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# Student affairs approaches to religion and spirituality in U.S. public higher education

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STUDENT AFFAIRS APPROACHES TO RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN U.S.  
PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts, Postsecondary Education: Student Affairs

Kayla J. Stafford  
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May 2017

## ABSTRACT

The field of student affairs addresses diversity and inclusion for all students; however, the student affairs profession may not provide support and resources for all developmental identities. There are a small number of public institutions that provide resources to help address and support students' religious and spiritual development. It is known that private colleges are able to provide spiritual and religious resources for students, but the current study investigates the opportunities that lie within public universities. Literature has provided evidence of the importance of religious and spiritual discussions and resources for holistic student development, and the significance of this study lays in understanding the commitment, or lack thereof, to providing religious and spiritual resources at public institutions. The research question this study answered is as follows: What are public university administrators' perceptions of and knowledge about religious and spiritual resources on their campus?

The qualitative study interviewed 11 administrators at a large, doctoral university. The interview questions were developed around three major categories of research: the current status of religion and spirituality at Cabin University, campus and student needs regarding religion and spirituality, and the administration's personal role and thought.

This study found there could be and should be more religious and spirituality resources available to Cabin University students. In summary, it was found that interfaith events, increased education, a building or space devoted to religion and spirituality, and investment in personnel to oversee the space would best provide the necessary resources for students to aid them in becoming culturally competent and developing holistically.

This study enables future researchers with the ability to further explore what is being done well or could potentially be introduced to campuses to ensure that students are developing holistically, because, as supported by the study, religion and spirituality must be incorporated into the work of student affairs professionals to foster holistic student development.

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This Study by: Kayla J. Stafford

Entitled: Student Affairs Approaches to Religion and Spirituality in U.S. Public Higher  
Education

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts, Postsecondary Education: Student Affairs

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## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my family– grandparents, parents, brothers, nieces– for being my continued support and motivation.

“A man’s true wealth is the good he does in this world.” -Muhammad

“Do things for people not because of who they are or what they do in return, but because of who you are.” -Mother Teresa



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

While higher education continues to put a lot of emphasis on test scores, grades, credits, and degrees, it has increasingly come to neglect its students' 'inner' development--- the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and of self-understanding (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011, p. 2).

America's first colleges were founded on religion. Today, only a fraction retain a religious identity. "Both sacred and secular worldviews have long held a place in US higher education, although nonreligious perspectives have been privileged in most institutions in the modern era" (Waggoner, 2011, unnumbered first page). There has recently been an increased interest in the realm of religion and spirituality on college campuses and in scholarly literature. Academic affairs' mission is to help students grow intellectually. Part of this intellectual growth is, arguably, the knowledge of world religions.

The definition of neutrality within higher education tends to be the controversy. Some individuals believe abstinence from all things religiously affiliated is the correct interpretation of the law; whereas, others feel that it is ensuring that one religion is not put on a pedestal above any other. Justice Clark commented on neutrality and the importance of religion in higher education. According to *School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp* (1963), Clark responded to the court decision with the following:

One's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or

religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.

Thus, in terms of academic affairs and student affairs, institutions of higher education can legally, and should developmentally, be tending to religious and spiritual education and support.

Private institutions are capable of meeting the religious and spiritual needs of students, but what are public institutions providing? How are public institutions providing religious and spiritual resources for students or why are they not? What is an administrator's role in this aspect of student development?

The key is to understand religion and spirituality as aspects of student identity and development. This study investigates the extent to which those aspects are addressed in public university settings and within the field of student affairs. Student affairs professionals, who are considered to be the masters of understanding student involvement and development in college, delve in the countless theories and concepts that surround the field of higher education. These professionals learn in-depth the numerous theories, identities, developmental patterns, and diversity issues that students are involved with on a daily basis. Faith and religion development is a theory that is discussed in majority of student affairs master's programs; however, that tends to be all there is in regards to religion. The student affairs curriculum calls attention to the importance of addressing religion, but that is the extent of the discussion. The topic of religion is typically avoided at all costs by institutional employees; in fact, it seems taboo at times. It is rare to find an institutionally funded resource for religion. Religion is seen as important in the theory of student development, but do all public institutions provide the necessary means for

students to receive interfaith understanding for their own development? The goal of this study is to research what religious and spiritual resources are currently available for students, what campuses and students need, and what administration's role is in providing this developmental opportunity. More specifically, this study presents what administrators recognize as resources at their institution, what they feel their roles and responsibilities are, the challenges they face, and what they desire to offer on their public institution's campus.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss each component of the literature review. These areas of research include: What student affairs is, the impact of religion and spirituality, the importance of interfaith, the controversies of Christian privilege, faculty and staff influences, institutional needs, and collegiate barriers to addressing religion and spirituality. Following will be an explanation of the study's significance and purpose as well as an introduction to the methodology used.

### Research Confirmation

#### What is Student Affairs?

From its roots, student affairs was created to aid in holistically developing students. The *Student Personnel Point of View*, the founding student affairs document, noted that well-rounded development includes a student's physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health (Williamson et al., 1949, p. 452). Institutions are continually adding and updating resources on campuses across America. There are wellness and recreations centers that contribute to the physical development of students. There are typically club sports, intramurals, and other activities also available to students

on campuses. Student life has been a large focus which aids in the social health of students. Institutions typically have a student center in the middle of campus, various types of student clubs, numerous festivities, and countless other events that promote socialization. Students' emotional health is supported by implementations like counseling services and advisors. Institutions have the entire realm of academic affairs to focus on the intellectual growth of students. Academic affairs utilize staff and faculty to maintain standards and regulations that enable students to have the most intellectually stimulating classes. On the other hand, there are very few institutions that have an on-campus entity that aids in the spiritual development of students.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, spirituality is simply “the quality or state of being concerned with religion or religious matters” or it is “the quality or state of being spiritual” (*Merriam-Webster OnLine*, n.d.). Religion is “the belief in a god or in a group of gods,” “an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or group of gods,” or “an interest, a belief, or an activity that is very important to a person or group” (*Merriam-Webster OnLine*, n.d.). Although spirituality and religion have different meanings, together, they encompass a larger realm of students and are both essential pieces of the holistic development of students. Furthermore, religion is often students' source of spirituality. Even if students do not embrace religion or spirituality, they seek some basis for their moral lives. This may come from secular resources, but it still falls under the category of holistic development.

The field of student affairs and higher education needs to recognize the importance of the total identity development of every individual. This includes gender,

sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, and religion and spirituality.

Regardless of the belief or lack thereof, questions of meaning are at the base of religion and spirituality. At the core, students' values and beliefs impact their decisions and lives.

### Religious and Spirituality Impact

Astin et al. (2011) demonstrated that 80% of college students are interested in spirituality. In addition, the study showed that spirituality is positively correlated with tolerance, academic performance, and overall wellbeing. Religion and spirituality are very impactful in students' lives. This is especially true in the college setting. There are also circumstances where students separate farther from their lifelong upbringings or find a new belief while in college. Colleges and universities provide an opportune environment and time for students to explore, dig deeper, question, learn, and grow in the realm of religion and spirituality. College could be a place that fosters this religious and spiritual growth that helps transform the student to whatever belief they choose. Regardless of what one believes as an incoming student or a graduating student, being able to educate and provide religious and spiritual resources on campuses has the opportunity to increase cultural understanding and inclusion across campuses and the nation. Religious and spiritual conversations have the ability to stimulate intellectual and emotional growth and help develop globally aware citizens.

### Importance of Interfaith

One aim of this study is to show a need for interfaith learning and religious safe spaces on campus. Interfaith gatherings are unbiased and promote cultural understanding. There is more to campuses than Christians and atheists. Interfaith learning creates open



dialogue and safe spaces for all beliefs– Christian, Muslim, atheist, agnostic, Judaism, Buddhism, and all others. Interfaith learning truly engages all cultures and beliefs. This creates an environment that promotes the learning of other faiths and perspectives.

### Christian Privilege

American higher education was built on the foundations of religion. The separation of state and religion is often misinterpreted in higher education especially at public institutions. Christian-affiliated language is changing and unknown lines are being drawn. Mainstream Christian individuals often feel it is better to avoid the conversation regarding religion than it is to have the discussion and potentially offend someone (Mayhew, Bowman, & Rockenbach, 2014). On the other hand, there is also research that shows mainstream Christians are privileged by having breaks scheduled around their main holidays and by being dominant in language and symbols (Eboo, Montero, Love, & Giess, 2016). The concept of religious privilege is clearly complex and ever so important.

### Faculty and Staff Influence

Religion and spirituality provide the opportune context and time for faculty and staff to challenge and support students. It can be a personal challenge to try to understand a culture different from one's own; but, it also can provide an opportunity for growth. With the right amount of challenge and support, faculty and staff can foster cultural learning that encourages the growth of global citizens. It is also vital that faculty and staff are educated with facilitating these discussions. This would enable a more comfortable and safe space for students. As briefly mentioned previously, in a multi-year study from

2003-2010, spearheaded by Alexander Astin, Helen Astin, and Jennifer Lindholm (2011) out of UCLA, over 100,000 students as well as faculty were studied in order to examine spirituality in higher education and students' search for meaning and purpose. They found that spiritual growth enhances tolerance, connectedness, academic performance, and overall well-being. They also discovered that 80% of the students noted that they were interested in spirituality. If 80% of students are interested in spirituality, who is fulfilling this developmental desire? There is a need for faculty and staff to help students develop holistically and into culturally competent individuals of society.

#### Institutional Needs and Actions

Interfaith and cultural understanding will not happen overnight. But, it is possible to continue to grow and provide the necessary developmental opportunities for students. It is possible on every campus. The private sector is more readily able to talk openly about religion and spirituality; however, public institutions may also address this. Public institutions need to first understand what the separation of state and church really means. Institutions of higher education need to know that discussing religion and spirituality on a public campus does not violate any laws and is an important part of students' development. Institutions should evaluate if they are providing students with the ability and safe place to explore, learn, and grow religiously and spiritually or not. Inclusive and diverse religious and spiritual resources can start small and snowball into larger opportunities for students. Students' religious and spiritual development will be most fulfilled with a consistent and reliable place to learn, teach, and grow.

### Collegiate Barriers

Ironically, Adams, Puig, Baggs, and Wolf (2015) found that one of the biggest barriers to instilling religious and spiritual conversations and resources on campuses is education, or rather a lack of education. Faculty and staff do not want to talk about a topic with which they have no training. With increased conversation, training, and education, colleges could become more attune to religious and spiritual needs on public institutions' campuses (Adams et al., 2015). This lack of knowledge creates an atmosphere that fears the unknown. One purpose of college is to facilitate learning, but people can be hesitant and fearful to learn about others and what they do not understand. Institutions have created barriers that make discussing religion and spirituality a taboo conversation. Students need a safe space to ask questions without feeling judged or ignorant.

Another addressed barrier is the misconception that church and state cannot or should intersect (Astin et al., 2011). As Eboo et al. (2016) discussed, religious and spiritual conversation can legally occur on public campuses and should occur for students' developmental purposes.

### Significance and Purpose

The significance of this study lays in understanding the commitment, or lack thereof, to providing religious and spiritual resources at public institutions. This is important, because there has been an increased interest in religion and spirituality on college campuses. To be a global citizen, one has to understand the values and views of other people. It is known that private colleges are able to provide spiritual and religious

resources for students, but the current study investigates the opportunities that lie within public universities. This is significant as public universities serve well over six million students yearly (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This study examines the resources provided to students by a large, research-oriented, public institution. The research question this study answers is as follows: What are public university administrators' perceptions of and knowledge about religious and spiritual resources on their campus? This will enable future researchers with the ability to further explore what is being done well or could potentially be introduced to campuses to ensure students are developing holistically.

### Methodology

This study was qualitative in nature. The researcher administered one-on-one interviews with upper administration at a public, R1 institution in the mid-west. The interviews addressed the administrator's knowledge on the current religious and spiritual resources, desired needs on campus, and personal perceptions.

Stafford (2016) completed an unpublished pilot study at a regional comprehensive institution also in the mid-west region. Seven upper administrators participated in the study. The unpublished pilot study found that administrators thought the institution could best help to foster holistic student development and global citizens by the following initiatives:

1. Creating a more diverse and inclusive Campus Ministries Association
2. Developing an easily accessible, on-campus interdenominational space for students, staff, and faculty that promotes interfaith dialogue and intercultural learning opportunities
3. Invest in personnel to oversee the interdenominational space and the Campus Ministries Association, develop potential programming, and be a primary and consistent resource known throughout campus

There were adjustments made to the pilot study in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency of the final study.

The final study was focused at a doctoral, Research 1 (R1) institution. To protect identities, the institution in which the interviews were conducted was given a pseudonym; the institution will be discussed as Cabin University. Invitations to participate in the study were extended to 13 individuals in upper administration positions; 11 participated. The interviews were one-on-one and began by going over the informed consent, prompt of the study, and then delving into the interview questions. The interview questions were centered on three categories: the current status of religion and spirituality at Cabin University, campus and student needs regarding religion and spirituality, and the administration's personal role and thought.

The interviews were recorded then transcribed. This ensured validity. To ensure anonymity, the researcher concealed the identity of each interviewee. The researcher found the most important aspects and common themes throughout the interviews by coding recurring thoughts, topics, and main ideas in the transcriptions.

### Anticipated Results

The researcher anticipated that this study would find a lack of religious and spiritual resources on Cabin University's campus and the upper administration would not have the topic of religion and spirituality on the forefront of their minds. In addition, it was also anticipated that the interviewees would speak about religious student organizations as the primary religious and spiritual resource.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutions of higher education aim to develop holistic, competent, and successful students. The Division of Student Affairs is a main component and propeller for this focus. Though the idea of holistic student development is not a new concept, the dimension of religion and spirituality has been discussed more frequently in literature and student affairs conversations throughout recent years. There are many inquiries surrounding the topic such as: What are we currently doing? What can we do? What should we do?

This study reviews the many aspects of consideration regarding religion and spirituality at a public university. First, there is a discussion regarding the background information to the dimensions of student development and how that is important to student affairs professionals. The impact religious and spiritual exploration can have and the value of interfaith movements are reviewed next. The various religious privileges are examined followed by the role faculty and staff play throughout students' developmental process. Next, the institutional needs and the many barriers they present are explored. Finally, a conclusion of what the research and literature is indicating in regards to this topic is presented.

#### Religion and Spirituality in Student Affairs

From its roots, higher education was built on the religious diversities brought from other countries (Durnin, 1961). Colleges were began on the foundation of religion and continued to evolve to the institutions that we have today. There is no denying that

religion has also been a topic in education; however, the value of its importance has wavered. *The Student Personnel Point of View*, a guide for student affairs professionals, states that education should foster holistic student development which encompasses “attention to the student’s well-rounded development- physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually,- as well as intellectually” (Williamson et al., 1949, p. 452). Higher education professionals focus on the many dimensions of student development, but they often do not engage in the spiritual or religious identity development for students (Eboo et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the value of religious development is discussed in recent research. Bowman and Small (2012) said that religion cannot simply be ignored and needs to be recognized as an important identity, too. Burchell, Lee, and Olson (2011) found that student affairs is very hands-off when it comes to religion and spirituality. “A public university student affairs division model that incorporates the religious-spiritual dimension of the college student experience has yet to be developed” (Waggoner, 2011, p. 242). Why is the field student affairs reluctant to act upon this aspect of diversity? Should student affairs be more intentional about providing opportunities for students to develop spiritually?

#### Religious and Spirituality Impact

There are many deeply entrenched issues encompassing religion and spirituality. Astin et al. (2011) explained how higher education is supposed to develop culturally competent students that serve as our next leaders. They stated that these individuals need to be knowledgeable about society’s most pressing issues such as:



...violence, poverty, crime, divorce, substance abuse, and the religious, national, and ethnic conflicts that continue to plague our country and our world. At root, these are problems of the spirit, problems that call for greater self-awareness, self-understanding, equanimity, empathy, and concern for others (p. 8).

Religion has a large impact on students. Everyone, in some way or another, possess some sort of worldview (Glanzer, 2011). Especially in college, students really start to mend who they are and what they believe. College is the opportune time for students to find their religious identity (Donahoo, 2014). Ganzach, Ellis, and Gotlibovski (2013) found that education had more negative effects on students with secular beliefs. Thus, the need for open religious discussion is not just for those who identify as mainstream or majority-viewed Christian. The need is for all students.

The impact of religion extends into the intellectual, social, and emotional well-being of the student as well. A study by Bowman, Rockenback, and Mayhew (2015) found that students were more apt to engage in opportunities like study abroad, service-learning, teaching, and interracial interactions if they had a more inclusive religious view. This research shows the value and impact that religion and interfaith opportunities can have at institutions. “Student affairs administrators believe that students rely upon spirituality and religion not only in times of tragedy but also in times of decision making in the context of current leadership responsibilities or future vocational and career pursuits” (Craft, 2011, p. 165). As confirmed by another study, religion is an important factor in the development and well-being of a student (Bowman & Small, 2012). That study stated that individuals who are involved in inclusive religious activities tended to have a better sense of well-being, too. Bowman and Small also found that students with

Christian beliefs typically had a better well-being than those that did not affiliate themselves with mainstream Christian beliefs.

### Importance of Interfaith

Research suggests that interfaith movements are the potential key to helping foster holistic student development on the spiritual and religious side. Interfaith learning groups share, question, and discuss all beliefs (e.g. Protestant, Agnostic, Catholic, Atheist, Jewish, Muslim). It enables students to have a safe space to ask hard questions that give life meaning (Nash, 2011). Bryant (2011b) showed the vitality in supporting all religious and ideological diversities at an institution. These identities are important to students and should be attended to.

Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin, Crandall, and Selznick (2015) reported a study that demonstrated the importance of creating an inclusive environment that facilitates interfaith learning opportunities for all beliefs. This would go hand-in-hand with Bowman and Small's (2012) conclusion that there is a positive correlation between religious involvement and student development and well-being.

Though there are more Christians in number (Lewis, 2015), there is also division between Christian groups (Mayhew et al., 2014). Interfaith measures that support all students, a sect of Christianity or another religious group, would increase the cultural understanding and unite students regardless of their denomination (Mayhew et al., 2014).

Rockenbach et al. (2014) researched the transformation individuals went through while students shared personal stories with each other. They found that as students open

up, there is a deep meaningfulness that occurs. Bowman and Small (2012) prompted the following challenge in their research: “Institutions that provide encouragement for all forms of student religious and spiritual expression, and that advocate for interfaith dialogue and the embracing of religious differences, can instill a greater ecumenical worldview across the institution” (p. 504). On-campus religious entities and interfaith learning is the answer. It is hard to meet the spiritual and religious needs for every student; however, the value in trying and doing so can be tremendous for students’ development.

Astin et al. (2011) stated that “the ‘big questions’ that preoccupy students are essentially spiritual questions...” (p. 1) and “students’ sense of equanimity is most likely to strengthen during college if they engage in ‘inner work’ ---- meditation, prayer, or self-reflection” (p. 54). Institutions have the availability to provide these opportunities to students, facilitate interfaith learning, and promote a safe place for *all* students to discuss their religious identity (Harrington, Jacob, Harbert, & Saiid, 2014).

Eboo et al. (2016) sums up what an interfaith leader strives to do:

Being an interfaith leader requires the willingness to remain in relationship with people whose views might offend your own. Being an interfaith leader requires profound commitment to extending a hand when others are withdrawing theirs. Being an interfaith leader requires the radical undertaking of seeing beyond your own perspective to deeply understand another (p. 192).

### Christian Privilege

Individuals associated with higher education and, more specifically, student affairs professionals are always cognizant of ‘privilege.’ There are privileges that encompass every segment of human identity.

Several researchers have that identified mainstream Christianity beliefs as privileged. Eboo et al. (2016) explained,

To be non-Christian, not White, to speak another language, or follow non-hegemonic cultural traditions on [U.S.-based institutions of higher learning] campuses can feel perilous because the followers of the Christian God appear to be in charge of symbols, language, and meaning (p. 193).

Regardless of the privilege that there is known to be surrounding Christianity, there is also research that suggests otherwise. The results of a study by Mayhew et al. (2014) showed that religious majority students reported to have a more negative campus climate perception in comparison to non-religious students or religious minority students. Contrary to popular belief, many of today's institutions favor nonreligious students which gives them the privilege in some cases. In their study, the college campus climate was most favored by non-religious students and felt most hostile from religious majority students (Mayhew et al., 2014). Bryant (2011a) found that "...students reported that being a Christian in the context of the college classroom imparted a host of challenges, which at times led to the feeling of having to 'sell out' (particularly in the sciences) in order to be successful" (p. 128).

This is why religion and spirituality is such a challenge in institutions of higher education. There are many opinions given and privilege arguments for all individuals and faiths. Religion is a complex component of humanity. Could the many delicacies and intersectionalities of religion and spirituality be why it is so important to support students in developing this identity?

### Faculty and Staff Influence

The role of faculty and staff should not be overlooked. Faculty engagement has a large impact on students' religious and spiritual development (Bowman et al., 2015). Craft (2011) added, "...Many student affairs administrators expressed their belief in the importance of the spiritual and religious aspects of student development, yet at the same time, expressed reluctance concerning their role in that aspect of development" (p. 163). Gonsiorek, Richards, Pargament, and McMinn argued that educators might intentionally avoid discussing religion and spirituality for fear of violating an unclear law of professionalism (Adams et al., 2015). Burchell et al. (2011) found that practitioners only tend to be comfortable talking about religion and spirituality if the student initiates the conversation, if the student shares similar beliefs as they do, or if they have developed a good relationship previously with the student.

Adams et al. (2015) stated that it is vital that higher education professionals are educated about religion so stress and unfamiliarity is minimized; thus, more professionals would then be comfortable and knowledgeable about religion and spirituality which would enable them to help students with their religious identity development process or engage in religious conversations. Glanzer (2011) offered that educators need to be informed about the various identities and how they influence an individual. They should not just be shown, but they should be taught about the various narratives. Glanzer (2011) further stated that "...educators, both religious and nonreligious, need to understand their own worldview or narrative.... [because] we cannot expect teachers or textbook writers

to divorce their identity and their accompanying stories from the way they teach and write” (p. 28).

Student affairs professionals have a large influence in students’ development throughout their collegiate time and should recognize, challenge, and support all students’ spiritual and religious journeys (Mayhew et al., 2014). Lindholm and Astin (2011) agreed that “...faculty attitudes and behaviors are known to have important implications for student development” (p. 51). Glanzer (2011) said that one thing most educators do agree upon is the desire to help develop students who are critical thinkers. Whether majority or minority worldview, it is vital that educators understand the importance of educating about all worldviews (Glanzer, 2011). Astin et al. (2011) added:

Students whose professors encourage them to explore questions of meaning and purpose are inclined to show larger-than-average increases in their inclinations toward spiritual questioning between their freshman and junior years, irrespective of their demographic characteristics, field of study, or the type of college or university (public, private, religiously affiliated, and so on) they attend. These effects can be potentially very powerful (p. 37).

Lindholm and Astin’s (2011) research showed that faculty with higher levels of spirituality in their own lives have a more positive look on their work and personal lives.

They stated:

Generally speaking, faculty who are spiritual view the importance of students’ personal development to be equal to that of intellectual and career development. In other words, they have a more holistic view of undergraduate education as it pertains to student development. Not surprisingly, spiritual faculty are also much more likely to engage in civic minded practice... (p. 64).

#### Institutional Needs and Actions

“College is a key time for students to explore beliefs and develop as leaders” (Rozeboom et al., 2016, p. 136). In research conducted by Rockenbach et al. (2015),

there was recognition of the many efforts being made at the collegiate level to promote an understanding between diversities of race and ethnicity; however, the study stated that there is a lack of inclusion in the realm of religious diversities. Institutions should look into making religious inclusiveness a part of their mission and design religious opportunities that promote spiritual diversity and inclusiveness (Bowman et al., 2015). There needs to be more initiative and action in regards to religious opportunities at institutions; just having a religious center or student club is not enough (Mayhew et al., 2014).

There are public institutions that use off-campus partnerships to try to fulfill students' spiritual and religious need. Donahoo (2014) found that there were three consistent reasons that students choose to go off-campus for their religious needs: (1) strong and consistent message, (2) family-like atmosphere, and (3) separation from campus life. When asked to explain about the separation from campus life, students made comments about off-campus churches regarding them as: a "permanent place," provides "faith and friendship...trust..." it is a "judge-free zone," and "staff that will listen to you without judging you" (p. 185). There is no doubt that off-campus churches can be and are beneficial to a student's development; however, institutions could also be using their resources to meet these needs of the students. Why isn't there an organized entity developed on-campus as a religious student resource? It could be a placed staffed with trusted adults. It could be a safe zone that advocates for interfaith learning. It could be a permanent place for students to grow, learn, and develop in their religion and selves. It could promote student development.

“Many student affairs administrators believe that students want to have discussions about spirituality and religion and want to be more open about this dimension of their identity but have no ‘safe place’ in which to do it” (Craft, 2011, p. 162). Astin et al. (2011) agrees that students want to have the discussion regarding religion and spirituality, but they want to learn and decide for themselves. Institutions should recognize these needs and be intentional about acting upon them. “If higher education cannot help students to hold competing identities and values in tension in the safe space of the college campus, how can we expect them to do so in their lives beyond?” (Eboo et al., 2016, p. 195).

#### Collegiate Barriers

According to the research of Adams et al. (2015), counseling professionals recognized barriers and strategies to overcome the obstacle of the religious uncertainty. Counseling can be closely tied or partnered with student affairs coursework and careers; thus, this research gives higher education personnel insight as well. The barriers that were recognized in playing a role of professionals being uncomfortable discussing religion are the following: having a lack of information, no or inconsistent religious education, and having little self-interest for religion. Adams et al. (2015) found that the suggested strategies to help individuals to be more comfortable and proactive to engage in religious conversations and activities were the following: continuing education and trainings, being more cognizant of the needs of others, and specific curriculum requirements that surround the topic of religion. “Student affairs administrators agree that, even though spirituality and religion play salient roles in students’ lives, for the most part students are



‘terrified to talk’ about these aspects of their identity” (Craft, 2011, p. 161). With education and interfaith learning, institutions could overcome this barrier.

Another barrier is the many interpretations of the law of ‘separation of church and state.’ Many individuals believe that ‘separation of church and state’ means that there cannot be or should not be any religious dialogue in public educational systems (The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, n.d.). However, that is not what the law declares. The first amendment to the Constitution of the United States is written:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

This means that citizens have a freedom from an “establishment of religion” and a freedom to exercise their personal belief. Thus, education and conversations regarding religion are acceptable in public educational systems.

“There are many people who do not think that spirituality or religion have a place in higher education beyond certain academic courses; however, those people forget that higher education is deeply involved with students’ lives” (Astin et al., 2011, p. 6). These dialogues can legally be and should developmentally be occurring. Eboo et al. (2016) affirmed:

When we create a culture of avoidance, rather than a culture of advocacy, we limit these opportunities for healthy identity development and relationship building. When we manage risk more than relationships by restricting religious freedom and individual right of conscience, we fail in our democratic mission (p. 194).

Interfaith learning aims to be more inclusive, appreciating all religious and spiritual needs. An interfaith program on campus would be beneficial to all students

regardless of belief or lack thereof and would not cross the church vs. state line (Donahoo, 2014). Nash recommends pluralism that intentionally includes religious and nonreligious beliefs alike (Nash, 2011). Pluralism, as Eboo et al. (2016) stated, is “respect for individual identity” (p. 191). In the end, “religion and education, although oftentimes at odds as to their means, both seek understanding as an end” (Strange & Rogers, 2011, p. 47). Regardless of the barriers, Astin et al. (2011) summarized their intense research with the following statement:

In short, we believe that the findings of this study constitute a powerful argument in support of the proposition that higher education should attend more to students’ spiritual development. Assisting more students to grow spiritually will help to create a new generation of young adults who are more caring, more globally aware, and more committed to social justice than previous generations, and who are able to employ greater equanimity in responding to the many stresses and tensions of our rapidly changing technological society (p. 157).

### Conclusion

What are public institutions doing? What *should* public institutions be doing?

This review of research literature supports the idea that institutions of higher education and the field of student affairs should be more intentional about providing opportunities for students to develop spiritually and religiously.

This research will address these essential but challenging questions by further introducing you to the study, explaining the methodology, and describing the findings. There will also be ideas provided that prompt future implications. The discussion of diversity and inclusion continues to grow and the need is ever more crucial in the field of student affairs, at our institutions, in the United States, and throughout the world. As

Eboo et al. (2016) stated, “Welcome to the world of religious diversity in the 21st century” (p. 192).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Problem

The field of student affairs addresses diversity and inclusion in regards to all aspects of identities. However, there are questions raised as to whether or not the student affairs profession truly does provide support and resources for all developmental identities. The problem is that there is a miniscule number of public institutions that provide resources to help address and support students' religious and spiritual development. Private institutions are able to address this area since attendance is a voluntary agreement to the stated norms of the institution. However, public institutions tend to follow more neutral legal requirements of the constitution. It seems as if public institutions feel that the discussion surrounding religion cannot occur on their campuses. But, legally these conversations can occur. According to theorists and research, these conversations should be occurring for the purpose of student's development. One study by Bowman and Small (2012) concluded that there is a positive correlation between religious involvement and student development and well-being. So what are public institutions doing to provide students with a place to ask questions and seek their own religious or spiritual guide? The research question this study answers is as follows: What are public university administrators' perceptions of and knowledge about religious and spiritual resources on their campus?

### Method Choices

In researching religion and spirituality in higher education further, the researcher had the opportunity to develop numerous means of conducting this study. Broadly, the options encompassed a quantitative or qualitative approach. This was narrowed down to either a general quantitative survey or a qualitative study that included interviews. Due to the nature of the study and question proposed, the qualitative interviews were chosen due to their allowance for more in-depth and personal thought for questions asked. It was decided that in order to find out what is available on campuses and personal perceptions of various regards, the open-ended questions in a more intimate, formal nature would formulate more accurate and thought out responses. Furthermore, due to what the researcher was looking to examine, it was decided that focusing on student affairs administration in various functional units would be most beneficial for the study. Finally, it was decided to address this as a case study at a single campus to allow the researcher to have a more comprehensive and integrated examination of the institution (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

### Unpublished Study

An unpublished pilot study by Stafford (2016) was developed and facilitated at a regional comprehensive institution. An invitation to participate in this study was extended and accepted by seven upper administration in the following positions at the university: Dean of Students, Assistant Dean of Students, Interim Vice President of Student Affairs, Director of Student Success and Retention, Director of Student Union, Assistant to the President, and Director of Residence Life. These administrators were all student affairs

professionals with a range of personal religious and spiritual beliefs which included a non-practicing Catholic, no religious commitment, Unitarian Universalist, agnostic, and practicing Catholic.

### Findings

The university prided itself on preparing students for success in a culturally diverse world. This study uncovered a recurring discussion about the lack of diversity on its campus. This raised the question: How can the university better prepare students to be culturally competent? The resources available at the regional institution were typically unrelated to the university and there was a careful line that administrators felt they had to balance as they attempted to be a resource for students' religious and spiritual needs while maintaining state and church separation. The research showed that the university would benefit from creating a more diverse and inclusive Campus Ministries Association (CMA). This would be most successfully accomplished with space and personnel. This study discovered that administration thought it would greatly benefit the institution and its students if there was a developed accessible, on-campus faith space for students, staff, and faculty that promoted interfaith dialogue and intercultural learning opportunities. Furthermore, it was found that the institution would better serve their students if they invested in personnel to oversee the space, the Campus Ministries Association, and develop potential programming while also being a primary and consistent resource known for students throughout campus. Lastly, the university prides itself on preparing students for success in a culturally diverse world. This study uncovered much discussion about the lack of diversity on its campus. This raised the question: How can the

university better prepare students to be culturally competent? This research found that the institution could best help to foster holistic student development and global citizens by the following initiatives:

1. Creating a more diverse and inclusive Campus Ministries Association
2. Developing an easily accessible, on-campus interdenominational space for students, staff, and faculty that promotes interfaith dialogue and intercultural learning opportunities
3. Invest in personnel to oversee the interdenominational space, the Campus Ministries Association, develop potential programming, and be a primary and consistent resource known throughout campus

As Danielle, an administrator, stated, “Our responsibility on the college campus is to continue to try and lift the fog. Help people see other ways of viewing the world.” It is necessary to know the basics of others’ beliefs and views in order to be a global and culturally competent citizen. It should be a goal of the institution to provide the resources to do so.

#### Changes Made

The unpublished study was productive in informing this study. The individuals selected gave insightful information; thus, the invitations to upper administration stayed the same for the research study. The biggest adjustments made were to the interview questions. The questions were restructured and reformatted into the following sections: What is currently available for religious and spiritual resources at the university, what is seen to be campus and student needs, and administrative perceptions and personal role in

regards to religious and spiritual student development. Lastly, the transcribing, coding, and analyzing of data went very well. This process remained the same as the pilot study validated an accurate and effective means for reporting the findings.

### Current Study

This research study was qualitative, which enabled the researcher to gain more insight and hear deeper perspectives from the interviewees. The qualitative data was collected via personal interviews to make a connection between the interviewer and interviewee; this method was more likely to gain meaningful information as qualitative research allows elaboration and rich data.

### Participants

The researcher wanted to focus the study at a large, R1 public institution, so the participants were exclusively from the same doctoral university. To protect identities, the institution in which the interviews were done was given a pseudonym; the institution will be discussed as Cabin University. The researcher extended an invite to participate in this study to individuals in the following positions:

- Executive Director, Student Union
- Director, Student Health and Wellness
- Assistant Director, Student Care and Outreach
- Assistant Dean of Students
- Assistant Vice President, Student Life
- Associate Director, Student Organizations and Leadership Programs
- Associate Dean of Students



- Deputy Title IX Coordinator
- Vice President, Student Life
- Dean of Students
- Director, Recreational Services
- Director, Student Disability Services
- Director, University Counseling Service

These 13 administrators were all student affairs professionals and chosen due to their various positions on campus. There were only two administrators that did not partake in the study. One individual could not make it work in their schedule and the other administrator did not want to participate and provided me with the following explanation: “I’m not connected to spiritual resources on campus and have limited direct contact with students in my current position.” The remaining eleven administrators agreed to participate. Not only were job titles different amongst interviewees, they also had a range of personal religious and spiritual beliefs which included Judaism, Catholicism, Christianity, and undisclosed.

#### Procedure

The researcher read numerous articles regarding religion and began formulating a topic focus and problem which regarded religion and spirituality in public institutions. It was decided to look in-depth at Cabin University’s religious and spiritual composition; more specifically, the researcher decided to focus questions on upper administration in order to gain their perceptions and obligations to religion and spirituality.

After brainstorming a base of interviewees, finalizing the on-campus interviews followed. The interviewees were e-mailed a brief description of the project, agreed or declined the invitation to participate, and then an interview was scheduled. The interviews were all scheduled at the interviewee's personal office at Cabin University. The interviews were private, face-to-face, interviews between the researcher and administrator. The interviews were designated to last for a maximum of 1 hour.

The researcher explained the informed consent form before beginning each interview (see Appendix A for informed consent form). The interview questions were centered on three main area of research: the current status of religion and spirituality at Cabin University, campus and student needs regarding religion and spirituality, and the administration's personal role and thought (see Appendix B for the interview questions). The interviewer asked to record the interviews for transcription purposes; all participants allowed the use of a voice recording device. The interviews were performed in a semi-structured manner. Again, this enabled the interviewer to focus more on certain areas depending upon each individual, and provided the researcher with flexibility and more information throughout the interviews.

After each interview, the researcher transcribed the interview verbatim. The transcription was then sent to the interviewee to ensure for accuracy and correct interpretations. The interviewees confirmed the interview transcription before the researcher began coding and analyzing the data.

### Data Analysis

The interview transcription was approved by the interviewee to increase validity of this study. Upon confirmation of accurate interpretation of the interview, the researcher began to analyze the qualitative data collected.

### Coding Procedure

To ensure anonymity, the researcher concealed the identity of each interviewee. There is no link to the interviewee's position, name, or information. All eleven interviewees were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. The pseudonyms are the following for the eleven administrators at Cabin University: Beth, Dana, Jake, Jason, Katrina, Korey, Kym, Shane, Tarissa, Taylor, and Thomas. This coding ensured anonymity as best as possible. The researcher chose to present the findings this way to give the interviewees a more secure environment to express their true opinions and feelings regarding the topic.

The data analysis process began by the researcher coding themes throughout each interview. These themes included recurring thoughts throughout interviews and finding main ideas in the transcriptions. The interviews were compared and contrasted to each other for the findings. The researcher looked for major similarities, differences, and interesting comments throughout all transcribed interviews in accordance with the questions asked.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The researcher expected that there would be a large, varying array of information collected from the eleven administrators interviewed. However, it was found that many responses were similar across the board of the student affairs professionals. It was evident that the individuals knew that there was some degree of religious and spiritual resources at Cabin University (CU), but there was certainly a need and desire for more. The organization of this chapter will address the current status of religion and spirituality at Cabin University, campus and student needs regarding the topic, followed by the administration's personal role and thought.

#### Current Status of Religion and Spirituality at CU

##### Available Religious and Spiritual Resources

The known, available religious and spiritual resources for students on Cabin University's campus were different among all eleven interviewees. The most discussed resource were student organizations. Eight out of the eleven (73%) administrators noted student organizations were a main resource on CU's campus. Katrina even stated, "...I think most of the resources available to students are through organizations." There were six (55%) individuals that mentioned the Campus Ministries Association in some capacity. Jake described this group as "...religious and spiritual advisors that are affiliated with our campus faith-based organizations." Only two of those administrators knew who helped facilitate that group. One of the six, Dana, knew there was some sort of group that met but could not recite the name. Furthermore, when referencing the Campus Ministries

Association, it was referred to a few different ways (e.g. Association of Campus Ministers, Campus Ministers, etc.).

“I think that there’s also groups within the community that try to be supportive with religious beliefs and trying to reach to the students...” Thomas mentioned. Including Thomas, there were six (55%) administrators that talked about off-campus churches and leaders available to students, too.

Three (28%) interviewees discussed the prayer and meditation rooms in the Cabin Union. To be inclusive, Beth added that, “...we have two because some folks who want to use those are our Muslim students, and so we want to have one for brothers and one for sisters.”

Besides those main points, there were not any resources stated that were duplicated. Thomas mentioned that the Student Involvement Office would be a resource for students. Beth mentioned the Danforth Chapel on CU’s campus as well as faculty and staff as resources for students. Kym talked about Biblical Counseling which is not affiliated with CU but located geographically close. Katrina referenced the Religious Studies academic area. She commented, “We have a Religious Studies program, but I don’t know if that’s where someone would go to make connections to their spirituality.” Dana added, “We have what’s called an On Call Dean program here that responds to the hospital and folks go over the weekend, so we have those resources for those folks to be able to connect students if they’re looking for that spiritual resource in a generic way.” With a wide range of thoughts on this question, Jason summarized it well: CU does not

have anything directly tied to the university, but it does reach out to make those resources available.

### Where Should Students Go?

When asked where he would send a student that inquired about a religious or spiritual resource, Thomas responded,

*I would try to help find an answer for them and then try to connect that student with those resources instead of the 'Here, call this office' sort of thing. That's just not my style. I think it's the style of a lot of student affairs professionals that we want people to learn by doing, but doing doesn't necessarily mean that we send them on their way to this office. We truly need to connect people A to B kind of thing.*

There were also a few other professionals that mentioned questioning them further before sending them on their way. But, overall, there was a large array of responses to this question as well.

The Cabin University website was the go-to place for the administrators to direct students. Seven (64%) interviewees stated the website as a good place for students to turn to. Shane mentioned Google; Beth and Jake mentioned OrgSyn which is their student organization management system; and Beth said, "I think it's going to start when they start looking at Cabin University. So now students will certainly do their homework online. And right now, families will do their homework online." Pointing students in the direction of student organizations was suggested by five (45%) of interviewees. The third most discussed place to guide students to was electronic mediums. Three (27%) individuals stated that is a major place for students to look and gain information.

There were many other suggestions that administrators claimed they would refer students to. There were only one or two individuals that mentioned the following avenues

of finding a religious or spiritual resource on CU: Signage, phonebook, welcome to the community handouts, orientations/tours/visits, student organization fair, activity fair, mailings, word of mouth, Biblical counseling, brochures, other student affairs colleagues, campus ministries, off-campus group, and the School of Religion.

### What's Available?

The interviewees were all asked what religious and spiritual events or activities are available to students at CU. The most often response was Danforth Chapel by five (45%) administrators. Jake explained, “It was established by the foundation and is maintained by the university.” Beth said that there are many services that happen in Danforth and it “might have daily or weekly meditation sessions there.” Danforth can be reserved by different people and many people can and do use it. Shane stated that it “...can be used for various events--- weddings, activations for fraternities and sororities, so there’s a number of different events that can be used in there.”

The Cabin Union was commonly talked about, too. Three (27%) administrators talked about the increased club and organization activity in the Union and the availability to rent space from the Union. Taylor said that there are cultural celebrations and other events sponsored by student organizations that take place in the Union that are often for students on campus and community members. Additionally, five (45%) individuals discussed the prayer and meditation rooms that are available for students.

Again, there was a range of responses regarding what is available to students on campus. Other responses that were mentioned by one or two interviewees included: Breakfasts and events held in churches for nondenominational groups, tailgating events

organized by faith-based groups, events in Cabin Park on campus hosted by different religious organizations, tabling, welcome events, student organization fair, handouts, free speech groups on campus, and various ministries that have their happenings off-campus.

Jason solely stated that he doesn't know if there are activities going on throughout campus or not. Katrina solidified that and claimed, "I don't know that it's always overt. I think students have to be looking and kind of know what they're looking for a little."

### Partnerships with CU

The religious and spiritual partnership that administrators knew of on campus fell into two primary categories: Campus Ministries Association/campus ministers and local, off-campus churches and their members. Dana and Thomas said that they did not know of any partnerships occurring. Dana specifically said,

*I'm not sure; I don't know, I think because we are such a decentralized model. I had a much stronger sense of that when I was working at a small, private, Catholic institution; I knew a lot more about what was happening.*

Thomas added that he lives outside of the city in which Cabin University is located, so he doesn't see these partnerships.

There were, however, six (55%) interviewees that said a big partnership is with the Campus Ministries Association/campus ministers. Kym stated, "...We try to collaborate a lot with them... Not as often as we probably should be or connecting our students to them, but especially in times of crisis when there's major things going on."

Tarissa added,

*When there's a concern or something horrible happens, natural disaster, a crime that impacts campus, or maybe, they may partner with university counseling service or housing to be available to offer support to students who might seek that kind of support from a religious leader.*



Tarissa, Kym, and Shane (27%) also mentioned the partnership between community members and churches. Shane and Tarissa specifically discussed how community members through local churches will partner for different events and fundraisers with CU students. They advocate for many causes like the Salvation Army, food drives, Coats for Kids, the Humane Society, and the Crisis Center.

### Whose Job?

The interviewees were asked if they had any knowledge of whether or not religion and/or spirituality was explicitly part of someone's job description on campus. Again, the answers varied. Two (18%) said it was, five (45%) said it was not, three (27%) said they did not know, and one individual mentioned that it may be for the Religious Department but did not mention student affairs areas.

Shane and Tarissa said that it is a part of someone's job description in terms of Pastoral Care at the hospital which is funded through the university. Tarissa also guessed, "I think when we think about our Student Life folks, that there would be [a religious/spiritual part in their job description]."

Jake, Katrina, Dana, Korey, and Kym said that they do not believe that religion and/or spirituality is a part of anyone's job description on campus. Jake stated, "...rarely in a public institution will you have someone whose quote-on-quote job it is..." Korey added, "When [university employees are] involved, they're involved on a volunteer basis. I think that's one of the things that distinguishes public institutions from private."

Thomas, Taylor, and Beth were not sure. Taylor and Beth both have previously had or currently have a liaison role with the campus ministers association. They both

mentioned their lack of clarity regarding their own job descriptions. Taylor perplexed, “I’m not sure what my job description says. Historically, it has been the person that has been in my position who has met with them.” Beth added that she feels it would be in the job description “as it relates to student organizations” and those managing the organizations though.

Kym said that religion and spirituality is not necessarily a job. It’s not written out in descriptions but is part of developing students which is what a lot of student affairs professionals’ objectives are. She added,

*I think, to be honest, it should be in all of our jobs to make sure we’re connecting students to where they feel the best fit for them and if it’s religious or spiritual, then we should be able to help them navigate that on our campus.*

### Challenges Faced

There are many challenges to addressing religion and spirituality on public campuses, and the interviewees discussed in detail what their perceptions were of the challenges faced. There were two concepts that were predominantly discussed by five (45%) of the individuals.

First, a major challenge to addressing religion and spirituality on public campuses is the misconception of the notion of church vs state. Katrina clarified the difference of “freedom *from* religion vs freedom *of* religion.” She discussed that history has taken us to a path where we don’t, can’t, and won’t talk about religion anymore. Jake also said, “But my own professional belief is that we need to be providing support to all, and as long as we’re providing support to all, we’re not supporting or not supporting any particular religious belief or spiritual belief.” That is what the law states. There will not be an

established religion. He continued, “Our position is that as long as we are consistent, equitable, and constant in our resource distribution then we’re okay.”

The other big challenge discussed was politics, media, and public perceptions.

Taylor explained,

*I think the biggest obstacle I face is that political and public perception issue... There would be nothing illegal about us having a university chaplain, but politically it would be very difficult to do. I find it hard, politically, to devote staff resources to spirituality. It's hard to explain that spirituality has many forms of expression and that's what we're supporting.*

Jason agreed by commenting, “...I think a lot of it has to do with public outcry, because I don’t think people understand the division of church and state.” He added, “The society has thrown us into a very conservative mode that we’re not going to try to offend anybody, because people are afraid of being sued.” Beth discussed the additional pressure through publicity and media focus that Cabin University receives due to its large size.

“The openness, I think, is greater here; the focus is also greater,” Beth offered. She continued,

*And so I think what I appreciate about being on this campus is that there is, there is an embracing of free speech, and so that's pretty open, and that's not always easy but it's very open to be able to really speak openly and to share and to disagree. And so being able to talk about religion and spirituality and belief systems, I think, is easier to do here... However, the other really hard piece to do here is because we're [such a big] institution, there's more attention paid.*

There were five other challenges that individuals discussed. Katrina mentioned that being uncomfortable with the topic is a challenge. Tarissa said that the first and biggest challenge, in her eyes, is a lack of awareness and training. Another challenge that Shane noted were the numerous variations in health care due to religious beliefs and the role that religion has in the healthcare field. He explained that some religions do not

allow blood transfusions or there are some “religions that don’t support immunizations, so their children are not getting vaccinated.” Korey added a challenge by pondering this:

*...Since it's the first time young adults are away from home, I know some people tend to resist what they see as traditional. So I think [the challenge is] in encouraging young adults to become interested, and I think everybody has a spiritual side to them... It's one of those things I find interesting, just the different paths that people take... So, I think trying to find, for students who aren't sure what to do, I just say, 'try to find the right balance.'*

Thomas thought a large challenge to addressing this need was the fact that there are so many different needs. “Some we know about, some we don’t know about,” he said. He summed up his thought by saying,

*So I think that there's just a lot of variance with our students, because we come from all walks of life. We come from many different countries. You take the folks who are just from the state of [state name], those folks are very different. Some come from more of the urban setting, maybe more of the [big cities], you know, a couple million people; whereas, there may be a whole nother group of them that come from very rural, farm community out in the country [areas]. And that's just what we're dealing with. We have a variety of students that come in with a variety of experiences and beliefs. And some of those beliefs are shaped while they are here, and that is a direct reflection on their experience here.*

### Fear to Talk About It?

When asked if there was a fear to talk about religion and spirituality on Cabin’s campus or what is preventing the conversation, there were three main responses. Six (55%) individuals mentioned there is a fear, four (36%) said it was a difficult or uncomfortable topic, and three (27%) felt that people just don’t want to talk about it, ignore, or avoid the conversation.

There was one individual that did not address at least one of the three overarching themes. Taylor said that there is the traditional notion to not discuss religion and politics,

but she was not sure if that notion was on Cabin's campus or not. She was just unsure and did not know.

Tarissa, Kym, and Shane stated that religion and spirituality is just something that isn't talked about, is ignored, or is avoided. Shane said, "There are certain things you don't talk about... You don't talk about politics, you don't talk about religion. They're just taboos." Kym added,

*I think some of it is 'if we don't talk about it then we don't have to be aware of it. If I ignore it then it won't bother me.' And I think people don't talk about things until there is an issue... So, I think people don't discuss these things, because it's not an issue at the time; it's not bothering them at the time. The minute that it starts to invade on whatever they feel is their personal space or their beliefs, I think that's when we have those discussions. Otherwise, I think if it's not infringing on their day-to-day lives at the time, then I don't think people feel like there needs to be a discussion. Now, in student affairs, I think there could be more discussions.*

The other conversation preventer discussed by the interviewees was due to the topic being difficult, challenging, and uncomfortable. Jake stated that he does not feel there is a fear of talking about religion and spirituality at Cabin University; but, he continued to say, "I think it can be challenging for some, because it is so personal... I would say that it's more private and as a result perhaps talked less about." Tarissa agreed that people tend to not know how to talk about it. Thomas reiterated the thoughts of his colleagues by summarizing, "I think that religion in general is just a difficult topic for some people to talk about. It doesn't matter whether you're a student or an employee. I think that some people are just uncomfortable about it."

Fear to talk about religion and spirituality was the primary reason administrators thought that conversations surrounding the topic were not occurring. Dana thought it to

be a self-imposed fear. Katrina felt that religion is a personal matter which makes it harder to talk about. She explained, “So I think we’ve just got to get through that fear, and I think it’s a cultural thing in the United States that just religion is so private for people and you’re not supposed to talk about it...” Beth added that she feels people fear being labeled or having a grievance filed against them. It is a fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. It is a personal fear that holds back these developmental conversations.

There were four administrators that discussed talking with students about religion and spirituality. All four (100%) said that the student has to initiate the conversation. Jason commented, “[For a student], I would not reach out to them and share anything unless they ask. If they ask and they open the door, I’m more than happy to talk to them about it.” Korey mentioned that he does not believe there is anything prohibiting him from starting the conversation, but “students may get the wrong impression from what I’m trying to do to help them if I ask that question [first].”

### Campus and Student Needs

#### Faculty and Staff

Four administrators explicitly discussed the roles of faculty and staff on college campuses. Shane summarized their roles and said faculty and staff need to know how and be prepared to handle these religious situations and conversations, too. “We often default to ‘it’s the campus ministers’ job’ or ‘I don’t know enough about the various religions.’ But, it could be and should be faculty and staff’s job,” Katrina added. She continued,

*And then working with college students all these years, I just think some of the big developmental and life questions people explore are in this area [of religion and spirituality], and we guide and help college students explore all sorts of things but not this very well.*

Tarissa specifically mentioned how under trained faculty and staff are in this area. She stated,

*I don't think our staff are equipped to or feel comfortable asking about someone's spiritual life. So, particularly those of us responding to trauma, I don't know if there is a lot of discussion about how to do that or how to honor that or to use that as a resource if it's a source of strength for the student... Because we're afraid of offending or seeming to judge or suggest... And I also think that people might not know or declare for themselves about what they think, believe, or feel and avoided it as adults or professionals. So then to be put in a spot where you're not sure what you think or feel or isn't something you've attended to on your own... It's similar, so how do you then do that with a student that you're working with?*

Dana spoke to Tarissa's last point by stating, "...there are many students that we work with that don't share similar identities that I have, but it doesn't mean that I can't provide that support or be that piece for them." "Once again," Shane began, "we're here to provide service and not judge. We all have opinions but we have to check them at the door." Student Affairs is here to support all students and as professionals in higher education, faculty and staff need to be ready to help students along their developmental path.

### The Struggles Students Face

Seven (64%) administrators discussed mental health or some form of crisis as the number one struggle that students face in which religion and spirituality could be a resource for them. For instance, Jason stated,

*The first thing that pops into my head are the mental health issues. A student who had that type of resource at home, they don't have it here, and it could be a comfort to them. I think that for many people, their faith does give them comfort, and I think that's one of the primary reasons, and that's really what faith is.*

Korey and Jake both commented on more specific occurrence of crisis and student need for a supportive resource. Korey discussed how religion and spirituality could be a resource for students who are struggling by self-harming or feeling as if they don't belong on the campus. Jake added,

*There's depression. There's death. There is a longing and a belonging, and so historically that's how our religious student advisors have supported our groups. They've supported our students who are grieving; they've supported our students who are struggling with perhaps psychological issues. So we engage our faith-based community in times of crisis... Unfortunately in my career, I've experienced multiple student deaths, so it has been very common for us to offer up religious support for the group.*

Dana also discussed an experience personal to her. She described situations she often saw in her previous role as a conduct officer. She explained,

*Again, it's when they make this decision and something happens, and for some of them this may be things they've been doing prior to coming to CU like underage drinking and partying, but for some of them this is the first time they've ever done that. First time they've ever been in trouble. First time they've had this experience. And you really see them grapple with that and talk about 'this is not me, I've never done this before, I'm not a bad person.' To me, all of that has underlying connections to spirituality [and] what ethos they hold for themselves.*

Tarissa added, “[A student’s faith] informs how they come in thinking about being a survivor or somebody that’s accused of some sort of harassment, misconduct, or assault... Sometimes it impacts it in a positive way [knowing] they have this additional resource.” On the contrary, she explained, it can make explaining the situation more challenging. It can be a personal dilemma for students when they are dealing with forgiveness and acceptance which makes religion and spirituality a challenge, especially if they do not have a place to go and feel safe. Kim summarized, “So I’d say a lot of the



times it's really for unfortunate events that we're connecting with our religious and spiritual organizations.”

Katrina discussed that students are searching, wondering, and asking big questions for themselves. “I think you could almost pick any [situation] that a student could be in [and] argue that religion could help with that. Now, again, I think it still needs to be up to the individual,” Thomas began. He concluded, “Again, because we are so different that we all require different things, we all want different things, we all need different things,” Students are struggling. Students need religious and spiritual support, especially in times of crisis.

#### Issues of Religion and Spirituality in Students' Lives

Seven (64%) administrators stated that they see religion and spirituality play important roles in students' lives, and they gave varying examples that testify to this. To begin, Jake simply discussed how there has been an increase in number of student groups and size of students groups pertaining to religion; that proliferation shows it is impactful in students' lives. Another circumstance in which administrators see religion and spirituality at work in students' lives is in times of crisis or need as discussed in the paragraph prior. Dana said she often discusses religion and spirituality with students in times of crisis such as a death in the family, depression, or another diagnosis. Korey further added that religion and spirituality is often evident in students' lives during times of personal crisis, specifically with life choices. He explained,

*In helping students through the disciplinary system, a lot of cases we get are alcohol or drug related, and so the students who go through treatment often times do become closer to God. So there's a number of stories I've had with people who*

*turn their life around and a lot of times it involves becoming more religious devoted.*

Beth and Katrina said that they saw the topic come up more often in students' lives when they work more closely and more often with students. As former hall coordinators, roles in which they had more direct and constant student interaction, they often saw students thinking about religion and spirituality. Shane also mentioned that not only are students talking about religion and spirituality and its role in their own life, but some students are also looking at different cultures for the first time. He stated,

*I think students by in large, many when they come here for the first time, do experience different cultures and different people, and I think that's important for them to be aware of that, because they may not have experienced that in their hometown.*

Thomas added that students are also processing and seeing cultural and religious differences in terms of programming and everyday life at college institutions, as well. For example, he mentioned, "...To enter into our facilities, you have to have a photo id. And so we see some variance in what different religions allow or don't allow in terms of photo ids." In the mainstream and majority religions, having a photo taken is certainly not unusual. But, in some religions, individuals cannot have their photo taken or have to wear particular garb in order to do so. These are cultural and religious aspects that are important in each student's life and important for the campus society to understand and appreciate.

### Desired Developments

There were many ideas presented when asked to think without limitations and explain what they would want developed on their campus and the campuses of other

public institutions. One (9%) individual said that public institutions should just remain how they are. That individual, Jake, specifically said,

*Again, I don't see us as an institution directing resources, financial resources, or staff to work exclusively with our religious student organizations... I don't think we'd have a full time employee whose job it is to work exclusively and only with our religious student advisors. But we embrace them. As we know, these loosely affiliated groups play a very, very important part in the lives of our students.*

Jake talked about the importance, yet still did not want to consider dabbling in the conversation of religion and public institutions.

However, the majority of administrators did discuss potential developments that would be beneficial to public campuses and student development. Thomas talked about the importance of finding out what students' needs and wants are. He stated,

*And so I think being a public university, we also need to keep in mind that we are an environment that has a lot of different people involved whether it's students, whether it's employees, whether it's our relationship with the community, there's so many different people that we want to make sure that we're embracing as much as possible to everybody.*

To accommodate the vast range of students and their needs, interviewees discussed developing a religious fair on campus, a cell phone app with resources, a more accessible website, having speakers, some religious some not, visit campus to discuss topics which could be religious-focused at times, or having a devoted staff member. A few administrators believed in having a staff dedicated this field of student development.

Kym specifically said,

*I think it would be nice to have someone whose responsibility it was to connect students and connect all of those pieces, too. On the campus and in the community or in whatever way students need it... I think it would help students find those communities. I think we have people who oversee organizations, we have cultural centers, I think it would make sense to have something that would fit within those.*

In coordination with Kym's comment, the most desired development was a building or center with a religious and spiritual focus. There were six (55%) administrators that discussed developing a center of some sort as their primary desired development. On this issue, Shane claimed,

*If money wasn't an issue, a building specifically built for the various religions so they could be housed under one roof with the flexibility of adding other denominations or beliefs as time goes on. It'd be a one stop, compassion center... With a foodbank, childcare services, expressive artwork... And I don't think it can be all things for all people, but if we had a center that offered them an opportunity to express their beliefs or find people that have common beliefs it would strengthen the bonds, I would think.*

Beth added that it'd be amazing to have a center that focuses on all aspects of wellness.

Dana also said that it could be a place for anyone and everyone that is interested. Katrina added,

*Maybe this could be a center for that—It's safe to talk about faith, spirituality, and religion here. This is a safe place; we're not going to argue about things, we're not going to try to convert people. But, you could come here and just have conversations... It'd be a pretty unique person to hire, but someone that's literally willing to be a convener of all the [religious and spiritual] student organizations.*

Additionally, Taylor commented,

*Somewhere on my list would be some sort of a center that would provide both programming and individual support around spiritual development. That'd be a great thing to have. Again, I think you could do it legally. I don't think the money is the only problem, I think the politics are also a huge challenge.*

The question of public perception and politics were brought to the forefront for some individuals as they brainstormed; however, the majority still stated that a center and staff would be a great resource for students on their campus.

### Interfaith Occurring on Campus

The administrators were asked if they know of any interfaith discussions occurring on their campus. Five (45%) professionals said that they do believe those conversations are occurring and five (45%) did not know if they were or not. There was one (9%) individual that thought there was not any sort of interfaith discussion happening on campus.

Shane, Jake, Beth, Tarissa, and Korey believed these interfaith, cultural conversations were happening on Cabin University's campus in some sort of capacity. Jake noted that the religious advisors encourage and facilitate these conversations. Korey claimed that the School of Religion and Campus Ministries shows that there are interfaith dialogues going on. He added that the diversity of the student population also increases the discussion. Tarissa mentioned the on-campus and off-campus groups that come together, discuss faiths, and explore religions. Beth discussed that these conversations take place depending upon what is occurring currently in the news and on-campus. She ended by stating, "I wouldn't say though, at least not that I'm aware of, that there have been any interfaith conversations that are not necessarily starting with our campus ministers." Shane agreed to an extent. He said the conversations are developing around whatever is in the news. "I think that biggest one going on right now with interfaith is between Christians and Islam," Shane explained. He also talked about conversations surrounding Black Lives Matter, politics, and women's rights, because those are all being discussed in the news; thus, the conversations are more likely to be found on Cabin University's campus.

Thomas, Kym, Katrina, Dana, and Taylor said that they did not know if interfaith conversations were occurring or who was leading them if they were. Taylor and Katrina discussed past events that tried to promote interfaith discussion. Taylor said, “The campus ministers tried [a service project] a year or two ago, they just did not get a lot of participation.” Katrina talked about how they had an event on Cabin University’s campus with guest Eboo Patel. “He was talking about this very stuff [which] is that by neglecting to talk about faith and religion on a college campus, particularly public...” we’re neglecting a large role we should be facilitating with our students, she recalled. Thomas summed up his thoughts by stating,

*...If I were to have to guess one way or the other, I would think that those conversations are happening, because we as student affairs professionals are constantly talking about the ways that we can support our students, and that is one aspect that, you know, is discussed is amongst so many other aspects of trying to provide support to students.*

Interfaith desire. “... If you work together on something, you’re more likely to form lasting relations that will allow that dialogue to continue beyond,” Taylor said after reflecting about interfaith movements. Taylor was not the only one that desired interfaith discussions or events to occur at Cabin University. Jake told about his desire to have more interfaith discussions at the Union. He stated,

*So, I have listened to, watched, observed, been in the audience for these panels where three or four different perspectives on spirituality are presented to our students, and I find those fascinating. I think the message is important, but just the visual of four different kinds of very disparate beliefs coming together and being civil, supportive, gracious to one another is good for our students to see. That they can observe differences being together and being humane, gracious, supportive, kind to one another, that’s a powerful presence. Our building, the Cabin Union, is the space for that. That’s why we have a student union, the Cabin Union, to be home and a place for those kinds of really important discussions. Certainly they happen other places on campus, because we’re a very large,*

*decentralized location, but the Cabin Union is where we want these discussions to occur.*

Kym further discussed the value these conversations would bring to connecting students especially international students. She stated, "...We have cultural conversations and things like that, but I don't know that it ever touches as deep as the religious and spirituality part." Thomas also agreed that interfaith conversations would be beneficial for students and human beings as a whole:

*My hope is that we can have differences, but we can respect them. And that means that we have to be willing to listen to other people and their ideas and opinions and religious preferences and those kinds of things. We have to respect them, and that goes back to the core of one human treating the way another treats another one. I think that religion in general can just be a very difficult conversation... But I think when you look at each individual, we have to respect what makes each individual that person, and religion is certainly a component that makes up a lot of people. So, I think that we just need to make sure that we're trying to respect other people no matter what their background is, what their religious beliefs are, where they come from, where they were born, all sorts of variances that we need to make sure that we're trying to do our part that we're making things better for tomorrow... But that means that we need to have those difficult conversations sometimes to move forward.*

### Departments as Resources

There were a wide range of responses when administrators were asked what departments they thought could be or should be a resource for students' religious and spiritual development. Four (36%) interviewees mentioned the realm of Student Life as a resource that could be and should be for students. Kym specifically mentioned the Dean of Students Office; Tarissa and Kym, the Student Leadership and Involvement Center. Korey, however, thought as Student Life on a broader term. He said,

*Well, I would say the whole Student Life area whether it's housing, student activities, Dean of Student office. I don't know that there is a particular*

*department that is more-suited to doing it than others, but I think it needs to be on all of our radar.*

The counseling center was mentioned by Jake, Beth, and Tarissa (27%). Beth mentioned,

*So, if I as a student want to go see a counselor and want to see a counselor at the university, could I request a counselor, not of my faith but maybe who has a faith or who has a belief system. So, I think that could be helpful.*

The other resources mentioned included: Ombudsman office, Religious Studies program, Student Care Office, LGBTQ Centers, higher education program, and a Chaplain. Tarissa explained further about the Chaplain; she stated it would be like a fire or police department which has a Chaplain(s) available to respond when needed.

### Personal Thought and Role

#### Personal Role

The administrators stated that just being a resource for students was what they felt their primary and personal role was. Eight (73%) professionals stated that being a resource and supporting students is their main obligation when it comes to religion and spirituality. Thomas said that he wanted to be a student advocate and provide students with the knowledge or resources that they need. He also said, “I think that it’s my responsibility to follow through with students when they do have a concern if they felt comfortable enough to trust me with that concern.” Jake regarded, “My obligation is that I am presenting an appropriate and full pool of resources.” He explained how he has to ensure staff is doing their job, staying current, and providing the best service possible.

Tarissa and Beth spoke of the importance of being visible to students. Tarissa mentioned the importance of supporting religious and spiritual conversations and making



that more visibly in her work. Beth added the value of going to events on campus. She stated, "...I think it's sometimes opening the door so that somebody knows that I'm open to having the conversation, I think that's part of it. And part of it, [researcher name], really is being present and being visible." Beth also made the comparison:

*So, I look at this and say, certainly we know that learning takes place everywhere. Sometimes more so out of class than in class, and I also think the learning comes about being able to quickly assess, to be able to think, to be able to engage in dialogue, to be able to disagree hopefully respectfully, and that is where I think it really comes into play. Otherwise, somebody with the argument is going to be, 'Well athletics really has nothing to do with the college experience.' And for some students, it doesn't; it has nothing to do with it. But for others, whether they're playing or working in athletics or going to the game as a part of a community or learning a tradition, it does have to do with the college experience. So, I guess I would much rather that we could talk about it and if somebody brings up that they have this or believe that or struggle with this, to at least be able to have a conversation and then maybe direct them to resources.*

Kym and Jake specifically discussed the importance of helping and being available in times of crisis. Thomas discussed the opposite end of it "not [being] my responsibility to push my own personal religious feelings" and to make sure he does not persuade or push his own personal religion to students.

Taylor and Korey believed their personal role was in the policy level. Taylor stated, "I function primarily at the policy level, so I think that's my responsibility to make sure that we have policies that allow for students' spiritual needs to be addressed and that we're not unnecessarily impeding that work." Korey echoed, "Well I don't know that I see a role other than just making sure that the rights of students who self-identify as religious that they're treated the same and not discriminated against negatively because of their religious viewpoint..."

Jason was the only administrator that believed he had a very small role in personally facilitating religious and spiritual development or resources for students on campus.

### Knowledge of the Law

The most repeated response to being asked what the respondents knew about the law pertaining to religion and spirituality at public institutions was “not sure.” Three (27%) administrators were not confident with the law. Thomas responded with, “Probably not much.” He knew that there were difference between public and private but could not speak specifically to what those differences were. Kym also did not know; regardless, she said,

*And so I think a key thing is making sure that we're not building our institution on the foundation upon a religious concept, but instead allowing all of those religious and spiritualities to thrive in the campus environment... I think a lot of people would probably disagree with me and say that we should separate all religion and keep this just a public institution, and I think that's probably where the law leans. But, I think as long as we're being open and willing to allow students to engage in whatever they feel is comfortable and not saying yes to you and not to you, I think that that's important.*

Furthermore, there were a wide range of other responses. Shane simply said that the law meant we have religious freedom. Others explained more in-depth about what they believed the law meant. Korey and Tarissa discussed the funding regulations that the law means for public institutions. “...We can't use public funds to proselytize... But, you can create things, opportunities, you can partner for a specific group; you just can't discriminate...” Tarissa explained. Korey added, “We can't use state funds to support religion. It's not a violation to have a prayer room. It's not a violation for a group to hold

a service. We have the chapel here which is like a lot of other chapels... This is from donated money.”

Jake and Beth talked more broadly about the law, interpreting it to mean that we are to keep church and state separate. Beth said, “Church cannot influence state.” Jake elaborated more:

*We’re obligated by law to separate church and state; I mean that’s the fundamental issue. So, how we respond, how we facilitate, how we engage, how we work with all of our religious student organizations and their affiliated partners is important and it’s something that we need to be sensitive to in terms of making sure that we are doing the right thing, and that we’re not jeopardizing that institution by favoring or being inconsistent or lobbying for a particular group over another. As long as we’re consistent and constant and equitable in the programs and services we provide, I think we will always be okay.*

Katrina took the separation of church and state further by discussing her knowledge of how we got to this point in higher education. She began by explaining that there is a difference between public and private institutions. Public agencies are open to all and cannot tell someone what to believe; however, private institutions can. She further explained,

*They, many of the early immigrants to what’s now the United States, were leaving European countries because many of them were facing a lot of religious persecution in those countries.... They wanted some religious freedom that they couldn’t have. So, as they came here, that was part of the freedoms that they felt like should be part of a democracy, so they set-up our rules to allow people to have freedom of religion... It didn’t ever say ‘You are free to never have to encounter or experience religion... I’ve had people say, ‘Why do they get to do that? Freedom from religion.’ And I’m like, ‘No. Actually, no. That’s free speech, and it’s protected...’ Again, not everyone has to like it. Not everybody does like it... I’m making very broad statements here, but people do get upset if the free speech they’re hearing they don’t like it. Again, ‘Why does the university allow that guy to say that up there?!’ [The response is simple,] ‘Because that’s his free speech...’ I just think [free speech is] so connected to religion on a college campus, on a public campus because of that.*

Dana, Jason, and Taylor also explained what they know of the law. Dana mentioned that she was not sure about the legal meaning of separation of church vs state.

But she said,

*But I think and to my understanding, we are an institution of academia, which means we should be able and should engage in conversations surrounding a wide range of ideas and philosophies and to be able to do that in a way that's not aggressive or one-sided but be able to explore in conversation, so that's the purpose of that.*

Jason explained,

*I think that university campuses are probably more restrictive than they need to be out of the respect of trying not to offend anybody or not to get into a lawsuit or something like that. I think that separation of church and state at this point in time is really more of a diversity issue than it is more of a rights type of issue. So, I think that the university allows religious diversity. So, somebody can celebrate what they are as an individual but not as the university.*

Lastly, Taylor replied,

*I think that the key for me is, there's actually two clauses in the First Amendment about religion. There's the establishment clause and the freedom of religion clause. It's more the establishment clause that people worry about. So, the state can't establish a religion, and that has been interpreted over the years to mean that I can't do anything that favors one religion over another, because that would tend to make that a government supported religion. So, we're just careful to provide the same options to anybody and by doing that we get away from the idea that we're trying to support or promote a particular religion.*

### Personal Influence

The student affairs professionals were asked if they felt their personal stance toward religion or spirituality influenced their attitudes about what should be done at a public university. Eight (73%) individuals said that their personal stance does or likely does influence their thoughts. Two individuals mentioned the importance of keeping work and personal life separate, but many had the same fundamental idea that one's

beliefs are core to who they are and the decisions they make regardless of the place. Dana explained,

*Because if I go back to the idea that that is your core values and beliefs, then it would make sense to me that that does feed into my belief that education is for all, everyone should have equal access, and that the respect that all deserve to be treated here and the equitable experiences.*

Thomas added,

*I think it's my choice to respect other people's opinions and experiences, and certainly my religious beliefs have helped shaped the way I think about that. But again, it's never a situation where I want to feel like I am forcing it on anybody else. But again, I'm going to treat people with respect. You know, integrity is going to guide my decision-making every day. So I think in a roundabout way, yeah, it probably does impact it. But you wouldn't necessarily draw a connection to, Thomas' spiritual beliefs, religious beliefs are what caused that decision over another... ' Yeah, I think that there probably is an indirect correlation to the way that I operate, the way I'm wired. Well, and this might be a little reflective of some of my personal beliefs, but I know that I personally feel more grounded every day if I start out with some readings that are based on the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. [I focus on] some scripture lessons and some prayer. I just feel more grounded in my day when I start my day that way. But that doesn't mean that the person sitting beside me is going to have the same feeling just by starting their day that way, you know, and we have to keep that in mind, too. I think that, you know, those are certainly formed through my background and my experience, and I don't feel it's my duty to force that on anybody else.*

Tarissa assumed, "I'm sure there's biased [sic] that I'm not aware of that does influence perspective and my behavior." Katrina agreed, "I probably am biased and maybe can't see. But, I think what influences me more is my understanding of our constitution... I think that influences me more than my particular faith practice."

Jake did not feel that his personal stance toward religion or spirituality influenced his feelings. He said,

*All of us come to the table with a variety of experiences that inform who we are as a person which translates to who we are as a professional, but my rearing and training and devotion to Catholicism doesn't affect how I facilitate and work with*

*and create, again, an environment for our other staff to execute. Frankly, it's because of that that I understand the importance of it for all of our students regardless of the denomination or belief.*

Jason did not answer clearly as to whether or not he felt personally influenced by his religion. However, he did offer this Christian-focused response,

*I think of the human worth and, again, Jesus hung out with prostitutes, tax collectors, beggars, and stuff like that so if it's good enough for Jesus, it's probably good enough for me. He didn't place any value on them as human beings nor should I.*

Thus, his beliefs for humanity are shaped by his faith and underlining the fact that his religion has shaped his thoughts.

### Holistic Student Development

The administrators were asked if they felt that religion and spirituality was a part of holistic student development. A uniform answer of “yes” was given by ten (91%) of the student affairs professionals. “I think it's absolutely part, as I shared earlier, of the holistic student development,” Jake stated. He and nine other colleagues were in agreement.

Dana and Thomas felt that religion and spirituality is core to an individual and what guides them throughout life. Dana stated,

*For a long, long time, it held the notion to me that [spirituality] is what drives the decisions that students make. Spirituality isn't a defined religion but it's one of those core values that you live by and guides you. It guides your actions, your thoughts, and your words. Your major choices, organizations you belong to, students that you do or don't make friends with, the philanthropy... All of those pieces of students, it kind of is the root of that, so to ignore that doesn't necessarily make sense. So I think a lot of times folks will feel really unable to have those conversation or challenge students or draw out that piece of them. But for me, if I'm working with the whole student, I'm working with the whole student. And I think spirituality, for me, it is the reason and the essence for everything that student is dealing with and it affects their decision making it. We see a lot of times*

*that dissonance when they've made a choice they're not really proud of and then they're looking back at who they are and what their core is, and that is a powerful piece to be able to reflect on that.*

Thomas continued,

*No matter where we are or where we go, work or school, we bring our beliefs with us. I mean, students, too, you know, as they're going through that self-identity formation process and the maturation process they go through, most of them go through, they're also finding their way and their voice and learning to be comfortable with sharing their ideas and opinions in a comfortable setting as well. So, you know, that could be part of the challenge as well. I think that, if we could respect one another and be able to share our ideas and opinions in an unveiled way without any fear of repercussion, we're going to be more successful in our community than what we would if we're just living in fear with it. I think if a student chooses for religion and spirituality to be a part of it, then certainly; [however], we cannot say religion is a part of a student's development if they do not feel that it is.*

Korey, Taylor, Katrina, and Beth spoke to the human identity component that religion and spirituality provides to all individuals. They explained that it is needed by everyone and is a part of our society. Korey stated,

*Well, in my opinion, everybody needs spiritualism. Everybody has a spiritual side to them. Whether they self-identify as being spiritual is another matter. You can have a secular quest or a religious quest, but it's still either way, in my opinion, a spiritual quest. And for people who don't have it, you need it. Whether it involves attending a church service or not. If that spiritual component is not being met, people aren't whole and that's just a lost opportunity. So I think that you need to do both. You need to see religion as an academic topic but also as a personal topic.*

Taylor agreed and added,

*It's just one of the dimensions of human existence. Particularly in the university community, spiritual development is about asking and addressing big questions. You can do that intellectually and we do and we should, but I think it also makes sense to do it from a place of personal seeking that's a little different than taking a class on it. To me, it's a universal human experience and connected, in fact to our intellectual mission.*

Katrina went more in-depth about acknowledging the need of religion and spirituality in holistic development. She explained,

*I don't know if we'll get there in my lifetime, because, again, history has kind of laid a path... Spiritual exploration or spirituality is an acknowledged component of the psyche by lots of theorists, lots of writers, authors, outside of religious circles. [There is] all sorts of research and philosoph[ies] and theories [that] point back to the whole person [which] does include a spiritual component. In that context, spiritual can be as broad as you want it to be, but some connection to something bigger than ourselves seems to be an important part of the psyche. So yeah, I think if students can't find that, we know from student development theories that they're trying to figure out who am I, what do I believe, what do I value, and many of those questions might be able to be answered by some religious spiritual exploration about the nature of knowledge, and the nature of the universe, and the nature of death, and big questions that people wrestle with their whole life. I don't know the perfect solution to how to help it.... I just think we could start by not being afraid to say that it's a part of your identity. It's a part of man's identity to wrestle with some of the big questions about the nature of the universe, life and death, and all of those questions that sometimes spirituality can help answer. At least acknowledge: It's okay if you're wondering about these things.*

Lastly, Beth added, “So being able to ask the questions and being able to answer those questions is important. And that’s why I think the dialogue is really important. I think that’s where it really comes down to is... It permeates our society” from athletes praying at games, politicians saying ‘God Bless America,’ and even simple hallway conversations.

Kym, Shane, and Tarissa noted the importance of religion and spirituality and the role it plays in holistic student development, but they described it as more of a personal decision and experience. Kym stated, “I think it should to the extent that it meets the students’ needs.” Tarissa mentioned that she believes “...people should be welcome to bring that into their development.” Lastly, Shane mentioned the delicacy of defining



spirituality and felt it can be defined differently by every person; thus, professionals should foster and not force it upon any students.

Jason was the only one that did not explicitly state that he thought religion and spirituality is a part of holistic student development. He offered this statement:

*And I think that students need inner peace, and if religion or any type of spiritual or religious aspect helps give them inner peace then that's good. But, since I don't know what brings everybody inner peace, it's going to be [up to] them [to] determine for themselves and help us provide that.*

Katrina summarized with the following statement:

*So, given that we're on a public campus..., what's the right thing to do? So for lots of other topics, we feel like the right thing to do is give students lots of information and answer their questions to the best of our ability... then let them decide. So, we could use that same model when talking about faith and spirituality and religion. [Present students with] lots of options, lots of ways that people believe.*

Chapter 4 has addressed three major categories of research: the current status of religion and spirituality at Cabin University, campus and student needs regarding religion and spirituality, and the administration's personal role and thought. Through the study, it was shown that the current status of religion and spirituality at Cabin University primarily falls on the responsibility of the students and unaffiliated resources. The administrators discussed political and public perceptions as one of the biggest challenges to navigate on their public campus. The administrators agreed that they saw religion and spirituality play various important roles in students' lives; additionally, they discussed a campus need for staff and a university affiliated center to be an educational and known religious and spiritual resource for students, staff, and faculty. Lastly, the administration's personal opinions on this topic uncovered that they believed facilitating

student religious and spiritual development was not a main priority to them nor did they know for sure what the first amendment deems legal on a public campus; yet, they were unanimous in stating that religion and spirituality was vital to holistic student development. The next chapter will examine the meaning behind these findings.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

In higher education we advocate and openly promote inclusion and diversity. Many institutions have centers and/or personnel dedicated to promoting the acceptance and value of all individuals' identities. These identities include gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and so forth. At the public level, there are many LGBT centers, scholar programs for underrepresented populations, and Multicultural centers that are institutionally funded, but there are few religious opportunities funded by public institutions. The religious identity is an important dimension in the conversation regarding inclusion and diversity. Whether an individual has a strong or nonexistent faith; a Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, Jewish, Atheist, other, or unknown view; or believes in Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, or none of the above; their belief is a part of their identity. That identity is a part of diversity. That diversity should be wholly fostered by higher education including public institutions and should not be chosen piece-by-piece. Spirituality and religion, whether an organized belief or lack thereof, is a vital part of an individual's identity as shown by research and discussed in Chapter 2. The importance of this identity needs to be in the conversation of successful student development.

At the heart of it all, student affairs professionals exist to support all students from all backgrounds. Regardless of religious or spiritual identity, students' beliefs and values are at the core of who they are and make an impact on their choices and how they conduct themselves throughout their life. Thus, these areas of identity must be

incorporated into the work of student affairs professionals to develop students holistically.

#### Unpublished Study vs Cabin University

In Stafford's (2016) unpublished study, which was completed at a regional comprehensive institution, the administrators unanimously agreed that there was not a religious or spiritual dialogue occurring on campus. The administrators expressed a desire for a more direct resource to aid in students' religious and spiritual development. In contrast, the administration at the R1 doctoral university provided more disjointed feedback in what administrators thought was occurring and what was available across their campus. The administrators largely assumed that due to their R1 size and diverse student population, there likely was a religious and spiritual conversation happening on their campus in some capacity. Furthermore, almost all administrators felt that they, as an institution, should be more of an effective resource for students' development in this area. Overall, when comparing the master's university to the doctoral university, the researcher received more uniform responses from the smaller, master's university. The student affairs professionals at the doctoral institution demonstrated less cohesion in their responses. This developed the question as to why were there similarities and yet differences between these two Midwest institutions?

Administrators at both institutions unanimously agreed that religion and spirituality is a part of holistic student development. The majority felt that there should be a more tangible and easily accessible resource available to students. The differences included the administration at the R1 institution responding with a wider range of

answers and a bigger focus on the politics impacting their institution which could be due to the size. Furthermore, the regional comprehensive institution has a third of the students, a more centralized campus, and potentially more connected administration. Whereas, Cabin University, the large doctoral university, is more decentralized which can make it more challenging for administration to know what is occurring across the campus as a whole. Administration at Cabin University also discussed the politics surrounding the topic area more often, too. This is likely due to the publicity and constant public focus that a large institution like Cabin University faces. This made some of their responses seem more hesitant than at the master's university. Lastly, the doctoral institution has a much more diverse student population; thus, they have more variety in religions and student beliefs on their campus in which they have to be cognizant of and tend to. It would be easier and less publically scrutinized to make changes on a more unified campus like the regional comprehensive that was studied. In summary, the size and variety of student diversity at the institution were the primary factors as to why responses were different between the academic affairs administrators at the two universities.

#### Discussion of Findings

The results of this study examined the available resources and administrative knowledge regarding religion and spirituality at Cabin University. Any religious and spiritual resources at Cabin University were typically unrelated to the university and there is a careful line that administrators feel they have to balance as they attempt to be a resource for students' religious and spiritual needs while also maintaining state and church separation. The administrators saw religion and spirituality play various important

roles in students' lives and desired an institutionally affiliated resource available to help foster holistic student development.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss the findings in regards to three overarching areas: current status of religion and spirituality at Cabin University, campus and student needs regarding religion and spirituality at public institutions, and the administration's personal role and opinion. Following will be a summary of the findings, implications for future direction, parameters, and recommendations and conclusion.

#### Current Status of Religion and Spirituality at CU

The administrators discussed the available religious and spiritual resources in three primary categories including: student organizations, the Campus Ministry Association, and off-campus churches and leaders. Beyond, there were a wide range of responses, many of which only a sole administrator noted. This showed a large variance in what administrators knew of and felt was available to students.

As for the top three responses, student organizations, the Campus Ministry Association, and off-campus churches and leaders, there is a similarity or tie amongst them. The Campus Ministries Association is a group of off-campus church leaders and affiliates that work closely with their student organizations. The Campus Ministries Association meets on-campus with one or two university representatives; otherwise, the group is self-sufficient and not supported by the university. The administrators themselves did not know if it was in their job description to meet with the association, but they continue to do so. Many members of the Association are connected to an affiliated student organization. The student organizations have rights like any other organization on

campus; however, their primary resource is the associated church. Thus, the vast majority of the religiously affiliated student organizations are dedicated to their designated church and organized religion. The off-campus churches will partner with student organizations, clubs, and teams for fundraisers and other events on-campus. Again, this is a student-run occurrence and not a university affiliated activity.

There is varying knowledge about what resources are available to students on CU's campus. The primary resource available to students was stated to be student organizations and the Campus Ministries Association. If students were not maintaining these clubs and connections to off-campus churches, where would CU students go to foster this aspect of their development? There was not one administrator that stated any university-sponsored resource that aided in students' religious or spiritual development, because there are not any known or occurring. This shows the lack of support for this area of development and need for a more informed campus about what is available or what should be available. As Mayhew et al. (2014) stated, there needs to be more initiative and action in regards to fostering religious and spiritual opportunities occurring on campuses beyond just a student organization. It is evident that student organizations and their off-campus support is the primary resource for students which is consistent with the literature on this topic.

The administrators had over a dozen different responses when asked where they send students or where students who are seeking a religious and spiritual resource should go. The most common responses were their website, student organizations, and electronic

media. Thus, this shows another disconnect between what various administrators know as resources on their campus or a lack of resource available.

From CU's website homepage, it takes five clicks to get to a desired student organization and that is if the student knows exactly what they are looking for. As Rozeboom et al. (2016) stated, "College is a key time for students to explore beliefs and develop as leaders" (p.136). Is sending students to search a website truly accessible and an effective means for students to explore their religious and spiritual side? There needs to be a consistent and reliable resource for students.

There were a vast number of responses when administrators were asked what religious and spiritual events or activities are available to students at CU. The top two responses included the Danforth Chapel and the Cabin Union. The Danforth Chapel is available for students to rent space. The Cabin Union, which is the student union, holds many student organizations and club events and houses the prayer and meditation rooms. As previous literature discusses, having a place is not always enough. Students want a safe environment with an individual that is capable to talk to them without judgment (Donahoo, 2014, p. 185).

Currently, the Campus Ministries Association and the local, off-campus churches were the two religious and spiritual partnerships that administrators noted. The Campus Ministries Association and the off-campus churches are not affiliated with the university; instead, they are connected closely with student groups. There were not any institutionally funded resources on CU's campus. This study solidified what previous literature has been alluding to: Public institutions tend to leave religion and spirituality in



the academic arena and not foster it beyond academically as discussed by Astin et al. (2011, p. 6).

The interviewees were also asked if they had any knowledge of whether or not religion and/or spirituality was explicitly part of someone's job description on campus and the answers were the following: Yes, no, and I don't know. The varying answers and uncertainty show disconnect across CU's campus.

There are many administrators that dedicate their time to the various other dimensions of student identities. There are also many administrators that stated religion and spirituality is not their priority; however, it is a part of holistic student development and valued in research and student development. Thus, shouldn't it be a priority for student affairs professionals and the field of higher education? It would be beneficial to holistic student development if they had a university affiliate with religion and spirituality as a priority and main focus in their job. As Kym, an administrator, stated, "I think, to be honest, it should be in all of our jobs to make sure we're connecting students to where they feel the best fit for them and if it's religious or spiritual, then we should be able to help them navigate that on our campus." Previous research agrees. Mayhew et al. (2014) found that student affairs professionals have a large influence in students' development throughout their collegiate time and should recognize, challenge, and support all students' spiritual and religious journeys.

It was found that administrators believed CU faced many challenges in facilitating religion and spirituality. There were two rather consistent challenges to addressing religion and spirituality on a public campus that administrators discussed. First, a major

challenge is the misconception of the notion of church vs state. Second are the politics, media, and public perceptions.

These areas are challenging to combat, but education is key. The misconception of our first amendment is very impactful as literature has shown. For example, Astin et al. (2011) discusses the role higher education plays in developing a whole student; yet, there is a general public perception pushing religion and spirituality to be disregarded outside of academic walls. This strongly affects public institutions, because they tend to follow the laws more closely; in comparison, private institutions are contractualized and have the right to establish a religion. A public institution, however, cannot have an established religion yet must allow exercise of religion. The amendment does not state that public entities cannot facilitate, take part, and provide religious resources. It is due to public perceptions, the second biggest challenge, that institutions tend to stray away from providing religious resources for students. As Taylor stated,

*I think the biggest obstacle I face is that political and public perception issue... There would be nothing illegal about us having a university chaplain, but politically it would be very difficult to do. I find it hard, politically, to devote staff resources to spirituality. It's hard to explain that spirituality has many forms of expression and that's what we're supporting.*

Public institutions do not want to be seen as favoring one religion over another and tend to default to avoid the topic as a whole. But, as long as all religions are given the same opportunities, it is legal. So we legally can talk about this, students want to talk about this, and, for developmental purposes, we should be talking about religion and spirituality so that our students are culturally competent.

The first colleges were built on a religious foundation. Now, there are a limited number of institutions that retain a religious affiliation. This shift to secular institutions was not to undermine the importance of religious and spiritual development for students but was to prevent proselytization. Institutions should still be providing resources for students.

Several interviewees agreed that there is a fear or discomfort to talk about religion and spirituality on CU's campus. People do not want to say something that other people will label as dumb nor do they want to offend someone. No one wants to talk about a topic that they do not fully understand. People really do struggle with this which is why religion is coined as one of the two things we do not talk about with anyone (politics being the other). It is hard and uncomfortable to talk about something that you are unsure about whether it is a religion you identify with or do not identify with. Thus, no matter whom the student is— mainstream Christian or religious minority— there is often a fear or discomfort. This is reinforcing what numerous researchers have found. For instance, Adams et al. (2015) discussed the importance of educating and familiarizing professionals so they are comfortable and able to have conversations involving religion and spirituality. Uncomfortable conversations about religion and spirituality provide an opportunity and potential for students to grow and learn substantially.

#### Campus and Student Needs

There were a handful of administrators who voluntarily addressed the topic of faculty and staff pertaining to religion and spirituality. They discussed the need for faculty and staff to foster this area of development and the need for increased training and

education to help them navigate these conversations and be a better resource. As Katrina stated,

*And then working with college students all these years, I just think some of the big developmental and life questions people explore are in this area [of religion and spirituality], and we guide and help college students explore all sorts of things but not this very well.*

This is an area that higher education professionals, especially those in student affairs, need to be aware of. It is an area of development that students are exploring, and it should not be an area to avoid. This study reinforced previous research including the finding by Craft. Craft (2011) stated, "...Many student affairs administrators expressed their belief in the importance of the spiritual and religious aspects of student development, yet at the same time, expressed reluctance concerning their role in that aspect of development" (p. 163).

The majority of administrators said that they do see students struggling and religious and spiritual resources could be or has been beneficial for them especially in times of crisis or mental health concerns. It is great that the university values outside religious sources to assist students who are in times of crisis; however, is that the only time a religious and spiritual resource is needed? It is not just in the most critical and emotionally visibly times that students are struggling. College students have impactful experiences throughout their collegiate experiences. From transitions or relationships to coursework or deaths, there are many struggles that students face. They transition to a new place. They experience new diversities surrounding them. They are typically living in a new environment. They experience great successes and also devastating failures. They are finding new ways to get involved— some in positive ways and others that affect

their life negatively. They are reaching new heights and sometimes falling along the way. Their paths are always unique. They are constantly finding themselves, growing, learning, and developing. They are constantly having impactful experiences throughout their college experience. Astin et al. (2011) stated, “the ‘big questions’ that preoccupy students are essentially spiritual questions...” (p. 1). It is not only in times of devastation that these ‘big questions’ arise.

Several administrators stated that they see religion and spirituality play important roles in students’ lives. From personal values to understanding other cultures, religion and spirituality is an important aspect of development to discuss and appreciate. Religion and spirituality comes up in students’ lives by exploring their own ideals and connecting with students that have different views from their own. College is an opportune time to navigate their questions and exploration as literature as suggested. CU administrators did not attest that their institution is providing the best possible religious and spiritual resources for their students. It is important that institutions evaluate if they are being a successful resource for this topic.

There were many ideas presented when asked to think without limitations and explain what the administrators would want developed on their campus and the campuses of other public institutions. The main two responses were a dedicated staff member and a center specifically focused on religious and spiritual exploration. Donahoo (2014) found that there were three consistent reasons students choose to go off-campus for their religious needs. Her study found that students want a “permanent place,” that provides “faith and friendship...trust...,” is a “judge-free zone,” and has “staff that will listen to

you without judging you” (p. 185). These two developments, staff and a center, would address these student needs.

The administrators were asked if they know of any interfaith discussions occurring on their campus. Again, there was varying answers showing disconnect, inconsistency, and a lack of knowledge across CU’s campus. The mission of interfaith is to recognize similarities and differences amongst all faiths and individuals through conversations and service projects. It can be invaluable for students to be a part of and is very impactful for the personal and professional lives of students. Interfaith movements on campuses can truly help students explore their own values while increasing their understanding of others. It begins with a conversation.

Furthermore, several administrators discussed their desire for more interfaith discussions and events on campus. Interfaith conversations and activities foster individual learning, increase global understanding, and give meaning to life (Nash, 2011). It would be beneficial for CU to invest in interfaith on-campus events, because it would provide students with an opportunity to ask questions, grow personally, and feel connected on their campus. This area of diversity is of value and would help many students find their purpose, grow culturally competent, and become an educated global citizen. As Bowman and Small (2012) stated, “Institutions that provide encouragement for all forms of student religious and spiritual expression, and that advocate for interfaith dialogue and the embracing of religious differences, can instill a greater ecumenical worldview across the institution” (p. 504).

There were a wide range of responses when administrators were asked what departments they thought could be or should be a resource for students' religious and spiritual development. The main two were Student Life and the counseling center followed by about a half dozen other responses. Though there were many specific areas mentioned as potential or current resources, it is suggested that the whole field of student affairs be capable of being a resource. This does not mean that student affairs professionals have to be experts. Student affairs exists to support all students and this includes all identities. And, like all identities, it is the field of student affairs that is present on college and university campuses to support students and understand their development process. It is important that student affairs professionals be knowledgeable about the role that religion and spirituality plays in students' lives. This is in agreement with Williamson et al.'s (1949) *The Student Personnel Point of View* as it notes holistic student development to include the dimensions of physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development. The field of student affairs generally provides ample opportunities for physical development. There are many gyms, workout facilities, recreation sports, and other activities in which students can participate in institutionally-funded activities that aid in their physical growth. Social development is fostered in residence halls, student unions, and many on-campus events. Students' emotional development is supported by advisors, counseling services, and other institutional resources. The field of academic affairs is dedicated to students' intellectual development. Then, lastly, is spiritual development. There are few institutionally affiliated resources on public campuses. This is an opportunity for public institutions and

student affairs to recognize a shortcoming and begin working to facilitate a more holistic campus for their students which includes a spiritual resource.

### Personal Thought and Role

Finally, administrators were asked about their personal thought and role on the topic. The majority of administrators felt that their primary role was to simply be a resource for students. They all recognized the importance of knowing the available resources and being able to refer students; however, they said it was not their job to provide those means. It was evident that most of the administrators knew it was important to help students that are inquiring about this topic; however, it was not evident that administrators felt that they should engage in the conversation. The consensus was that religion and spirituality is just not really talked about besides when needed which are times of tragedies. And, if students do ask, they tend to refer them.

The administrators had a range of knowledge about the first amendment to the Constitution. The most repeated response to being asked what respondents knew about the law regarding religion and spirituality at public institutions was “not sure.” This is one of the biggest challenges to combat. Because, as literature discussed earlier, it is legal for public institutions to have religious events and hold religious conversations as long as they do not favor religions over another. As Jake explained,

*We're obligated by law to separate church and state; I mean that's the fundamental issue. So, how we respond, how we facilitate, how we engage, how we work with all of our religious student organizations and their affiliated partners is important and it's something that we need to be sensitive to in terms of making sure that we are doing the right thing, and that we're not jeopardizing that institution by favoring or being inconsistent or lobbying for a particular group over another. As long as we're consistent and constant and equitable in the programs and services we provide, I think we will always be okay.*



Education is the first way to help clear up the misconceptions and extreme practices that occur in regards to the law. However, it is hard to educate the public and media that tends to see any expression of religion as favoring one over any other and, therefore, breaking our constitutional law. In fact, as long as all religions are given the same rights, that is not illegal. Dana stated,

*But I think and to my understanding, we are an institution of academia, which means we should be able and should engage in conversations surrounding a wide range of ideas and philosophies and to be able to do that in a way that's not aggressive or one-sided but be able to explore in conversation, so that's the purpose of that.*

Jason added,

*I think that university campuses are probably more restrictive than they need to be out of the respect of trying not to offend anybody or not to get into a lawsuit or something like that. I think that separation of church and state at this point in time is really more of a diversity issue than it is more of a right's type of issue. So, I think that the university allows religious diversity. So, somebody can celebrate what they are as an individual but not as the university.*

As discussed in Chapter 2, research shows that these conversations should developmentally be occurring and can legally be occurring. It was clear that Cabin University was fostering very little conversation regarding religion and spirituality.

The vast majority of student affairs professionals said that their personal stance does or likely does influence their attitudes about what should be done at a public university. They ensured the idea that what you believe is fundamental to who you are and affects the decisions you make. They all agreed that their religious stance does not make them want to convert students, but it affects how they feel about supporting students and caring for others. This assures that, like students, their beliefs and values are important to them as a person. This reinforces Glanzer (2011) who stated "...educators,

both religious and nonreligious, need to understand their own worldview or narrative.... [because] we cannot expect teachers or textbook writers to divorce their identity and their accompanying stories from the way they teach and write” (p. 28).

Lastly, the administrators were asked if they felt religion and spirituality was a part of holistic student development. All but one said they felt religion and spirituality *is* a part of holistic student development. This is consistent with research. Bowman and Small (2012) discussed religion as a vital aspect of the overall development and wellbeing of a student. In agreement, Craft (2011) elaborated, “Student affairs administrators believe that students rely upon spirituality and religion not only in times of tragedy but also in times of decision making in the context of current leadership responsibilities or future vocational and career pursuits” (p. 165).

#### Summary of Observations

CU is lacking a consistent and reliable resource available for students to explore religion and spirituality. The prayer and meditation room is the only opportunity constantly available to students. This does not offer aid for students that are questioning or desiring help. It does not offer understanding, discussion, or appreciation for different faiths. There could be more done and more available.

The administrators did not know whether or not religion and/or spirituality was explicitly part of someone’s job description on campus. The varying answers and uncertainty show disconnect across CU’s campus. This is something that CU should look to address. There should be a known staff member that questions and inquiries can be directed to for coherency across the campus.

Student affairs graduate programs should be more intentional about educating pre-professionals about religion and spirituality and the role it plays in students' lives. Religion and spirituality tends to be discussed in courses such as History in Higher Education and Theory of College Student Development. Even so, it is often briefly touched on and not discussed in detail. Integrating religious and spiritual knowledge into more courses and conversations would better prepare and encourage professionals with the knowledge and skills to be a resource for students.

Education about religion and spirituality would enable students, faculty, and staff to engage in conversations, learn from each other, ask questions, and understand cultures beyond themselves. This would begin to combat the fear and discomfort that talking about religion and spirituality was said to bring. It is important that student affairs professionals have background knowledge to talk about this dimension of diversity.

Furthermore, CU could better help their students by providing a consistent and constant religious and spiritual resource for all students throughout the school year. Institutions of higher education should have a permanent, on-campus religious and spiritual resource for students; a resource that would be available for everyday life, rejuvenation, and crisis. Thus, this resource would provide support during crisis but also throughout the joys and sorrows of everyday life that students face.

As the interviewees suggested, a dedicated space and personnel would be the most beneficial to this area of student development. It would be an interdenominational space where students could go for religious and spiritual guidance at their convenience. It would be a space where students could talk to a staff member, other students, or a

spiritual leader and always know there is an on-campus space available for individual or group prayers, meditation, services, meetings, or rituals. A space supplemented with a student affairs professional could ensure that there was always inclusive and engaging activities and conversations. These events would be inclusive of all people— students, staff, faculty, Christian, Buddhist, atheist, Muslim, agnostic, Unitarian Universalist, Islamic, and all others. Some students find their balance and core from their religion. Other students' purpose may not be fulfilled by an organized religion, but it is still a part of their identity. It would be beneficial to have a space to foster that.

The findings of this study seemed to discover that the administrators found it easier to personally avoid the conversation of religion and spirituality in their professional roles than to engage in it. To support a student, higher education professionals are encouraged to educate themselves, ask questions, embrace uncomfortable conversations, and seek opportunities to learn from others. These are all aspects that can be helpful for students and are all moments for growth and learning for students and professionals.

#### Directions for Future Research

The researcher developed two further research questions and possible studies after performing this study. First, due to finding differences and similarities between the mid-sized, comprehensive institution (unpublished study) and the large, R1 institution (research study), the researcher feels it would be beneficial to extend this study to other institutions and to determine if there are relationships with respect to institutional size or geographical location. In addition, the researcher purposefully focused on the perceptions

of administration and would extend the question to include the understanding of student, faculty, and staff perceptions regarding religious and spirituality on public institution campuses.

### Parameters

A possible limitation to this study is the small number of interviewees. There were 13 invitations to participate in the study that were initially extended. There were eleven administrators that were able to participate and agreed to interview. In addition, this was an extensive case study at one large, doctoral institution in the Midwest. Interviewing a larger group of administrators, investigating at more institutions, or researching in a different geographical location may have yielded different findings. For future studies, it could be beneficial for the study to look into one or all of these variables.

Finally, it is important to note the researcher's possible bias regarding the importance of religion and spirituality. The researcher was baptized and raised in an organized religious faith, has continued to foster that important aspect, and places high value on faith as a continual guiding influence. The researcher acknowledged the personal influence and worked to ensure it did not impact the study.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

This qualitative study examined administrator's perceptions of religion and spirituality on their R1 institutional campus. Literature provided evidence of the importance of religious and spiritual discussions and resources for holistic student development. The 11 administrators interviewed uncovered that they appreciate the

importance of religion and spirituality on the institution's campus, but they do not feel it is their job to foster the conversations.

In this final chapter, the findings were discussed more in-depth. However, the question remains: What, as an institution, is Cabin University doing to facilitate the dimension of religious and spiritual diversity? Are student organizations and the Campus Ministries Association enough? This study suggests there could be and should be more accessible and available on-campus resources for students to utilize in the journey of holistic development.

In summary, this research found that CU could best help to foster holistic student development and global citizens by instituting the following initiatives:

1. Increased education to ensure more comfortable, informed, and coherent staff and faculty across the campus that are knowledgeable about the importance of religion and spirituality, the perceptions that exist, and the resources available across campus. This would also include making religion and spirituality a more prominent unit in the student affairs graduate program at CU
2. Encourage interfaith conversations and events on-campus to promote questions, discussions, and cultural understanding
3. Develop an easily accessible, available, and on-campus spiritual space for students, staff, and faculty that promotes personal and group exploration and learning opportunities

4. Invest in personnel to oversee the interdenominational space, the CMA, potential programming, and be a primary and consistent resource known throughout campus

This study is consistent with the large, multi-year study by Astin et al. (2011) cited earlier that reported a positive association between students' spiritual growth and tolerance, connectedness, academic performance, and overall well-being. Astin et al. found that 75% of college students are searching for meaning and 80% of students are interested in spirituality. This research study and studies done by researchers such as Astin are in agreement: Spirituality is an important aspect in students' lives and should be fostered by the collegiate community. If 80% of students are interested in spirituality and administration is saying it is important to foster, why are the majority of public institutions not facilitating this developmental need? Who is educating these students and fulfilling their development desire?

Student affairs professionals exist to support all students and all of their dimensions of identity. Regardless of religious or spiritual identity, students' beliefs and values are at the core of who they are and make an impact on what they do. Thus, these areas of identity must be incorporated into the work of student affairs professionals to develop holistic and culturally competent students.

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## APPENDIX A

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA  
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW  
INFORMED CONSENT**

Project Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Investigator(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**Invitation to Participate:** You are invited to participate in a research project conducted by the investigator to assist with completion of a thesis study through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

**Nature and Purpose:** The study is designed to determine administrative ideas, positions, and thoughts regarding religion and spirituality at a public institution. There will be questions regarding work obligations and personal opinion.

**Explanation of Procedures:** You have responded to the e-mail invitation that was previously sent to you which initiated this informed consent form. An interview of approximately one hour (maximum) in length is scheduled. This interview will be tape recorded with your permission. The interview will be transcribed and then sent to you for confirmation of accuracy. It will be requested that you read and confirm that what was written is what you were saying. Then the researcher will analyze themes from the interview to use in thesis paper as well as the possibility to drawn upon findings in presentations and other intellectual programs.

**Discomfort and Risks:** Risks to participants are minimal.

**Benefits and Compensation:** No compensation will be given for inclusion in this study

**Confidentiality:** Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. You will be interviewed in person and your interview will be tape recorded, transcribed and confirmed, and then themes pulled from the information. After this point, all of the information linked to you will be changed to an alternative name and no linkage to your interview will be available. All efforts will be made to maintain anonymity; however, due to your position on campus, responses may reveal your identity.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw:** Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all.

**Questions:** If you have questions about the study or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study, you can contact the project investigator, Kayla Stafford, at 319-████-████ or the project investigator's faculty advisor, Dr. Michael Waggoner, at 319-████-████.

**Agreement:** I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed name of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of investigator)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed name of investigator)

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Interview Questions:**

1. What religious and spiritual resources are available to students on Cabin University's campus?
  - a. Where would they go to seek those out?
  - b. What are religious and spiritual activities or events available to students?
  - c. What religious partnerships do you see on campus?
  - d. To your knowledge, is religion or spirituality explicitly part of your job or anyone's job on campus?
2. What challenges are there to addressing religion and spirituality on public campus?
  - a. Fear?
3. What are some of the struggles that students face in which religion and spirituality could be a potential resource on campus?
  - a. If money and personnel were not an issue, would you want to see anything developed on public campuses to provide students with adequate religious and spiritual resources?
4. What role, if any, do you personally have in facilitating religious and spiritual development or resources for students on campus?
  - a. In your role, do you see issues of religion and spirituality coming up in student life?
  - b. With an increasing number of international students and the current events occurring, do you know of any interfaith discussions going on?
  - c. What do you know about the law regarding religion and spirituality at public institutions?
  - d. I spoke earlier about holistic student development. Should religion and spirituality be a part of that?

- i. What might that look like? Interfaith?
    - ii. Are there other departments or programs on campus that could be resources for this aspect of development?
  - e. Does your personal stance toward religion or spirituality influence your attitudes about what should be done at a public university?
5. Given what we've talked about, is there anything you feel that you have not said about this topic or that you would like to add?