.

As such, the idea of leadership is constructed through the relationship of these artifacts and their creators (Yanow, 2000) and becomes a shared symbol and valued role in which to aspire. Wheaton student activists also experience role conflict (Charon, 1979; Stryker, 1980) when the role of activist is placed on them. Coming from conservative cultures that view activism as illegitimate and negatively associate the term with liberalism, these students seek to distance themselves from it, instead preferring to see their roles as leaders. Rather than activists for social or political issues, they see themselves as leaders pursuing social justice.

The leadership mode of activism is comfortable to the typical Wheaton student from similar academic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. So they interpret these messages, or the symbolic character of these artifacts and their creators (Yanow, 2000), as a reinforcement of their previously-held idea of academic achievement leading to positional authority providing opportunities for positive cultural change and ministry. This frees students to engage in activism by focusing on knowledge attainment about activism and issues, through coursework and experiential learning programs; practicing leadership by working with power within campus structures; and preparing themselves for lives of global influence after college.

Student activists clearly absorb their institution’s attitudes regarding activism, and identify themselves through them. Artifacts of mission, coursework, chapel programs, and even behavioral policy are carefully employed across campus to
influence students’ worldviews. The constant interaction between students, professors, administrators, and peers within a variety of campus contexts, like through their classes, in their residence hall, at a sports or arts event, and in their student organizations, gets interpreted and internalized within the activist. It is important that campus leaders understand the complexity of this interaction when advising students, designing programs, and crafting steering documents and policy. Careful alignment and communication of values can create and reinforce powerful learning and agency-building opportunities; however, inconsistency creates dissonance and confusion, disempowering students as they haphazardly navigate the system.

Student Activism Through Campus Structures

Both institutions demonstrate that activism is institutionalized through a variety of structures and programs and embedded in the relationships between faculty, staff, and students, guiding students to and through their activism. Intentional programs and structures have been built to support activism within the educational framework and community culture, as described by Biddix, Somers, and Polman (2009). While Quayle’s (2007) three learning outcomes of activism: “appreciation of differences, cultivation of students’ voices, and connection to global society” (p. 3), are seen at these Christian colleges, additional learning outcomes might also include leadership development, the integration of faith and learning, and a commitment to and participation in social justice.

Although these institutions are open to activism and intentionally design some forms of it with learning outcomes, they are also concerned with their image, especially to outside constituents. Being tuition-driven colleges, all public perception is critical to the securing of new funds, either through donors or new student
enrollments. They are also often accountable to sponsoring denominations or church traditions, which are often represented on the institution’s board of trustees. This is consistent with Polletta’s (2008) institutional schema of culture that is “constitutive of interests and identities but also as circulating through networks, backed up by resources, and employed in the service of organizational agendas” (p. 85). Thus, in regard to student activism, great efforts are made by administrators to proactively influence and present a unified and idealized culture of activism, rather than a culture of student initiated activity on issues and methods deemed important by groups of students, consistent with Schein (1996). This is particularly evident in the message from Wheaton’s former president clarifying the meaning of the student activism written about in an alumni magazine, describing it as “sharing Jesus” instead of change “for the world’s sake.”

These institutions dominate their cultural schema through resource and power, accomplishing it through the investment of funds and staff in the creation and support of a certain type of activism, consistent with Polletta (2008). This is illustrated by the organizational structures built to involve students in narrowly defined activism, primarily through official student organizations and college-sponsored programs. Rewards of resources and access to staff and faculty members entice students to participate in these structures, which they do. Institutional power is enacted through the enforcement of policies and behavioral codes, with the persistent threat of punitive action or the denial of resources and access, consistent with Musolf (1992). These student activists challenge few of these policies and behavioral codes, which is consistent with typical Millennial characteristics of being trusting, desiring to work within existing structures, desiring access to campus leaders, and conventional in their actions (Howe & Strauss, 2000). This connection to the establishment seems to
work for these students and feels natural to them, as long as the structure addresses their interests.

All cultures engage in negotiation and compromise of espoused values, deeper values, and time-sensitive situational requirements (Schein, 1996), which is true with the occasional attempts of student activism that respond to situations outside the established norms. The student activists at these institutions generally do not attempt to radically change the existing culture based on individual and political opportunity, but seek to make changes within the existing structures and culture when issues arise. This is consistent with Polletta’s (2008) view of institutional mobilization being changes to familiar and routinized practices. When student activists are faced with situations they view as inconsistent with the shared cultural values, whether it is through a campus building project that violates the cultural value of caring for creation, or through the fallout of a racial slur on a free speech board that violates the cultural values on race, responses are measured, modest, and through approved means. Petitions are signed, letters are written, meetings are held, and educational programs are scheduled, rather than attempting to decouple power from authority (Musolf, 1992) by participating in disruptive actions, like a campus race riot or being tied to a tree. While these students desire and sometimes act to be heard by campus leaders, they generally do not attempt to leverage power to force change.

Student Activism as Student Development

These institutions teach students that student activism is cognitive and affective growth, of which one component is the development of the individual activist. This growth is described as becoming more aware and knowledgeable about a specific issue, as well as developing skills in leadership and learning specific skills
to be an effective activist. Students also grow in confidence, find their voice, and become empowered in their ability to affect change.

Involvement Theory

This development fits well with Alexander Astin’s Involvement Theory (1984, 1996), which states students should proportionately gain cognitively and affectively through their involvement in college. These students also display higher levels of satisfaction in their college experience. The student activists at Calvin and Wheaton were very active, perhaps even too involved and busy in their coursework, student activities, participation in multiple student organizations, service-learning opportunities, community involvement, and domestic and international study and mission trips. While student grades and general satisfaction levels are beyond the scope of this study, impressions were given throughout the study that the activist participants performed well academically and were satisfied with their college experience, which is consistent with this theory.

Faculty interactions were seen as the greatest influence for student activism in this study. Astin (1984) states that higher student-faculty interactions are the largest influence of student satisfaction. “Students who interact frequently with faculty members are more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience” (p. 304). This included peer friendships, courses taken, academic environment, and the college administration. Study participants described access to key faculty members as a benefit to activists working within institutional structures. The satisfaction in college described in the theory apparently extends specifically to satisfaction in activism.
Peer involvement in activism was one factor participants described as influencing their level of involvement. Astin (1996) identified peer involvement as the biggest and most favorable source of cognitive and affective development for students. This student activism study showed that while peer involvement was certainly found to be important in influencing the degree of activism involvement, most of the cognitive and affective development was gained through interactions with faculty and staff. This engagement with faculty and staff through their involvement in activism led to growth in awareness of the complexities of many social issues. It also helped in the development of identity, voice, agency, and confidence to affect change, as well as discovering new passions and ways to interact with people who are different from them. It would seem that Calvin and Wheaton provide a good model of involvement for other Christian institutions, providing high levels of opportunity for involvement and leadership that are proactively designed for student growth and closely advised by committed faculty and staff.

Moral Development Theory

One of the cognitive areas of development -- morality -- can be viewed through Kohlberg’s Moral Development Theory (1976). While study participants never identified growth in terms of moral development, student activists were clearly in a developmental process of understanding complexities of power, differences of view, rights of individuals and the common good. Most of these students would rate at stage five (“Human Rights and Social Welfare Morality.”) Their focus on social justice and personal faith integration would put them at a higher moral stage than most of their peers, who would likely fall into stages three (“Interpersonally Normative Morality”) and four (“Social System Morality,”) which is consistent with
Chambers and Phelps’ (1993) assertion that student activists and protesters measure higher in moral development.

In terms of college environment, the two case study institutions certainly display characteristics that have been shown to impede moral development. Many of the campus social policies restrict student behavior by rooting them in Biblical interpretations of morality (Chambers & Phelps, 1993), requiring students to agree to these by using terms like “community covenant” in establishing proper character and behavior among the student body, consistent with Arens (2004). Dirks (1998) also points to campus homogeneity as leading to lower levels of moral development, especially with many of these students attending institutions that closely match their pre-college beliefs and that reinforce their worldview. The case study students also come from relatively similar family, church, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds, which does not necessarily promote the idea of challenging varying ideas and social structures.

While the two case study institutions possessed these environmental and cultural characteristics, they were able to partly overcome them through an integration of their religious orientation with a rigorous liberal arts curriculum, which Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicate is key to fostering growth in moral reasoning in these types of environments. This integration happens at Calvin and Wheaton through service-learning programs, student organizations, local and international experiential education, and interaction with faculty, all of which promote moral reasoning in college (Pascarella & Terenzini).

While Hickerson and Laramee (1976) place most Christian colleges and universities at stage three (“Interpersonally Normative Morality”) of Kohlberg’s moral stages, these two institutions, while maintaining policies that would promote
stage three moral development, also emphasize a mission of scholarship and leadership development for the betterment of community, of campus, country, and world (stage five, “Human Rights and Social Welfare Morality.”) Also, these institutions employed pedagogies that extend past Dirks’ (1998) assertion that Christian colleges typically teach toward knowledge dissemination instead of rigorous posing of questions or encouragement of students to challenge ideas. While all colleges and universities, Calvin and Wheaton included, have faculty who would approach their teaching as merely disseminating content from their academic discipline, several faculty members at these two institutions, particularly the ones who are involved in student activism and advise student organizations, challenge their students’ thinking through experiential activism, research, and service-learning. The students who participated in this study, who were involved in activism and displayed higher levels of moral development, were also connected to these faculty members who aided in this development by challenging their students, modeling activism to them, and living lives committed to their worldview.

Finally, Dirks (1998) states that lower student moral development at Christian colleges is also due to insufficient challenges to students’ worldviews. Students have fewer opportunities for cross-cultural interactions and role-taking that stimulate moral development on these homogenous campuses, which creates insulated and safe environments that do not encourage growth born out of challenges in a world of differing values. These two institutions were, in fact, homogenous, insulated, and safe environments; however, efforts are made to challenge students’ worldviews. Some of these efforts were reactionary, reluctantly responding to activist issues of race, homosexuality, and the environment. Some were intentionally designed to promote cross-cultural interactions, including service-learning opportunities to neighboring
communities and academic and mission trips to developing countries. Most of the study’s student activists had participated in one or more of these opportunities, and attributed some of their growth to them.

These students showed high levels of moral development, responding to occasions their institution challenged them at higher levels. They also displayed levels of frustration with the incongruence of campus policies, positions, and procedures designed for stage three moral development, forcing them to agree to a lower-level social and behavioral contract on institutional-defined morality (Hickerson & Laramee, 1976). It was unclear if stage regression occurred within this incongruence, possibly due, in part, to the characteristics of today’s emerging adult of moral confusion and disorientation, due to our individualistic society that is devoid of a unified idea of the common good (Smith, 2011). These students’ morality appears to play out in individualized and compartmentalized ways, allowing for higher stage morality in working for change in addressing societal ills, but operating at lower moral development stages on campus when deemed advantageous in accomplishing their goals. While this incongruence is seen as an annoyance to them, student activists do not seem particularly troubled by it and are resigned to utilizing it to their advantage when necessary. In order to reduce this incongruence, institutional leaders might work toward alignment of their college’s mission, policies and practices, modeling and enabling students to develop a consistent moral system toward the common good.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is in the limited number of cases studied. While there was no attempt to generalize the study’s findings from Calvin and Wheaton to
all Christian colleges and universities, additional case studies could help confirm, refute, or add nuance to them. In that same vein, by only studying student activism in these two particular contexts with similar levels of student activism, this study does not represent the other 171 institutions that are members and affiliate institutions of the Council of Christians Colleges and Universities (CCCU). These two institutions are also from the same geographic region and possess similar academic reputations, and are both being pillar institutions within the CCCU. As such, these two case studies may not be representative of most Christian colleges and universities. Studying additional contexts would provide a fuller and richer understanding of institutional similarities and differences, much like that accomplished through this study’s cross-case analysis, except with more contexts to compare.

Another limitation is the amount of time exposed to campus, students, and activism. I was only able to spend one week on each campus, which allowed for interviews and general observations, but little else. Because of the timing of these weeks, no actual activism events were happening on campus while I was there, beyond the inanimate mechanisms of student newspapers, campus posters, and Wheaton’s Forum Wall, although I did watch students reading and writing comments on the wall. I had hoped to watch an event or student organization engage an issue, but timing did not allow it. Richness in the data may have been lost by relying mainly on data from individual interviews, focus groups, newspaper archives, and web content, instead of direct engagement with students in action.

The lack of racial diversity within my participant pool is another limitation of this study. I made no particular effort to assemble a diverse group of students, staff, and faculty, a fact that is evident in my study’s participants. Out of 40 combined participants at both colleges, 36 appeared to be White. Two students appeared to be
Black, one appeared to be Hispanic, and one appeared to be of Asian descent. All of the faculty and staff appeared to be White, and happened to also mostly be men. While I am unaware of how racial demographics contribute to student activism in general, particularly at racially homogenous Christian colleges, it is clear that most of my data were from majority culture participants. This is important to note, as some of the data directly addressed the lack of diversity on these campuses, mostly from a White, majority culture perspective.

The final limitation is my own work experiences within these types of college contexts. I worked for a decade in the student development field at Christian colleges and universities, sometimes advising students in their activism, or lack thereof. This experience likely contributed to my previously held assumptions about student activism and these campus environments, which proved beneficial in my understanding and respect for Christian college frameworks and cultures; however, the same motivation and experience that led me to this study may have also negatively impacted my interpretation of the data or how those interpretations are presented. While I made an intentional effort to bracket my biases and to remain open to emergent ideas that on the surface looked obvious or not notable, given my familiarity with the environments, it is unknown what may have been lost or understood differently due to my past work experiences.

Recommendations

The findings from this study have illuminated new ways to conceive of college environments around student activism and to engage students, and uncovered opportunities to further this understanding. As a result there are recommendations for practice, for practitioners at similar colleges and universities to enhance their current
work or reframe it taking into consideration the study findings. Also, recommendations for research are offered to identify some next steps in this line of research to strengthen understandings of the topic.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for practice include engaging student development staff, faculty members, and institutional presidents in a concept of activism that includes student learning and growth consistent with institutional missions and practices. This concept can be enacted through campus structures by utilizing existing paradigms and models, particularly through service-learning programs and value-laden leadership development programs.

Student Development Staff

One recommendation for practice is for student development staff to allow for more varied opportunities of student activism outside established institutional structures. This study demonstrates these colleges have strong systems and structures to guide students through leadership development programs, campus involvement, local and global learning and service, and narrowly-defined student activism; however, there is often a fear-based response to activities that fall outside institutional designs, like the creation and enforcement of bureaucratic systems that reduce the risk of controversy, appease constituents, and control student exposure and behavior. While students certainly benefit from and are drawn to these systems and programs, the potential of other forms of activism remains largely untapped. Dynamic and varied learning opportunities could emerge if student development staff demonstrates thoughtfulness and flexibility when encountering student initiated activist situations.
This might mean a willingness to risk engaging topics that are uncomfortable or controversial, or being open to spontaneous student initiatives by freeing them from normal bureaucratic obstacles.

Faculty

Another recommendation is for faculty to fully utilize their influence with students and intentionally engage them in activism. This study and others show faculty members have more influence in student activism than any others on campus. With this influence should come a sense of responsibility, not only to be effective classroom teachers of activism within their academic disciplines, but also to become involved in other capacities that lead to more focused interactions with students. This could include advising a student organization, giving campus presentations, welcoming mentorship opportunities, and inviting students to participate in activism through her/his academic discipline. Faculty members also have an opportunity to model activism to students by sharing with students stories of their own engagement. Students will be inspired to engage in activism by faculty members who embrace this influential role, articulate an integration with their Christian faith and academic discipline, and demonstrate a personal commitment and response to an issue.

Presidents

The role of college board members and cabinet level personnel, like those of the president and vice-presidents, necessitates a broad perspective that accounts for not only the educational vision of the institution, but also its financial stability and constituent base. Sometimes the idea of student activism can threaten that foundation if conceived of in a negative way. College presidents, with their influence with the
board and supervisory roles over campus staff, can serve as promoters of student activism if conceived as being congruent with the college’s faith tradition and institutional learning goals. With a better understanding of current student activism, presidents can educate boards and set campus agendas that expand the definition of activism to one that engages students, contributes to learning, and promotes the ideals of the institutional mission. It is recommended that presidents provide vision and leadership to their campuses in the understanding of student activism and the resulting way the institution structurally supports activism and responds to it outside those designs.

Service-Learning

For those institutions that need a framework in which to position student activism, another recommendation is to utilize existing paradigms and models in the creation of their own programmatic structures. One is in service-learning, which is one way institutions can support student activism (Hamrick, 1998; Pan, 2002), and has been shown to promote growth and learning in participating students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Prentice, 2007). An intentionally designed service-learning program within Christian higher education should engage students to grow academically, spiritually, emotionally, and morally (Schaffer, 2004). Service-learning is often perceived as a non-threatening mechanism for change creation and social justice for students on Christian campuses, helping students pursue the ideals of shalom and agape within a tightly controlled environment. With direct connections to the curriculum and with faculty and staff oversight, service-learning is an opportunity for Christian thought and action leading to active citizenship and social responsibility,
especially if designed from “thick” versions of Morton’s (1995) paradigm of charity, project, and social change in service-learning.

Leadership Development

The Leadership for Social Change Model (Astin, 1996) is another framework that can be utilized in the design of student leadership or involvement programs, or to reframe ones that already exist. This leadership model, which is values-based and is designed for service to others, demonstrates the interrelationship of the individual, group, and society. Leadership development is clearly a value at Christian colleges, for which they heavily invest with funds and staff. This model could provide institutional leaders a perspective on student activism and leadership development that is values-based, non-threatening, and easily connected to their college mission.

This model could simply be applied to existing groups working for social change, attending to deficiencies to evaluate effectiveness, or in the proactive creation of new groups or programs. It could also be used to reactively frame student activism that may arise outside of normal institutional structures, helping it to be understood and legitimized within contexts that would usually resist these activities. The model could add to the leadership development that already happens at these colleges, rounding it out by intentionally moving training beyond the common emphasis on personal development by integrating elements of group and societal values.

The model can be utilized by any person or group on campus if the following characteristics are present: (1) a problem is identified and tasks are defined; (2) personal and shared values are identified; (3) research is conducted on tasks or needs; (4) labor is divided among student participants; and (5) group functions reflect a commitment to debriefing, personal reflection, and interpersonal feedback (Astin,
1996). These characteristics fit well with the student organization mechanism for student activism found on these campuses. These groups are generally formed around a problem or issue, with student officers leading each organization. Each has a mission statement that describes shared values from which their activities emerge. Issue awareness is promoted by the organization, first through an internal process of becoming more knowledgeable about an issue and then sharing it with others. Organization members often have unique roles in club leadership and through their activism event planning and facilitation, with an advisor generally guiding the entire process.

Although the model fits the student organization structure well, it would seem that all the student activism described by the student participants could fit within this model, including service-learning and even protest and demonstrations. The biggest challenge would be in the debriefing, reflection, and feedback processes. While other characteristics are more natural in the creation of such a group and for ensuring tasks are completed for activities, post-activity reflection may need to be intentionally emphasized in the program for values of individual, group, and society to be developed in leaders. This is where faculty advisors can help students find the most meaning in their activism and situate their leadership development.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are three recommendations for further research: an activist’s pre-college background, a longitudinal study of student activists, and to broaden this study to other institution types.
Activist Pre-College Background

The first recommendation is to better understand a student activist’s pre-college background and its resulting influence on their activism in college. While this study drew a link to students’ backgrounds as part of a larger homogenous cultural group on campus, it was beyond the scope of the study to investigate the specific pre-college factors for involvement and noninvolvement, or the degree of their influence. The student interviews revealed some interesting commentary on their past activism within their families, communities, and churches back home. More understanding of their pre-college experiences of activism may illuminate new ideas or deepen this study’s findings, as well as help college practitioners better plan for them when they show up on campus.

Student Activist Longitudinal Data

A natural extension of this study would be a longitudinal study of student activists. Tracking a student’s engagement with their campus culture and their resulting activism from their first year through graduation, and maybe beyond, would enable the exploration of changes in attitudes and involvement over time, rather than primarily relying on one-time reflective interview data. This would also enable the researcher to better understand the campus culture by continually returning to and becoming more intimately aware of the specific campus events around activism. A longitudinal study would optimally provide more opportunity for direct observation of activism rather than reported accounts of it. A study that tracked an activist beyond graduation would benefit from a more mature reflection of their college experience, a relating of their activism to the world outside of their past campus environment, and an ability to see the long-term effects of their activism after college.
Different Institutional Types

A final recommendation for further research is to conduct a similar study at other types of institutions, particularly at public universities and other private secular colleges and universities, to better understand if the findings of this study are unique to Christian colleges. While it was shown that student activists at Christian colleges make meaning of their activism from their institution’s bounded set of principles from which they operate, it is unknown if this is unique to these environments. This study could be extended to a larger interconnected web of case studies to not only broaden understandings of current student activism to a variety of other institutional types, but also help control for generational characteristics in this study. By controlling for these generational characteristics the connection between Christian college culture and student activism should become more apparent.

Summary

The goal of the study was to help create an understanding of how students at Christian institutions understand and engage in activism within their college’s culture and to provide institutional leaders information about these student activists and campus cultures as they create policy, plan learning activities and programs, and advise students. Three research questions were asked to provide a description and meaning of student activism within the context of Christian college environments and cultures. (1) How do current students, studying at a Christian college or university, understand the concept of activism? (2) What are the institutional facilitating factors or barriers in relation to student activism and how do they shape student activities? (3) How do students make meaning of their activism within the Christian campus culture as they think about their future activism?
This multi-case study was conducted at two Christian colleges, Calvin College and Wheaton College, with individual and focus group interviews with student activists, staff and faculty interviews, campus observation, and archival record review. The findings demonstrate that student activists at Christian colleges understand activism the way their institutions teach them and through an educational paradigm. Also, college faculty members are seen the most influential on campus in promoting student activism. The findings also show there is a growing cultural acceptance of activism conceived as the pursuit of Christian social justice. Finally, student activists embrace and work within institutional systems that control student activism, and that they make meaning of their activism through their institutional construct.

Recommendations for practice and further research were generated from these study results. Recommendations for practice include engaging student development staff, faculty members, and institutional presidents in a concept of activism that includes student learning and growth consistent with institutional missions and practices. This concept can be enacted through campus structures by utilizing existing paradigms and models, particularly through service-learning programs built on “thick” paradigms of charity, project, and social change (Morton, 1995), and value-laden leadership development programs, like the Leadership for Social Change Model (Astin, 1996). Recommendations for further study include a student activist’s pre-college background and its resulting influence on their activism in college; a longitudinal study of student activists; and a replication of this study at other types of institutions, particularly at public universities and other private secular colleges and universities, to better understand if the findings of this study are unique to Christian colleges.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Student Interview Protocol
Student Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Age and Class Standing of Interviewee:

Gender:

Interview Questions

1. How did you decide to attend this college?
   - Influences?

2. What came to mind when I used the term *activism* in describing my study?
   - What type of activities would fit the term *activism*?
   - How do you think other students might define *activism*?

3. What types of current student-led activism are you aware have taken place on this campus within the past five years?
   - Does a particular issue or activity stand out in your mind?
   - If so, would you please describe it?

4. In what ways would you consider being involved in activism while in college?
   - What would need to occur for you to get involved?

5. How does student activism happen on your campus?
   - Are there any typical issues or activities?
• If so, why do you think that is?

6. What kind of activism can or cannot work on this campus?

7. Have you ever encouraged or engaged in activism on this campus?

• If so, what were the issues?
• What were the goals?
• What did you do?
• If not, why?

8. Were you engaged in activism before coming to college?

• Who or what were the biggest influences to your involvement/non-involvement?

9. (If you have been involved in activism on campus) How has your involvement changed you?

• How do you think your involvement will influence your life after college?

10. What do you think are the overall benefits of student activism?

• On this campus?

11. How is student activism appropriate within a Christian college?

• What characteristics of student activism would be inappropriate within a Christian college?
• What kind of activities would you refuse to be involved with? Why?

12. How does your campus culture currently encourage and/or discourage student activism?
13. What kind of messages about activism, spoken or unspoken, are on this campus?

14. How does the college’s administration, staff, or faculty currently influence student activism on this campus?

15. Does a certain group or individual employees have a greater influence on student activism?
   - If so, which ones?
   - How do students generally respond to this influence?

16. If any, who are the specific supporters or adversaries of student activism on your campus?

17. What other factors do you believe may contribute to whether or not a student on your campus participates in activism?

18. What would have to happen at this college to promote more involvement in student activism?
   - What is the likelihood of that happening? Why?

19. Who should I talk to on this campus in order to learn more about this topic?
Appendix B

Staff/Faculty Interview Protocol
Staff/Faculty Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Is interviewee Staff or Faculty (Circle One)

Interview Questions

1. Why have you chosen to work at this institution?

2. What came to mind when I used the term *activism* when describing my study?
   - What type of activities would fit the term *activism*?
   - What about on a college campus?

3. What types of current student-led activism are you aware of on your campus within the past five years?
   - Does a particular issue or activity stand out in your mind?
   - If so, would you please describe it?

4. How would you describe your current involvement with activism?

5. Have you recently (within 5 years) encouraged or engaged in activism on this campus?
   - If so, what were the issues and activities?
   - If not, why?

6. How can you imagine student activism benefiting or harming a student?

7. How does student activism work on your campus?
• Are there any typical issues or activities?
• If so, why do you think that is?

8. What kind of activism can or cannot work on this campus?

9. How does your campus culture currently contribute to or discourage student activism?

10. How does student activism fit or not fit within the mission of a Christian college?

11. How does the university’s administration, staff, or faculty currently influence student activism on this campus?

12. Does a certain group or individual employees have a greater influence on student activism?
   • If so, which ones?
   • How do students generally respond to this influence?

13. Are there any specific detractors or advocates of activism on your campus?
   • If so, who?

14. What kind of messages, spoken or unspoken, about activism are on this campus?

15. What other factors do you believe may contribute to whether or not a student on your campus participates in activism?

16. What would have to happen at this institution to promote more involvement in student activism?
   • What is the likelihood of that happening? Why?

17. Who should I talk to on this campus in order to learn more about this topic?
Appendix C

Dean of Students Interview Protocol
Dean of Students Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Interview Questions

1. Why have you chosen to work at this institution?

2. What came to mind when I used the term activism when describing my study?
   - What type of activities would fit the term activism?
   - What about on a college campus?

3. What types of current student-led activism are you aware of on your campus within the past five years?
   - Does a particular issue or activity stand out in your mind?
   - If so, would you please describe it?

4. How would you describe your current involvement with activism within the past 5 years?
   - What were the issues and activities?

5. As an educator and enforcer of campus policy and behavioral standards, how do you see your role regarding student activism?

6. Can you differentiate between different types of student activism and how you would respond to the various types in your administrative role?
7. How can you imagine student activism benefiting or harming a student?

8. How does student activism work on your campus?
   - Are there any typical issues or activities?
   - If so, why do you think that is?

9. What kind of activism can or cannot work on this campus?

10. How does your campus culture currently contribute to or discourage student activism?

11. How does student activism fit or not fit within the mission of a Christian college?

12. How does the university’s administration, staff, or faculty currently influence student activism on this campus?

13. Are there any specific detractors or advocates of activism on your campus?
   - If so, who?

14. What kind of messages, spoken or unspoken, about activism are on this campus?

15. What other factors do you believe may contribute to whether or not a student on your campus participates in activism?

16. What would have to happen at this institution to promote more involvement in student activism?
   - What is the likelihood of that happening?
   - Why?

17. Who should I talk to on this campus in order to learn more about this topic?
Appendix D

Student Participant Recruitment Email
Hello. My name is Brian Cole and I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University. I am writing a dissertation on student activism on the campuses of Christian colleges and universities. I’m contacting you because I have had communication with an institutional contact at (Institution Name) who has identified you as someone who has been involved or may have an interest in student activism. As part of my study, I hope to interview you on your campus for approximately one hour. I would be willing to buy you a cup of coffee from your campus coffee shop as you meet with me, and am willing to interview you in a quiet public place on campus where you feel comfortable. With your permission, I will be taping the conversation with a digital voice recorder, so it would be best if the location is not too noisy.

I would appreciate hearing your experience and perspective on student activism, as it applies to you and your campus. The information I receive will be used as part of my data for a doctoral dissertation I am writing. This interview and data will be completely confidential, and I will protect your identity by not using your real name or even institution name, in my transcripts or final report. Just so you know I will be providing you the transcript of your interview to help me identify if I accurately represented you in the interview. If you are willing to meet with me for about an hour-long interview, would you please respond to this email (brian.e.cole@wmich.edu) or call or text me on my cell phone (248) 761-3322 to indicate what time would be best for you, and where you would prefer to meet. I am familiar with your campus, so there would be no need to provide directions. Thank you. I hope to hear from you soon.
Appendix E

Staff/Faculty Participant Recruitment Email
Hello. My name is Brian Cole and I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University. I am writing a dissertation on student activism on the campuses of Christian colleges and universities. I’m contacting you because I have had communication with an institutional contact at (Institution Name) who has identified you as someone who has been involved or may have an interest in student activism. As part of my study, I hope to interview you on your campus for approximately one hour. I would be willing to buy you a cup of coffee from your campus coffee shop as you meet with me, and am willing to interview you in any location on campus where you feel most comfortable, including your office. With your permission, I will be taping the conversation with a digital voice recorder, so it would be best if the location is not too noisy.

I would appreciate hearing your experience and perspective on student activism, as it applies to you and your campus. The information I receive will be used as part of the data for my doctoral dissertation. This interview and data be completely confidential, and I will conceal your identity in the study and will not using your real name or even institution name, in the report. Just so you know I will be providing you the transcript of your interview to help me identify if I accurately represented you in the interview. If you are willing to meet with me for about an hour-long interview, would you please respond to this email (brian.e.cole@wmich.edu) or call or text me on my cell phone (248) 761-3322 to indicate what time would be best for you, and where you would prefer to meet. I am familiar with your campus, so there would be no need to provide directions. Thank you. I hope to hear from you soon.
Appendix F

Participant Consent Process
The following outline gives the description of the steps I took in the consent process:

1. Introduction of myself and study topic

2. Presentation of consent form explaining:
   a. Purpose of study
   b. Format of interview
   c. Explanation of voluntary nature of participation, including the opportunity to stop at any time
   d. Explanation of how the participation is confidential, and the steps I will take to ensure that confidentiality

3. Having the participant read, ask questions, and sign the consent form

4. Introduction of the interview protocol
Appendix G

Student Consent Form
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, & Technology
College of Education

Principal Investigator: Donna Talbot, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Brian Edward Cole, M.A.
Title of Study: The Impact of Institutional Culture on Student Activism: A Case in Christian Higher Education

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "The Impact of Institutional Culture on Student Activism: A Multi-Case Study in Christian Higher Education." This project will serve as Brian Cole's dissertation for the requirements of the Ph.D. in Educational Leadership--Higher Education. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
This study will attempt to better understand the nature of student activism at Christian colleges and universities and how the institutional culture contributes. It is my hope that the information I receive through this study will assist in understanding your campus culture and students' experiences relating to activism.

Who can participate in this study?
Student participants will be selected because of an involvement in student activism on your campus. The research design calls for 10-12 students at least 18 years old and at junior or senior class status. At a later date, student interviewees may also be asked to participate in a focus group on this same topic, which is not a requirement to participate in the individual interview.

Where will this study take place?
Interview settings will be selected on campuses that are comfortable and naturalistic to the participants, ensuring it is also suitable for voice recording. If selected and willing to participate in the focus group, that meeting will take place in a campus conference room.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
You will be asked to participate in one interview, approximately one hour in length. If selected and willing to participate in the focus group, that group interview will last no more than two hours. I will also send you the transcript of our individual interview for you to check for accuracy. You may be asked to take time to respond to email follow-up questions on this subject.
What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
You will be asked to participate in one interview, approximately one hour in length. You will be asked questions about your opinions about and involvement in student activism, as well as how your institution’s culture contributes to the type and amount of student activism on your campus. At a later date, student interviewees may also be asked to participate in a focus group on this same topic, which is not a requirement to participate in the individual interview.

What information is being measured during the study?
The researcher will measure students’ understanding of the concept of activism and how students make meaning of their activism in the context of their college community. The college’s facilitating factors or barriers to student activism, and how those shape activities will also be measured.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. One potential risk of participation in this project is that you may be upset by the content of the interview; however, the student investigator is prepared to connect you with resources to alleviate these feelings should they emerge. Should you become significantly upset, I am prepared to make a referral if you need further counseling or assistance about this topic.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
You may benefit by your participation in this study by engaging in a structured reflection of your activism, which may lead to insight into your past and future anticipated activities. Your input will also contribute to the comprehensiveness and completeness of this study, which may be instructive to better understanding of your institution’s student activism.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
All of the information collected from you is confidential. That means that your name and any identifying information will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The forms will all be coded, and the student investigator will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data is collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms and data will be retained for the duration of the project in a locked file in the student investigator’s home office and will be transferred and stored at Western Michigan University, as required, at the completion of the
dissertation. Your name will not appear on any publications or presentations on the research findings.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator (my Dissertation Chair), Dr. Donna Talbot at donna.talbot@wmich.edu or 269-387-5122. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant's signature __________________________ Date ____________
Appendix H

Staff/Faculty Consent Form
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, & Technology
College of Education

Principal Investigator:  Donna Talbot, Ph.D.
Student Investigator:    Brian Edward Cole, M.A.
Title of Study:          The Impact of Institutional Culture on Student Activism: A Case in Christian Higher Education

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "The Impact of Institutional Culture on Student Activism: A Multi-Case Study in Christian Higher Education." This project will serve as Brian Cole's dissertation for the requirements of the Ph.D. in Educational Leadership–Higher Education. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
This study will attempt to better understand the nature of student activism at Christian colleges and universities and how the institutional culture contributes. It is my hope that the information I receive through this study will assist in understanding your campus culture and students' experiences relating to activism.

Who can participate in this study?
Student participants will be selected because of an involvement in student activism on your campus. The research design calls for 10-12 students at least 18 years old and at junior or senior class status. Five to seven staff and faculty participants have been selected because of identified involvement or knowledge of recent activism on your campus.

Where will this study take place?
Interview settings will be selected on campuses that are comfortable and naturalistic to the participants, ensuring it is also suitable for voice recording. For staff and faculty, this can happen in their office space.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
You will be asked to participate in one interview, approximately one hour in length. I will also send you the transcript of our interview for you to check for accuracy. You may be asked to take time to respond to email follow-up questions on this subject.
What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
You will be asked to participate in one interview, approximately one hour in length. You will be asked questions about your opinions about and involvement in student activism, as well as how your institution’s culture contributes to the type and amount of student activism on your campus.

What information is being measured during the study?
The researcher will measure students’ understanding of the concept of activism and how students make meaning of their activism in the context of their college community. The college’s facilitating factors or barriers to student activism, and how those shape activities will also be measured.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. One potential risk of participation in this project is that you may be upset by the content of the interview; however, the student investigator is prepared to connect you with resources to alleviate these feelings should they emerge. Should you become significantly upset, I am prepared to make a referral if you need further counseling or assistance about this topic. Another risk may be the emergence of opinions that may run contrary to campus policy or norms, which may perceived as running a risk of administrative retribution if becoming public. This risk is alleviated by the confidential nature of this study. All participants will remain confidential and interview data will not be linked to the participant.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
You may benefit from your participation in this study by engaging in a structured reflection of the student activism on your campus. Your input will also contribute to the comprehensiveness and completeness of this study, which may be instructive to better understanding of your institution’s student activism.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
All of the information collected from you is confidential. That means that your name and any identifying information will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The forms will all be coded, and the student investigator will keep a separate master list with the
names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data is collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms and data will be retained for the duration of the project in a locked file in the student investigator’s home office and will be transferred and stored at Western Michigan University, as required, at the completion of the dissertation. Your name will not appear on any publications or presentations on the research findings.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator (my Dissertation Chair), Dr. Donna Talbot at donna.talbot@wmich.edu or 269-387-5122. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant’s signature

Date
Appendix I

Student Focus Group Consent Form
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, & Technology
College of Education

Principal Investigator: Donna Talbot, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Brian Edward Cole, M.A.
Title of Study: The Impact of Institutional Culture on Student Activism: A Case in Christian Higher Education

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "The Impact of Institutional Culture on Student Activism: A Multi-Case Study in Christian Higher Education." This project will serve as Brian Cole’s dissertation for the requirements of the Ph.D. in Educational Leadership-Higher Education. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
This study will attempt to better understand the nature of student activism at Christian colleges and universities and how the institutional culture contributes. It is my hope that the information I receive through this study will assist in understanding your campus culture and students’ experiences relating to activism.

Who can participate in this study?
Student participants will be selected because of an involvement in student activism on your campus and participation in individual interviews for this study. The research design calls for 7-10 students who have previously participated in this study through an individual interview.

Where will this study take place?
If willing to participate in the focus group, that meeting will take place in a student center conference room.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
If willing to participate in the focus group, that group interview will last no more than two hours.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
You will be asked to participate in a group interview with other students, no longer than two hours in length. This focus group interview will be recorded. You will be asked questions about your opinions about and involvement in student activism, as well as how your institution’s culture contributes to the type and amount of student activism on your campus.
What information is being measured during the study?
The researcher will measure students' understanding of the concept of activism and how students
make meaning of their activism in the context of their college community. The college's
facilitating factors or barriers to student activism, and how those shape activities will also be
measured.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. One potential risk of
participation in this project is that you may be upset by the content of the interview; however, the
student investigator is prepared to connect you with resources to alleviate these feelings should
they emerge. Should you become significantly upset, I am prepared to make a referral if you
need further counseling or assistance about this topic.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
You may benefit by your participation in this study by engaging in a structured reflection of your
activism, which may lead to insight into your past and future anticipated activities. Your input
will also contribute to the comprehensiveness and completeness of this study, which may be
instructive to better understanding of your institution's student activism.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
All of the information collected from you is confidential, although other participants in the focus
group will hear your comments. That means that your name and any identifying information will
not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The forms will all be coded, and
the student investigator will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the
corresponding code numbers. Once the data is collected and analyzed, the master list will be
destroyed. All other forms and data will be retained for the duration of the project in a locked file
in the student investigator's home office and will be transferred and stored at Western Michigan
University, as required, at the completion of the dissertation. Your name will not appear on any
publications or presentations on the research findings.
What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator (my Dissertation Chair), Dr. Donna Talbot at donna.talbot@wmich.edu or 269-387-5122. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant’s signature    Date
Appendix J

Participant Recruitment and Enrollment Procedures
The following outline is a description of the steps I took in the consent process for individual interviews:

1. Contacted initial students (up to three) and staff/faculty identified by Student Development Staff contacts via email recruitment letter (Appendix D & E).

2. If participant responded to the email agreeing to learn more about participating, I thanked that person and set up a meeting time on campus. If participant responded and indicated a wish not to participate, I responded to the email thanking that person for responding.

3. For those who agreed to meet with me, I introduced myself and my study and followed the Participant Consent Process (Appendix F). If the person chose to participate, I had her/him complete the Consent Form (G & H). If the person chose not to participate I thanked her/him for meeting with me and inquired about other potential participants they may know.

4. The concluding question in my interview protocol asks participants for names of others on campus whom I could talk with to learn more about the topic. I collected those names and any contact information my participant had for these people. I then contacted those people whom my participants recommended. If the contact information I received was an email address, I sent the prospective participant the same recruitment letter sent to my initial group. If I was personally introduced or given a phone number to contact, I held a conversation with that person and included the content contained in the
recruitment email (and moved to Step 2 in the Recruitment and Enrollment Process). I repeated this step until thematic saturation.

The following outline gives the description of the steps I took in the consent process for the student focus group:

1. If during the interview the participant was knowledgeable about campus activism and communicated effectively, I asked the participant if she/he would be willing to learn more about potentially participating in a student focus group.

2. I explained that the focus group contained questions that have arisen from the individual interviews, and that it would last no longer than two hours and would be recorded. I explained that this focus group would consist of a small group of students who would have the opportunity to collectively answer questions.

3. If the participant was willing and able to meet at the predetermined time and location, I provided her/him with the logistical details. I also collected or verified contact information to send a reminder of the focus group time and place. If the participant was unable or unwilling to participate, I thanked her/him for their time in the individual interview.

4. For those who agreed to attend the student focus group meeting, I introduced the Focus Group Consent Form (Appendix I). If the student participant agreed to sign the Focus Group Consent Form, they were asked to stay in the room.
Although this did not occur, anyone who chose not to participate would have been free to leave and thanked for their interest and prior participation.
Appendix K

Counseling Resources
Wheaton College – The Counseling Center at Wheaton College
(http://www.wheaton.edu/Counseling/)

Contact Information
Wheaton College Counseling Center
Student Services Building - 1st Floor
630-752-5321

"Counseling aimed to meet the needs of the Wheaton College Community"

Wheaton College exists "for Christ and His Kingdom" and Counseling Center staff members are Christians who see their work as having a Christ-centered purpose. Christian counseling is an activity endorsed by God to help His people who are distressed, uncertain and hurting. Christian counseling is a global activity required of the church at large, and Christian counselors in particular, aimed at obeying the Scriptural mandate to "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). Within this perspective, the Christian counselor applies Biblical principles and practices whenever they are available. He or she integrates counseling techniques that are consistent with the Christian faith, professionally sound and based on the best training and practice. The staff at the WCCC are expected to adhere to the standards of professional ethics prescribed by Wheaton College and the Christian Association for Psychological Studies.

Services

The Counseling Center at Wheaton College functions within a broad model that includes preventive, developmental and supportive interventions. We provide students (and spouses) with individual counseling, group counseling, premarital counseling, medical and psychiatric referrals, referrals to therapists who are off-campus, and assessment and testing for various needs. These services are confidential. We also provide consultative and educational services to members of the larger Wheaton College community.

- Hours
- Group Program
- Assessment Services
- Referral Services
**Hours**  
During the academic year, the Counseling Center is open from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Monday-Thursday, and 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. on Fridays. Appointments can be made by coming by the Counseling Center or calling (630)752-5321. Emergency walk-in hours available each day for crisis/counseling or consultation. We are located directly across from the Bookstore in the Student Services Building. The Center is open during the summer session for consultations, referral resources, and crisis management. Call ahead to set up an appointment during these times.

**Group Program**  
The Counseling Center offers a variety of groups each year. A number of groups each year are coordinated around a common theme and provide both education and support for students who have had similar experiences. Past themes have included eating disorders, children of divorced parents, and dealing with chronic pain. The focus of groups adjusts slightly each academic year in response to student need. In addition we offer men's groups, which focus on issues pertinent to male students, and women's groups, which address a range of relational issues common to female students.

Group participation primarily allows students to gain experience with, and work on, issues of being intimate with peers. The immediate group goal is to provide a safe environment in which students can explore personal issues, grow in a context of mutual learning, and alleviate symptoms of loneliness, sadness or anxiety. The long-term goal is to learn the skills necessary to develop healthy and mature relationships in general. We believe these skills contribute to more effective participation in friend and family groups, improved quality of life, and more mature, honest participation in Christian community throughout the lifespan.

**Assessment Services**  
The Counseling Center is equipped to administer many psychological tests. These are done with the assistance of one of our counselors, who can help determine what (if any) testing might be helpful for the student. Tests can be administered to assess a variety of personal problems. The primary purpose of testing is to help the counselor and the student define a specific set of goals. We also offer assessment for some learning difficulties, as well tests that categorize interpersonal style. Feedback sessions can be arranged as necessary. There is a charge for certain types of testing. Contact the Counseling Center or speak with a counselor to find out more details.

**Referral Services**  
The Counseling Center has built relationships with local Christian psychiatrists and other mental health providers for the benefit of those students who want or need services off-campus. Referrals can be made for medication consultation, nutritional counseling, substance use counseling or other specialized needs.
Calvin College – Broene Counseling Center Information
(http://www.calvin.edu/admin/broene/)

Our Mission
Our mission is to provide high-caliber counseling and therapy services in a relaxed and confidential setting and within a Christian framework. College can be a stressful time. That’s where we come in. We exist to help students cope with the difficult times and use them for personal, emotional, and spiritual growth.

Who Seeks Help?
In a word--anyone! Every year, hundreds of Calvin students come in to the Broene Counseling Center. Some come for just one appointment. Others come for several. Some come for struggles with a friend, others for stress related to school life and work. The good news is that students are using our services and have found out the good things that can come from seeking our help!

The Cost
There is no cost for our counseling services. This is a marvelous benefit for Calvin students. Similar services in the community will cost between $90 to $115 per hour.

To Make An Appointment
Call: (616) 526-6123

Our location:
366-368 Spoelhof College Center (3rd floor near the Chapel)

Our hours:
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Crisis Care hours daily from
3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
8:00 to 4:30 during the summer

Services We Offer

• Individual Counseling
• Group Counseling
• Couples Counseling
• Workshops, presentations
• Psychiatric Consultation
• Referrals
• Consultation to Faculty and Staff
• Online Screening (http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening/Welcome.aspx)
Appendix L

Western Michigan University HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: July 21, 2011

To: Donna Talbot, Principal Investigator
    Brian Cole, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 11-06-27

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “The Impact of Institutional Culture on Student Activism: A Multi-Case Study in Christian Higher Education” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: July 21, 2012
Appendix M

Wheaton College Consent Letter
May 2, 2011

Mr. Brian Cole
Doctoral Candidate
Western Michigan University

Re: Institutional approval to collect data for your dissertation research

Dear Mr. Cole,

With this letter, I am communicating our institutional approval for Wheaton College to participate in your doctoral dissertation study on student activism on Christian college campuses. We understand that you are planning to conduct interviews in early fall. The bulk of the interviews will be with students, with 15 or so individual interviews and possibly a focus group with a small group of students; there are also to be 6 to 10 staff interviews inclusive of faculty as well. You will be taking the initiative to arrange these interviews based on our suggestions of suitable individuals; I have previously communicated my suggestions to you by e-mail.

I wish you the best as you conduct the study.

Sincerely yours,

Stanton L Jones, Provost and Professor of Psychology
Appendix N

Calvin College Consent Letter
March 30, 2011

Mr. Brian Cole  
140 Woodward Avenue  
Rochester, MI 48307

Office of the Provost
3031 Burton St SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49548

Dear Mr. Cole:

This letter is to confirm that I have given permission for you to conduct research at Calvin College for your dissertation project on student activism. Permission is given with the understanding that the project will be conducted as described in your previous messages (see succeeding pages), and with the following conditions:

1. IRB approval -- please send me a copy of WMU's IRB approval, when granted.

2. You may name Calvin College in your dissertation. However, we ask that you check with us prior to naming Calvin College in any publication arising from your dissertation.

3. Please send a copy of the completed/defended dissertation to the Calvin College Provost’s Office.

Blessings on your research,

Claudia DeVries Beversluis, Ph.D.  
Provost, Calvin College

CB/hr
Appendix O

Calvin College Case Study Participants
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Appendix P

Wheaton College Case Study Participants
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