THE CATHOLIC AND MARIANIST CULTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
DAYTON AS REVEALED THROUGH STUDENTS’ VOICES

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THE CATHOLIC AND MARIANIST CULTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON AS REVEALED THROUGH STUDENTS’ VOICES

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ABSTRACT

THE CATHOLIC AND MARIANIST CULTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON AS REVEALED THROUGH STUDENTS’ VOICES

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The purpose of this study was to explore students’ experience of the Catholic and Marianist culture at the University of Dayton. Higher education institutions hold a unique niche in United States culture and colleges transmit culture. Student development theories suggest that students progress through stages of development and there is a hierarchy of environmental influence of students’ development. Both bodies of knowledge were backdrops for this study of the meanings one group of 23 seniors at a Catholic and Marianist University made of their four-year experiences. Transcripts of individual, face to face interviews and written follow up questions were analyzed in this qualitative study grounded in frameworks of life history and ethnographic interviewing. Findings include students’ trajectory of experience, their perceptions of the culture at UD, and the values and ideals their experience reflected. Dominant were the dynamics of diversity, strong cultural mores based on the values of respect, and the perception of UD’s culture as a bubble. Implications for the University of Dayton’s role in a competitive higher
education market are drawn. Students’ voices revealed UD’s Catholic and Marianist mission is distinct, it shapes the culture and students’ learning, and it remains an ideal which has not yet been fully realized.
Dedicated in loving memory of Dr. Joseph Watras,

whose brilliance, encouragement, and humor

will never be forgotten.
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“In the end, though, maybe we must all give up trying to pay back the people in this world who sustain our lives. In the end, maybe it’s wiser to surrender before the miraculous scope of human generosity and to just keep saying thank you, forever and sincerely, for as long as we have voices.”—Elizabeth Gilbert

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CHAPTER I
THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The mission of the University of Dayton originates with one man’s faithful response to chaos (University of Dayton, 2013). According to the University of Dayton authors, Father William Joseph Chaminade, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, believed the new circumstances required new methods of spreading the good news of the Gospel and he had two insights for how to go about this mission. The University of Dayton authors go on to say Chaminade’s first insight was a special focus on Mary, the mother of Jesus, and specifically her “yes” to incarnating Christ and his kingdom in the world; his second insight is based on the idea that this was the time to realize Mary’s mission of bringing Christ into the world through education and formation of lay communities on their journey of faith. According to the authors, this was the beginning of the foundation of Daughters of Mary Immaculate and the Society of Mary. Members of these communities, or Marianists, worked to rebuild the Catholic faith in France through schools. These schools were founded on a set of values that included: education of the mind and heart, relationships of care, integration of the theoretical and practical approaches to learning and a special concern for the poor. This was the beginning of the Marianist tradition of education.
In 1849, a year before Chaminade’s death, the first Marianists arrived in the new world carrying with them the same values of Marianist education (University of Dayton, 2013). The founders’ vision was to create a learning community for the purpose of educating faith-filled people who would lead and serve the country and church. The authors go on to say part of the values included adapting to the situation and reading the signs of the current time and place, in much the same way Chaminade responded to the aftermath of the French Revolution. The mission has evolved over time to its current mission which states “The University of Dayton is a comprehensive Catholic university, a diverse community committed, in the Marianist tradition, to educating the whole person and to linking learning and scholarship with leadership and service” (University of Dayton, 2011).

From the founding of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate and the Society of Mary to the founding of the University of Dayton, a core set of values has guided the practice and behavior of people committed to serving the Marianist mission, and the Marianist tradition of education (University of Dayton, 2013). The University of Dayton authors state that the values include the need for education in the context of community, and leadership for the purpose of service.

The history and tradition of Catholic and Marianist education illustrates the first portion of the statement about organizations by Kraemer (2011), that “Values are homegrown. They must come from within the organization itself and be embraced by every single person—universally and consistently” (p. 81). Chaminade and his followers were responding to a desire to spread the Gospel and did so through education based on a set of values and principles that they developed and agreed to (University of Dayton,
Are the values at the core of Marianist education “embraced by every single person—universally and consistently?” Kraemer’s challenge is unrealistic for any organization as large and diverse as UD. While the standard of “universally and consistently” may be too high, the question of how the values are embraced by students helps set the stage for this study.

**Statement of the Problem**

How do UD students describe their experiences and are the values the university has set forth discernable in the experiences they describe? There is little research surrounding the lived experience of students in Catholic higher education and how their experience shapes their understanding of the values and mission of Catholic universities (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008). More specifically, is the Catholic and Marianist educational mission being fulfilled in the students who attend UD? Are the Marianist educational values embraced by students? Does the institutional mission influence the culture of the university? In this study I explored students’ experiences and how they understood and made meaning of the culture at UD as well as how they expressed the values of the educational mission of the University of Dayton.

**Questions and Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to offer understanding and insight into students’ experiences at UD. Perhaps that understanding and insight have the potential to shape educational practice to better meet the goals the University of Dayton has set for itself.

The questions that guided this study are as follows:

1) What is the lived experience of students within the Catholic and Marianist culture of UD?
2) How do students understand the Catholic and Marianist culture and what experiences most shape their understanding?

3) What values and ideals of the Catholic and Marianist mission do students’ experiences reflect?

By examining the lived experience of students, I attempted to interpret how students made meaning of the Catholic and Marianist culture. What underlying values and beliefs came through the stories they told of their lives at UD? How did students express how their values and beliefs relate to their daily experiences? I explored the links students made between their experiences in specific classes, events, activities and conversations and the Catholic and Marianist mission. In an attempt to follow where students’ voices took me, this naturalistic study could not be driven by more specific predetermined lines of inquiry. Insofar as I could plan ahead, I could say that this was the general inquiry I was interested in pursuing.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study was designed to be theory building versus theory testing. According to Merriam (2002) qualitative researchers often select a topic because there is a lack of theory surrounding it. In this case, there was a lack of theory surrounding students’ experience of mission, specifically Catholic and Marianist mission (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008). From the themes that emerged, theories could be generated from this study.

However, there are a number of theories that grounded this study, especially in the areas of student development, organizational culture, and qualitative research. This
study contributes to the theories that already exist, particularly in the area of students’ experience and understanding of Catholic institutional mission.

**Theories of Student Development**

The rationale for this study was based on some theories of student development and the way traditional undergraduate students may make meaning of the world cognitively, interpersonally and intrapersonally (Kegan, 1994). According to Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda (2001), students transition in the ways they make meaning throughout their college experience. Baxter Magolda’s (2001) longitudinal study showed that the way students understand knowledge changes in college from a point of view where knowledge and truth exist outside of themselves to a point of view where knowledge is socially constructed and the students themselves contribute to the knowledge base.

Understanding the ways students make meaning developmentally was important to this study because some authors have shown Catholic institutional mission to be consistent with student development theory (Heft, 1993; Hunt, Joseph, Nuzzi, & Geiger, 2003). In other words, the mission of Catholic higher education is structured to support the transition in ways of knowing and making meaning that Baxter Magolda (2001) and Kegan (1994) describe. For example, Catholic colleges ask students questions about their religious identity and spiritual development as part of their practice (Heft, 1993). Heft (1993) argues one way Catholic colleges address this is through courses in theology, philosophy and ethics. According to Heft, these classes push students to consider what their values and beliefs are about knowledge, faith, and moral behavior. Thus through the cognitive, academic lens students are exploring personal values and beliefs.
Catholic institutions are geared to developing the whole person (Hunt, Joseph, Nuzzi, & Geiger, 2003). For example, student development is holistic; development cannot be separated into areas such as cognitive or interpersonal. Development in those dimensions (cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal) is intertwined and growth in one area leads to or is simultaneous with growth in another (see Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994; Love & Guthrie, 1999). Catholic institutions support departments like campus ministry, and student affairs as part of their educational mission (Hunt, Joseph, Nuzzi, & Geiger, 2003). This is where they are consistent with development in the way Kegan (1994) and Love and Guthrie (1999) describe. Supporting co-curricular activities and student affairs alongside academics is a way of communicating a message that development of the whole person is one of the institution’s values. I examined students’ experience both in and outside of the classroom, including their living situations, relationships and co-curricular activities based on the theories that development occurs as a result of experiences in each area, and that holistic development was consistent with Catholic institutional mission.

Theories of Organizational Culture

Theoretical frameworks in the areas of environment and culture informed this study. According to Strange and Banning (2001), campus spaces play an important role in determining behavior on college campuses. The design of this study took into account environmental factors that influence students’ understanding of the Catholic and Marianist mission. For example, the university campus is filled with artifacts that point to its Catholic and Marianist culture. One of the most predominant artifacts is the dome of the chapel, which can be seen from all over the city of Dayton. The chapel is located in
a high traffic area of UD’s campus that many students needed to walk past every day. Throughout campus there are several religious statues, prayer spaces and crosses and crucifixes. In addition to the physical artifacts, changing elements of UD’s environment have the potential to impact students’ experience of the mission, including the growth of the international student population and the wider use of on-line classes. Environment has an impact on students’ experience and understanding, as well as on their learning (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Theories surrounding culture played an important role in this study because values and beliefs are an essential component of many authors’ definitions of culture, including Kuh and Hall (1993), Manning (1993), and Schein (1992). The study design incorporated some of these existing definitions and methods of examining culture. Schein (1992) offers a definition of culture that includes three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs, and underlying values and assumptions. Kuh and Hall (1993) provide four different levels of culture, which include artifacts, perspectives, values and assumptions. The design of this study incorporated both Schein’s and Kuh and Hall’s definition of culture, and used specific elements that Strange and Banning (2001) articulated including traditions, stories, policies, symbols, practices, philosophy and mission.

Manning (1993) outlines several components of student culture that describe the meaning behind words like artifacts, values and assumptions. For example, Manning offers three categories of artifacts, which are physical, verbal and behavioral. Manning goes on to write physical artifacts include things like buildings, documents, the campus grounds and memorials and verbal artifacts include sagas and campus language. Behavioral artifacts include rituals and rites of passage as well as performances (Manning,
1993). Manning defines cultural performances in terms of events like football games, memorial services and talent shows. The final category under cultural artifacts as defined by Manning is traditions. According to Manning, traditions include school colors, social events, and various awards and recognition ceremonies as well as long-standing student organizations. Beyond cultural artifacts, Manning offers three other major areas that outline student culture and those are perspectives, values and assumptions. Manning defines perspectives as unwritten rules and norms and values as both espoused beliefs and enacted beliefs. Finally, Manning writes, assumptions are the most basic level of culture; assumptions include the ideas on which university practices and policies are based. These definitions were important to this study because they offered a framework for structuring questions and understanding student experience beyond the verbal elements of culture.

**Theories of Qualitative Research and Methodology**

This study was structured on the framework and theories that guide qualitative research. The theories of qualitative research that underpinned this study were that reality is complex and interpreted through the lenses of individuals (Merriam, 2002). Reality is not fixed, predictable or measurable as it is in positivist, quantitative research (Krathwohl, 2009; Merriam, 2002). Instead reality changes and evolves (Merriam, 2002). Finally, meaning in qualitative research, according to Merriam (2002), is socially constructed.

A qualitative study was the best fit for this topic as well because the purpose of the study was not to predict or generalize, as it is in quantitative research, but to explain with words (Krathwohl, 2009). Krathwohl (2009) says a qualitative approach should be
used when the study design is inductive and holistic. The design of this study took into account students’ whole experience rather than separating their experience into individual variables.

According to Merriam (2002) and Ridenour and Newman (2008) qualitative research is designed to make sense of phenomena from the participants’ perspectives. In this case the perspective is that of the students. The primary focus was understanding and describing the experiences of students as much as possible in their own language, consistent with Krathwohl’s (2009), Merriam’s (2002) and Ridenour and Newman’s (2008) descriptions of qualitative research. Merriam (2002) suggests three approaches for understanding the phenomena and those approaches are interpretive, critical and postmodern. The approach in the design of this study was interpretive. As Merriam (2002) describes, interpretive qualitative research is exploring a phenomenon in a particular context, from the participants’ perspectives and understanding the meaning that experience has for the participants. Merriam says interpretive research explores how participants “interact with their social world” (p. 4). Merriam’s (2002) definition for interpretive research laid a foundation for this study as I planned to explore the phenomena of Catholic and Marianist mission and culture, and how students, in particular, interacted and made meaning of that culture in the context of their education at the University of Dayton.

Assumptions Underlying the Study

Ridenour and Newman (2008) discuss the importance of acknowledging one’s assumptions openly. There were several assumptions underlying this study. The first was that the Catholic and Marianist mission has at least some components or a combination of
components that made it distinct from other Catholic, private and secular institutions in some way. This assumption is based on the number of documents such as the Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton (University of Dayton, 2013), and the Commitment to Community (University of Dayton, 2011), that exist to articulate the unique Catholic and Marianist mission. I planned to explore what aspects of the institutional mission, or combination of those aspects are distinctly Marianist.

The second assumption was that students’ experience and education happen both within and outside of the classroom. The University of Dayton is a largely residential campus with division-one athletics, over 250 student organizations and several annual campus wide experiences such as Christmas on Campus, family weekend, and New Student Convocation. These activities and programs are what Strange and Banning (2001) refer to as “behavioral artifacts” (p. 101). The assumption for this study was that experiences and environment shape students understanding of the Catholic and Marianist mission as well as their classroom studies and the design of the curriculum. This assumption was based on the literature surrounding the importance of environment in shaping learning (Strange & Banning, 2001), the holistic nature of student development (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994; Love & Guthrie, 1999) and the multiple components of organizational culture (Manning, 1993, Schein, 1992).

A third assumption was that the Catholic and Marianist mission guides the work of the faculty, staff and administration at the University. This assumption was based on the fact that it is one of five goals of the university’s strategic plan. The goal reads “Strengthen and promote the University’s distinctive Catholic and Marianist identity” (as cited in the University of Dayton, 2013) It is written in The Common Themes in the
Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton document “the University has sustained a creative fidelity to its founding mission and to enriching the beliefs and convictions that support this mission” (p. 3). Beyond just the documents the university has developed, many resources have been dedicated to shaping curriculum in a way that is intended to be consistent with UD’s mission. In addition to the documents, strategic plan goals and curriculum, an entire office, the Office for Mission and Rector, is described on the website as being at “the center of university leadership” (University of Dayton) and is dedicated to helping the university live its Marianist mission better.

Other assumptions included those that are consistent with qualitative research as well as insider status of the researcher. For example, according to Merriam (2002) and Ridenour and Newman (2008) one of the underlying premises of qualitative research is that knowledge is complex and holistic. According to Merriam (2002) and Ridenour and Newman (2008) in the qualitative paradigm knowledge is moving, evolving and changing over time. It is value laden and context bound. This was a qualitative study operating under those assumptions. In qualitative research there are assumptions and bias based on the position of the researcher (Merriam, 2002; Ridenour & Newman, 2008). I was an insider at the University of Dayton and this study assumed insider status. The insider status and bias are described more in the “Researcher Position” section of this chapter.

Importance of the Study

The question of the value of a Catholic and Marianist education is bound to surface if it has not already. In fact, the Council of Regional Accrediting Commission asks the questions “What are students learning? Is it the right kind of learning? What difference is the institution making in their lives? What evidence does an institution have
that ensures it is worth the student’s investment?” (Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, 2003, p. 1)

According to the literature, higher education is more competitive and expensive than it has ever been (CollegeBoard, 2014; DiSalvo, 2012; Pope, 2011) and there are significant questions about the value of higher education as well as questions surrounding the mission of higher education institutions (Wood, 2011). Wood (2011) also questions what college students are actually learning, as well as the impact of the overwhelming number of diversions higher education has offered students.

According to Wood (2011) higher education has marketed more to students from a social engagement standpoint at the expense of being focused on academic rigor. Wood (2011) attributes this hazy understanding of the mission of higher education to a number of factors including mission creep, and public choice theory as well as an understanding that undergraduate learning has always had a focus beyond undergraduate learning. As Wood (2011) puts it, our expectations of higher education are that it will provide a space for faculty to pursue research and scholarship, prepare graduate students and undergraduate students for professions, pay attention to forming the character of its students, offer an environment for extra-curricular activities including sports, theatre, arts, and social exploration and give young adults the space to act up and make unwise decisions. In attempting to serve all of these purposes, it is possible if not likely that none of them are being served well. Wood (2011) writes, “if it is not a crisis, we should make it so for we are wasting the lives of individuals in a pointless and pointlessly expensive pursuit (p. 212).” Exploring Catholic and Marianist institutional mission and the actual experience of students, as well as the meaning students make of that experience, may
shed some light on whether or not we are achieving the goals the mission lays out and identify the ways in which education is not, in Wood’s (2011) words a “pointlessly expensive pursuit” (p. 212).

Understanding more about the phenomenon of the Catholic and Marianist education from students’ perspective addresses some of these questions. The themes that emerged from this study might prepare faculty and staff for more clearly mission-driven practice, inform how we recruit future students, and how the University of Dayton distinguishes itself in a highly competitive market. This study may only be applicable to the University of Dayton. However, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) by providing thick description of the context of a study, a possibility exists for some transferability of a study’s findings. Lincoln and Guba argue the decisions about transferability and whether or not the contexts are sufficiently similar, is up the person “seeking to make the application elsewhere” (p. 298). I attempted to provide thick description of this study’s context and findings in order to, as Lincoln and Guba describe, “provide the database that makes transferability judgments possible” (p. 316).

The University of Dayton now has a number of documents and learning outcomes that are rooted in the Catholic and Marianist tradition, so the question was whether or not those learning outcomes are achieved and in what ways they are being achieved. For example, the university has listed seven learning outcomes as part of the common academic program and used resources including grants and workshops for faculty to make sure those learning outcomes are achieved (University of Dayton, 2006). These learning outcomes reflect some of the ideas and values of the founders. The learning outcomes outlined in the Common Academic Program are scholarship, faith traditions,
community, diversity, practical wisdom, critical evaluation of our times and vocation (University of Dayton, 2006). Are they successful? Are the learning outcomes being achieved and if so where and how is that happening?

**Researcher Position**

According to Merriam (2002) because the researcher is the instrument of data collection, it is important for the researcher to identify his or her position and bias. Ridenour and Newman (2008) identify describing and disclosing bias as a trustworthiness strategy in qualitative research. There are several factors that influence my position as a researcher.

First, at the time of this study I was an employee of the University of Dayton, where I planned to conduct the study. My position was the assistant director of campus ministry for retreats. I had worked at UD for eight years, full time, in two positions in Campus Ministry, the Campus Minister for Retreats and Faith communities and the Assistant Director of Campus Ministry overseeing the area of retreats and faith communities. I had a master’s degree in theology from UD. During my master’s program I spent two years working in campus ministry as a graduate assistant in the retreats area. I left UD for two years to work in campus ministry at a Catholic parish serving Drake University before I returned to UD in 2007. As an undergraduate student I attended Xavier University in Cincinnati, another Catholic University. I was a practicing Roman Catholic.

Campus ministry at UD falls under the Office for Mission and Rector. This office is committed to promoting and sustaining the Catholic and Marianist Mission of UD. I note this because I had spent a total of 10 years working in an office that is part of a
division committed to promoting the Catholic and Marianist mission at UD. The Catholic and Marianist mission guides the practice of campus ministry at UD.

As a full time staff member I was involved in a number of programs that UD offers for faculty and staff development including the Leadership UD Development team and the Marianist Educational Associates. Both of these groups work with the mission of UD. Leadership UD has the values and ideas of the Marianist mission woven throughout its curriculum. I had both attended and planned sessions for faculty and staff that focus on some of these values. The Marianist Educational Associates are committed to advancing the Catholic and Marianist mission of UD and do so through a week-long formation retreat, and several gatherings, workshops, speakers, and retreats throughout the year. My involvement with both of these groups meant I had a lot of exposure to the Catholic and Marianist mission of UD and that exposure has been through the lens of fostering commitment to the unique mission of UD.

In some ways this study was related to the work that I did; it might have even been considered an extension of my work. I worked with students on a regular basis and was accustomed to hearing those I worked with talk about their experience at UD and the way they have grown in their understanding of some of the Catholic and Marianist values such as faith, community and service. I worked with a particular population of students, though, and those students were the ones that elected to be involved with campus ministry programs. I planned to extend outward from my normal work responsibilities and the regular structure of my work in this study; and therefore, into groups of unfamiliar students. Because I had a number of faculty and staff connections who were in regular contact with populations of students different than those I encountered on my
usual work days, gaining access was easier for me than it would for an outside researcher. Given my positionality, ways I planned to manage my researcher role (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) are described in chapter three.

**Operational Definition**

Catholic and Marianist mission is operationally defined as the collection of documents that specifically articulate the goals and values the educational experience at UD of what Estanek, James, and Norton (2006) call the public profession of Catholic identity. This profession can exist in everything from mission statements and public documents, to a university’s advertising. While the university has a mission statement, the Catholic and Marianist mission is much broader than that and includes some of the founding historical documents, the *Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton* (2013), the *Habits of Inquiry and Reflection* (2006) that inform the Common Academic Program, the *Characteristics of Marianist Universities* (2014), and the *Commitment to Community* (2011). The essence of these and many other documents make up the Catholic and Marianist mission.

**Summary**

In this chapter I addressed the problem, that there is little research surrounding the lived experience of students in Catholic higher education. I stated the research purpose, to offer understanding and insight into students’ experiences at UD, and articulated the research questions. I discussed the theoretical frameworks of qualitative research, student development an organizational culture that grounds this study. I articulated the assumptions underlying this study and my position as a researcher. Finally, I included the operational definition the Catholic and Marianist mission.
I intended to explore what it meant to students to be at a Catholic and Marianist institution. I related the meaning from student voices to the organization’s mission. I examined the ways Catholic and Marianist values are communicated and learned as well as the practices, environment, artifacts, values and beliefs that make up Catholic and Marianist culture. Findings from this study offer understanding and insight into students’ experiences at UD. That understanding and insight has the potential to shape educational practice to better meet the goals the University of Dayton has set for itself.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore students’ experiences of the Catholic and Marianist culture at UD. Specifically, this study explored how students expressed the values of the educational mission of UD. In order to conduct this study, it was necessary to explore the current literature surrounding this topic.

I critically reviewed four major areas in the literature for this study: organizational culture, the role that higher education plays in student development, Catholic higher education mission, and the importance of student voices. Within each of these areas are a number of subcategories that I use to support the approach and methods for this study. Subcategories include how culture is represented and perpetuated, student culture in higher education, ecology and stage models of student development, the mission of higher education, Catholic higher education and Catholic and Marianist higher education, and finally the challenges of studying student culture.

Organizational Culture

The setting of this exploratory study was the University of Dayton organization and its culture. Before examining organizational culture, I outline what makes up an organization. Hanson (2003) suggests schools operate in a “natural social systems model” (p. 7). The natural social systems model is founded on principles that are based on how
people actually behave within an organization rather than how they should behave. Hanson goes on to say that organizations within natural systems are made up of subgroups that either collaborate to achieve system goals or compete among themselves to accomplish their subgroup goals. Subgroups have different power bases and informal power is an important variable in determining how an organization operates (Hanson, 2003).

Fabac (2010) defines organizations and their purposes more simply. Organizations are social entities that exist to achieve certain goals. Organizations have structure, and consist of resources that are both human and material that can be managed to help the organization achieve its goals. As Fabac writes, organizations have a degree of interaction with the environment. In other words, the environment influences the organization. Hanson (2003) describes this as open systems theory where the organization receives inputs and generates outputs within its environment.

Stapley (1996) offers other insights into the nature of organizations. First, organizations have boundaries. In other words, there are parameters to what an organization is and what it does. For example, a university does not perform the same functions as a hospital. These boundaries, Stapley argues, are necessary for organizations and for humans to make sense of and put order into their environments. Open systems theory as described by Hanson (2003) does not contradict Stapely’s assertion about boundaries. Open systems theory simply allows the boundaries to have openness to interaction with the environment.

Higher education certainly fits the definitions of organization, according to Hanson (2003) and Fabac (2010). Colleges and universities exist to serve a purpose and
have both human and material resources. Their interaction with the environment is complex. Schein (1992) outlines the different stakeholders universities exist to serve including students, faculty, the community, financial investors and society as a whole. According to Schein, universities must balance the needs of different stakeholders and constituencies because they all constitute the environment of which the organization is a part. Kuh and Hall (1993) echo this point as they claim there is a “dynamic interplay among institutional conditions, and the social, political and economic forces that influence the campus environment” (p. 1). In other words, the environment and stakeholders have an impact on culture in higher education, which make it an open system (Hanson, 2003).

Stapely (1996) says the what organizations actually organize is human behavior. Stapely goes on to write that the structures Hanson (2003) and Fabac (2010) discuss would not exist without patterns of human behavior. In Stapely’s words, “when an organization ceases to exist there are few clues to its nature in life” (p. 13). Stapely is arguing that organizations are systems contrived by humans who need to make sense of and put order to their environment. Without humans and their behavior, it would be impossible to understand the nature of an organization. Strange and Banning (2001) echo Stapley’s point in their writing about how the environment impacts campus culture. Strange and Banning (2001) assert that an environment is shaped by the individuals in it. According to Strange and Banning “individuals in an environment collectively inform the aggregate features of an environment” (p. 36). In other words, the way people behave and interact has an impact on the organization itself.
While each of these authors emphasize different aspects of the organization, such as the boundaries (Hanson, 2003), the goals and resources (Fabac, 2010) the environment (Strange and Banning, 2001) or the human, social component (Stapely, 1996) all of the authors agree that organizations are dynamic and complex. According to Kuh (1990), because of the complex nature of organizational culture it is best studied in a holistic manner.

**Definition of Organizational Culture**

Schein (1992) claims culture is difficult to define and that many will agree that it exists without being clear about what the “it” is. However, according to Schein there are critical aspects to organizational culture. An organization is made up of a group of people. Schein writes the culture portion of the definition begins with phenomena that are “shared or held in common” (p. 8) within the group. Schein goes onto write that words like “rituals,” “values” and “norms” (p. 10) are not enough to describe culture. Culture has two other essential elements, which are structural stability, in other words, the organization will persist over time, and integration of its elements into a coherent paradigm (Schein, 1992). Schein claims culture contains within it some shared history and learning of the group. The shared experiences, and groups’ accumulated learning are passed on through socialization to new members of the organization. Given this perspective, I can logically design a study to listen to students’ stories as a potential window into their culture. Furthermore, I can explore the meaning of those stories through the framework of the organization’s (UD) mission.

Stapley (1996) argues that culture is not something an organization has or is. Culture, rather, is a theory to help explain and interpret human behavior. Stapley says
culture is an abstract concept, and its constructs are determined by individuals. Thus it is critical to study individuals and both their conscious and unconscious processes if we are to understand an organization’s culture. Stapley says we need a theoretical framework to make sense of culture. Schein (1992) provides such a framework. Culture, in Schein’s words, consists of three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and underlying assumptions.

Kuh and Hall (1993) provide a definition of culture specific to higher education. In their definition culture includes the artifacts, espoused beliefs, values and assumptions that Schein (1992) articulates. Kuh and Hall (1993) add patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, traditions, practices and norms. Kuh and Hall (1993) go on to say all of these elements “guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education” (p. 2) and “provide frames of reference for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on and off campus” (p. 2). The frames of reference for interpreting meaning is consistent with what Stapely (1996) says about needing people to have a way to put order into their environments.

How Culture Develops

Schein (1992) offers three sources as well as a process for how cultures develop. The sources of culture he mentions are, first, the beliefs and values of the founders of the organization. In this study the beliefs and values of the Catholic and Marianist founders are this first source. The second source is the learning experiences of the group as the organization evolves, and the third source is the new values and assumptions brought by new members and leaders to the organization. Examples at UD of the second source might be how UD integrates technology use into administrative tasks and teaching. An example of the third source at UD might be what values a newly hired president or new
senior leadership members might bring to UD. The process Schein outlines for how culture develops has four steps that revolve around creating a small group. First a person has an idea for “a new enterprise” (p. 212). Then the person brings in others who share this idea, or believe that it worth a contribution of their resources. The group then begins to act on the idea in order to achieve common goals. Through this action the group develops a shared history, learning and experiences.

According to Stapely (1996), culture within the organization is not something an organization has or is, it is created by the patterns of behavior of its members. Culture, Stapley writes, is something that emerges as a result of social interactions, and meanings and symbols that are agreed upon by the members of the organization. The culture of an organization emerges out of these patterns and these patterns are susceptible to modification and change (Stapely, 1996).

According to Peterson and Spencer (1990), organizational culture provides a number of benefits to an organization’s members. First, they write that culture can provide an understanding of an organization’s purpose and meaning for the work of its members along with a sense of organizational identity. They go on to say that culture is a way of “attracting, selecting and socializing new members” (p. 4) and can provide a framework for making sense of some of the informal aspects of the organization, in other words, the behaviors and ideas that are not written anywhere but seem to be understood by an organization’s members.
How Culture is Represented

Culture is represented through the levels that Schein (1992) describes and those levels include artifacts, espoused beliefs and perspectives, values and underlying assumptions.

**Artifacts.**

Kuh (1993) says there are three kinds of artifacts and they are physical, verbal and behavioral. Schein (1992) lists some examples of these artifacts, many of which fall into Kuh’s three categories. Schein’s examples include architecture, art, style of clothing and manner of dress, myths and stories, and visible group behavior. Strange and Banning (2001) write that many of the artifacts of a particular university culture are feature points on campus tours and include distinct buildings, landscaping, or state of the art libraries and rec centers. At UD, the RecPlex, Humanities plaza and the chapel are all part of the regular campus tour and are artifacts according to Kuh (1993) and Schein’s (1992) definition.

According to Schein (1992) the artifact level of culture is the easiest level to observe, but is challenging to decipher. Schein uses the example of pyramids in both Egyptian and Mayan culture. They both have visible pyramids but they mean different things to the two groups (Schein, 1992). Schein writes the observer may be able to describe artifacts and how those artifacts make the observer feel, but the observer will not be able to draw conclusions about what different artifacts mean to the members of the group and whether or not those artifacts are indicative of the underlying assumptions of the group based on those observations alone. For example, at the University of Dayton, artifacts might include the crucifixes in the classrooms, and that almost every house in
the student neighborhood has a front porch. However, from those observations alone one cannot draw conclusions about what those objects mean to the culture at UD.

Schein (1992) suggests one can learn what artifacts mean to a given culture over a period of time, but quicker ways of getting to a better understanding of an organization’s culture are to look at the espoused beliefs, values and assumptions. Examining culture at these deeper levels is the way to understand the meaning of the artifacts, and the assumptions that shape behaviors in an organization. Listening to students talk about themselves and their experiences was how I went beyond the artifacts such as chapels and crucifixes, to the deeper levels of culture Schein describes.

**Espoused beliefs, values and perspectives.**

Kuh and Hall (1993) define perspectives as “the way we do things here” (p. 6). They include norms and shared rules that define acceptable behavior. Both perspectives and espoused beliefs exist at a level that people are usually aware of. Kuh and Hall go on to write that another way of explaining perspectives are as “social conventions manifested through behavior” (p. 6). Examples of perspectives according to Kuh and Hall include acceptable dress, and what is and is not okay to speak about. Examples at the University of Dayton include students coming to the McGinnis Mass (the 9 p.m. Mass for students) in pajamas, dressing up for formal and semi-formal dances, and entering the chapel in silence.

Values according to Kuh and Hall (1993) and Schein (1992) are both espoused, or written and visible and enacted. Kuh and Hall go on to suggest that values are more abstract than artifacts but longtime members of an institution can typically articulate them in ways that are consistent with an institution’s mission or philosophy. Kuh and Hall
write that values are the basis on which the members of a particular culture or subculture judge “situations, acts, objects and people” (p. 30). Values, Whitt (1993) describes, include a university’s commitment to the environment, religious values and community values. For example, one might conclude that one of UD’s values is environmental sustainability because dining services has only compostable take-out materials and there are recycling bins all over campus. Faculty, staff and students making use of these recycling bins might add to the evidence that producing less waste is a value for UD.

Kuh and Hall (1993) distinguish the two primary types of values as espoused and enacted. The espoused values include documents such as an institution’s mission statement. The enacted values are what Kuh and Hall refer to as the “living mission” (p. 6) or how policies are set, and decisions are made. The *Commitment to Community* document at UD, for example, is one way the University espouses its values about what community means. The enacted values would be how decisions are made in areas like conduct and housing that are or are not consistent with that document.

**Assumptions.**

According to Kuh (1993) assumptions are “abstract, tacit axioms” (p. 663) that faculty, students, staff and administrators use as a framework for understanding their roles, their relationships and nature of the organization. Kuh says that by their nature, assumptions make up an unquestioned reality. Assumptions, according to Kuh and Hall (1993), are the foundation upon which all of the other levels of culture, artifacts, values, espoused beliefs and perspectives are based. According to Kuh and Hall (1993) members of the organization are not typically aware of the assumptions they hold. They exist at a level where they are taken for granted.
Schein (1992) elaborates on values and assumptions in a group context. Schein writes that basic assumptions are essentially taken for granted. He goes on to argue that if assumptions are strongly held within a group, then the group members will find “behavior based on any other premise inconceivable” (p. 22). According to Schein, assumptions exist at the unconscious level.

Kuh (1993) draws on the work of Schein (1992) to outline the basic assumptions that form what Kuh calls the “core of a college’s character” (p. 663). The first assumption is about the relationship between people and the natural world (Kuh, 1993; Schein, 1992). In other words, is the relationship of the university to its environment a harmonious one? In other words, does a university see value in preserving and protecting natural resources or does it have a dominant relationship as simply a consumer of resources? (Kuh, 1993)? The second assumption that Kuh (1993) and Schein (1992) discuss is the nature of reality and truth. In other words, does one truth exist and is truth revealed or is truth discovered (Schein, 1992)? The third assumption is the nature of human nature. In other words, are humans fundamentally good or evil? The fourth assumption is the nature of human activity (Schein, 1992). Kuh gives some examples, i.e., what constitutes work and play, and what behavior is expected and appropriate? The final assumption that Kuh (1993) and Schein (1992) discuss is the nature of human relations. Kuh’s examples include whether or not the environment is competitive or collaborative in nature, and what type of authority, such as legal or traditional, does the institution operate from?

Assumptions, according to Schein (1992), are difficult to change. Schein writes the reason for this is human beings need cognitive stability. Assumptions, Schein writes, are a group’s cognitive defense mechanisms that allow the group to continue to function.
Schein suggests that questioning or challenging assumptions often leads to anxiety and defensiveness in a group. Yet, assumptions, Schein argues, are the keys to understanding the other levels of an institution’s culture. In Schein’s words “to understand a group’s culture, one must attempt to get at its shared basic assumptions and one must understand the learning process by which such basic assumptions come to be” (p. 26). Schein writes that if one can dig down to the level of assumptions in a culture, the essence of the culture will be explained, as will much the behavior that goes on within it. I attempted to discover some of the underlying values and assumptions of student culture at UD in this study through listening to students’ voices and the meaning they made from their experiences. Another component of institutional culture is climate. Climate is distinct from culture according to Peterson and Spencer (1990). They write that culture comes from the studies of anthropology, sociology and linguistics, climate reflects a cognitive and social psychology base.

**Climate.**

Climate is more concerned with individual behavior and attitudes of its members towards important dimensions of the organization. According to Peterson and Spencer, climate reflects the current situation rather than the deeply held attitudes and beliefs.

The difference between climate and culture is an important distinction for this study. The University of Dayton is currently undergoing a major transition in senior leadership. This transition is likely to have an impact on institutional climate as the university adjusts to the multiple changes. This situation is likely not a permanent alteration of historical foundations, which is why it fits Peterson and Spencer’s definition of climate as opposed to culture.
Renn and Reason (2013) discuss climate as it relates to a few areas in higher education. Renn and Reason’s examples of different climates are the gender climate, the racial climate and the sexual orientation climate. Renn and Reason argue it is important to pay attention to climate because climate is part of what constitutes an environment for student success. According to Renn and Reason, not all students will succeed in all environments. An example of a situation that recently impacted or reflected the racial climate at UD was the news regarding events in Ferguson, MO\(^1\) and Staten Island, New York\(^2\). Many students engaged in silent protests or hung sheet signs with messages containing the hashtag and slogan, “black lives matter.” The protests, the sheet signs and both the positive and negative responses that emerged from those actions all reflect attitudes and behaviors that are more indicative of UD’s current racial climate. In the words of Peterson and Spencer, these are examples of “common member perception of attitudes toward and feelings about organizational life” (p. 7). According to Peterson and Spencer, climate is more malleable and more easily changed than culture.

**How Culture is Perpetuated**

There are a number of ways culture is perpetuated. One way is through a process of socialization. Kuh and Hall (1993) describe this process in the context of higher education. Socialization is how new members of the community learn to behave and

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\(^1\) In August of 2014, a white police officer, named Darren Wilson, shot and killed an unarmed black teenager, named Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri. In November of that same year a grand jury ruled not to indict the officer. Both the shooting and grand jury ruling prompted demonstrations in Ferguson that went on for weeks (Buchanan, et al., 2015).

\(^2\) On July 17, 2014, in Staten Island, New York, Eric Garner, an unarmed black man, died as a result of two white police officers putting him in a chokehold and compressing his chest as they put handcuffs on him. Later that same year, a grand jury ruled not to indict the officers (Baker, Goodman, & Mueller, 2015).
learn what values are important to the institution (Kuh & Hall, 1993). They write, “in most colleges, at least 30% of the students are new each year” (p. 11) thus the current student culture has a chance to impact the new students early on as those students often arrive with as Kuh and Hall put it “a heightened sense of anticipation and high expectations” (p. 11). Students receive messages about a range of variables, including how hard to work in courses, patterns of sleeping, eating and studying, what activities on campus enhance status, norms of acceptable behavior, which classes are difficult and in which professors’ courses to enroll. Kuh and Hall argue student culture teaches students how to get an education and what an education means.

Schein (1992) outlines two major categories for culture development and perpetuation. The first is focused on survival and adaptation in external environments and the second is internal integration. Adapting to external environments, as defined by Schein, is a coping cycle that an organization needs to develop for a system, or organization to survive in relation to its changing environment. Schein outlines five processes of the cycle. According to Schein, the process is sequential but an organization may be working on a number of the steps at any given time.

The five processes, as Schein (1992) outlines in the external adaptation and survival process, are first, mission and strategy; second, goals; third, means; fourth, measurement; and fifth, correction. Mission and strategy is “obtaining a shared understanding of core mission, primary task, manifest and latent functions” (p. 52). “Goals” stem from the group’s mission. “Means” is the consensus that is developed by the group for how to achieve the goals. “Measurement” is the group’s consensus on how it will determine how well it is doing reaching its goals. Finally, “correction” is how the
group decides it will remedy issues when goals are not being met. This process of external adaptation, Schein writes, is how a group develops shared assumptions about what behaviors work and do not work. When these definitions are set and the assumptions established, these become the definitions and behaviors that are passed on to new members of the group (Schein, 1992).

Schein (1992) offers six ways an institution’s culture is perpetuated through internal integration or getting a group together to accomplish its goals. The six ways an organization deals with internal integration, according to Schein, are first, creating a common language and conceptual categories. The second means is defining group boundaries and criteria for inclusion and exclusion. Third is distributing power and status. Fourth is developing norms of intimacy, friendship and love. Fifth is defining and allocating rewards and punishments. Schein defines the final method as explaining the unexplainable and includes ideology and religion.

Leaders have a key role in transmitting culture, according to Schein (1992). Leaders communicate an institution’s underlying values and assumptions through their behavior. According to Schein their behavior includes rewards and punishments, criteria for recruitment, the way resources are distributed, how incidents are handled and matters of promotion. Through these behaviors and decisions, Schein writes, leaders communicate their basic assumptions. If the leaders are conflicted about what their assumptions are then that conflict is communicated and can become part of the culture or the reason subcultures form. The role of leadership in transmitting culture was important for this study as it provided some insight to the role of educational leaders in the culture of higher education in general and UD in particular.
The Role of Values in Culture

As Schein (1992) emphasizes, values are collective; they must be agreed upon by the group. Values emerge in an organization because an organization’s leader has assumptions and ideas about what will and will not work for the organization to meet its goals. Schein goes on to suggest that once those beliefs are acted on and shared by others, and then found to work, the group agrees to those beliefs and ideas as values based on their shared experience.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), shaping values is an important part of the mission of higher education in the United States. Pascarella and Terenzini write that stakeholders agree that the development of values is an important part of the college experience. While there is disagreement on which values colleges should teach and how rigorously colleges should teach them, there is consensus that shaping attitudes, values and beliefs is an important part of college education.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) outline several categories of values that, according to their studies, colleges can impact. These categories include sociopolitical values, civic and community attitudes, racial-ethnic attitudes, gender-role attitudes towards homosexuality, educational and occupational attitudes, religious attitudes and values, and understanding and interest in the arts. According to their research over 20 years, college has a long term effect on shaping these values for students. In the words of Pascarella and Terenzini, “the influence of education is, in general, greatest during college years” (p. 342). They go on to write that values and attitudes tend to stabilize after the college years. Bowen (1996) echoes the point of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005). Bowen writes that through college, students become more interested in ideas, in aesthetic
experience, in tolerance towards diversity and in their involvement in the community and politics.

For Bowen (1996), the ethos of higher education is created by institutions considering and analyzing values through practices such as social and artistic criticism, and construction of “philosophical systems and ideologies” (p. 267). Higher education institutions “appraise existing social policies and recommend new ones” (p. 267). The ethos, created by these practices is, in Bowen’s view, promulgated unofficially, and may not have total agreement. Nevertheless, Bowen argues, in higher education in our time this prevailing ethos “includes several basic ideals or tendencies that influence the outlook and values of its students and through them influence social change” (p. 267).

Some of those ideals, according to Bowen (1996), include a free mind, and freedom of thought, the concept of individuality, and a humane outlook. Bowen goes on to argue that higher education, through transmission of these values, has an impact on social change. Bowen lists six examples of ways this might occur. The first example, is a greater openness to change within the general public. In Bowen’s words “the influence of educated people may lead to wider realization that the prevailing conditions of society are not preordained” (p. 271). Second, there may be increased participation of citizens in public affairs. Third, some of the values of the “academic ethos” (p. 271) may become more pervasive in the general public. Next, college educated people contribute to the economy in ways that are beneficial to society by bringing new ideas about organization and technology to their various professions. Fifth, because of the “international exchange of students and faculty” Americans have an increased understanding of international cultures. Finally, the lifestyle of college students and their engagement in the arts and
culture may be transmitted to society as a whole. Bowen is arguing that higher education has an influence on the values of its students by transmitting values and ideals that are in place within its systems. According to Bowen, these values are important to understand because the students who are shaped by them ultimately influence society as a whole.

Schein (1992) argues that values are an important part of any culture. Bowen (1996) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) articulate some of the values that underpin the culture of higher education. Bowen and Pascarella and Terenzini argue that the values of higher education impact and shape students as well as impact and shape society as a whole. I explored the role of the values of higher education and the University of Dayton in particular in this study. I also explored the role of values in students’ lives and how they may have changed during their time in college.

**Student Culture in Higher Education**

“As the needs of college students change, colleges and universities must understand those changes in order to continue assisting students in achieving their academic and personal goals” (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 4). This statement illustrates the importance of understanding student culture as a means of understanding the best ways to educate students at the university level. Bishop et al. (2004) go on to say that college student culture is continually evolving and changing, so we must continue to reassess our decision making regarding students and their environment. So what exactly does college student culture look like today? Kuh (1990) echoes this point. Kuh suggests student culture shapes “all aspects of campus life” (p. 57). Kuh goes on to write that student culture is the way newcomers are socialized to the institution.
According to Love et al. (1993), it is dangerous to view student culture as one entity. There are many cultures and subcultures among university students. Cultures of populations that are underrepresented often look different than those of the dominant culture. Love et al. go on to claim there are a number of subgroups that contribute to the broader university culture, including classes, roommates, residence halls, athletics and student clubs and organizations. Students bring a number of different backgrounds, behaviors and attitudes to the university (Love et al., 1993). While it would be a mistake to describe student culture as monolithic, there are some elements distinct to student culture in higher education that are worth examining. Love et al. (1993) describe student culture in three levels, which are national, institutional and intra-institutional.

**National culture.**

Love et al. (1993) explain at the national level, there are many experiences students have in common. Examples include adjusting to being away from home, choosing a major, navigating campus, and figuring out campus processes (Love et al., 1993). According to Love et al., (1993) these common experiences for students create a shared understanding and experience even when the institutions are far away from each other. As Love et al. (1993) say, “student culture is the experience of being a college student” (p. 61). Love et al. go on to say that national surveys of college students often produce results that make them appear to be a unified group with similar beliefs, values, perspectives and assumptions.

**Institutional culture.**

The next level of college student culture, according to Love et al. (1993), is institutional culture. This level defines the setting for this study. Different types of
institutions attract different types of students. For example, the culture of students at a military academy is quite different than the culture at a university with a “pervasive religious orientation” (p. 62). The University of Dayton, a mid-sized Catholic and Marianist institution in the Midwest with its own culture, will attract a particular type of student. According to Love et al., there are a number of ways institutional culture is communicated, some of which include faculty and staff passing along important information to students, such as which courses are required and how to register. Students learn what the most important aspects of university culture are through their interactions with other students (Love et al., 1993). Finally, large university traditions and celebrations illustrate and communicate important aspects of student culture such as New Student Convocation, major sporting events, homecoming, graduation and institution specific holidays or celebrations (Love et al., 1993). Examples of institution specific events at the University of Dayton include Christmas on Campus, New Student Convocation and reunion weekend.

Intra-institutional culture.

The final level of institutional culture that Love et al. (1993) outlines is intra-institutional culture. This level consists of all of the subcultures within the institution. These can be as broad as faculty or student or staff groups or as narrow as a specific residence hall floor. Love et al. identify three major categories of intra-institutional culture: subcultures, peer reference, affinity groups, and culturally marginalized groups.

Subcultures. Subcultures, according to Love et al., include groups like residence hall floors, athletes and Greek organizations. One of the most important parts of student subcultures, according to Love et al., is a common living area. For a student subculture to
emerge, two of the key elements are propinquity and persistent interaction (Love et al., 1993). A common living area provides both, according to Love et al. One example of a residential subculture at UD might be Lowes street in the student neighborhood which has a reputation for hosting more parties and consists of more landlord-owned houses than many other streets in the student neighborhood.

**Peer and affinity groups.** A peer group or reference and affinity group, according to Love et al., is not as strong as a subculture. Subcultures pass on values, norms and beliefs to new members. Peer groups are formed when students come together because of some common association. The examples Love et al. (1993) use are student government, new student orientation leaders and resident advisors. The groups persist over time but they do not necessarily share norms, values and beliefs. While the groups exist from year to year, they are made up of different members each year (Love et al., 1993). Peer groups at UD might be retreat teams, the President’s Emmisaries and campus tour guides.

**Culturally marginalized groups.** The last subsection of intra-institutional culture is culturally marginalized groups (Love et al., 1993). According to Love et al. (1993), these can include groups like international students, students of color or commuters. The difference between marginalized groups and subcultures or peer groups is a sense of disconnection from the institution (Love et al, 1993). According to Love et al., they may share values and beliefs with one another within the subgroup but do not necessarily feel those values and beliefs are in line with the institutions to which they belong. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), culturally marginalized groups are less likely to persist in an institution.
Understanding the levels and complexities of student culture provided context and insight to the study of student culture. As Love et al. (1993) assert, students are not a homogeneous group with the same values and beliefs. There are peer groups and subcultures within every institution. Kuh (1990) argues we need to understand institutional culture if we are to help engage students in behaviors that are more in alignment with the goals of higher education. Understanding some of these dynamics and the complexities that exist within culture helped inform the design of this study. Kuh goes on to say that before culture can be influenced or changed it needs to be understood.

**Higher Education’s Role in Student Development**

According to Wolf-Wendel and Ruel (1999), American higher education exists to develop the whole person. Higher education’s purpose, since the first United States institutions of higher education were established in the 1600’s, was to do more than educate students academically or intellectually (Lucas, 2006). According to Lucas (2006) colonial colleges aimed to foster moral, religious and intellectual development.

Lucas (2006), in his discussion of the history of the student affairs movement, chronicles the return of attention to the extracurricular life after World War I. According to Lucas, organizations like campus newspapers, theatre groups and social clubs and Greek organizations were taking up more and more of college students’ time. Academic leaders were starting to understand the benefits of these “non-academic” (p. 212) organizations and their contribution to students’ well-rounded development. The twenties and thirties began what Lucas refers to as a revival of “old time collegiate attention to the non-intellectual side of student development” (p. 212). The non-intellectual side of student development, according to Lucas, includes residence life, career services, campus
chaplains, fraternity and sorority chaperones, and financial aid. According to Lucas, “practically all observers were agreed, given the increasing size and diversity of the undergraduate population, the emergence of an elaborate extra-academic support structure was both necessary and probably inevitable” (p. 212). The student affairs movement that Lucas describes continues to this day as institutions offer ample opportunities outside the classroom for student growth and development of the whole person.

What exactly are the components of development of the whole person as colleges set out to achieve it? According to Wolf-Wendel and Ruel (1999), development of the whole person includes intellectual or cognitive development, cultural awareness, moral growth, skills and education for citizenship. Wolf-Wendel and Ruel (1999) argue a focus on developing these areas through attention to co-curricular or what Lucas (2006) refers to as the “non-intellectual” side of development has many benefits, including increased retention rates and a more positive impact of the collegiate experience on the student. Student development theory supports the arguments of Wolf-Wendel and Ruel (1999) and actually counters Lucas’s statement that the development of areas like moral growth and cultural awareness is “non-intellectual.”

**How Student Development Occurs**

**Stage models of development.**

According to authors Chickering and Reisser (1993), Kegan (1994), Baxter Magolda (2001) and Love and Guthrie (1999), student development is holistic and integrated. In other words, development in one area, such as cognitive development, has an impact on development in other areas, such as interpersonal. Bowen (1996) writes that
the differences between cognitive, moral and emotional development are arbitrary. According to Bowen, these domains of development often overlap. In Bowen’s words “Cognitive learning affects the emotional and moral make-up of people, and affective development influences cognitive learning, especially through its impact on motivation and purpose” (p. 104). Renn and Reason (2013) support Bowen’s claim. In their words, the cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of development “intersect, overlap, influence, and reinforce one another” (p. 117).

Both Baxter Magolda (2001) and Kegan (1994) discuss three primary dimensions of development. According to Kegan (1994) they are cognitive, which includes intellectual and moral development, intrapersonal or psychosocial, and interpersonal or social. Baxter Magolda writes that students are wrestling with three primary questions, which illustrate the three dimensions of development Kegan writes about. Those questions are “How do I know?” (cognitive), “Who am I?” (intrapersonal) and “How do I want to construct relationships with others?” (interpersonal).

Many student development theorists support a stage model of development. Kegan (1994) refers to these stages of development as “orders of consciousness.” In Kegan’s model there are five orders of consciousness and all five include intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive ways of making meaning. He explains what each of those areas are and identifies their differences, but according to Kegan, when a person transitions between orders, it happens in all areas at one time. In Kegan’s words, “the relation is transformative, qualitative and incorporative. Each successive principle subsumes or encompasses the prior principle” (p. 33). In other words, transition between orders of consciousness is a matter of growth. The third order becomes part of the fourth
order and is a necessary phase of the process. One order, as Kegan puts it, becomes an element or tool in the next order. Kegan writes that people’s ways of making meaning increase in complexity in all three dimensions as they grow and develop.

Kegan’s (1994) orders of consciousness basically cover development over a person’s entire life. The orders that most affect college students, according to Baxter Magolda (2001) and Kegan (1994), are the third and fourth orders. The third order, according to Kegan, is the level to which many adults have developed. Kegan defines some characteristics of an individual at the third order and those include: recognizing and understanding others’ points of views, thinking abstractly, and awareness of expectations and shared feelings in a relationship. As Kegan writes, at the third order an individual cannot recognize relationships between relationships, distinguish oneself from a relationship, or see oneself as author of one’s own life. The individual, instead, sees himself or herself as playing a role in a theatre. Kegan later defines the third order more simply. He writes at that level of meaning making what a person believes he or she should feel, value and want is what the individual actually feels, values and wants. In the fourth order those assumptions shift. Kegan refers to fourth order as the “self authored mind” or self-authorship. I will discuss more about the idea of self-authorship later.

Baxter Magolda (2001) uses Kegan’s idea of self-authorship but focuses her stage model of development on stages and transitions that occur during college. She identifies four stages of development that occur during college. Baxter Magolda’s first three stages illustrate what might be considered some of the substages of Kegan’s (1994) third order of consciousness. The stages of development, according to Baxter Magolda, are absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing and contextual knowing. According
to Baxter Magolda’s longitudinal qualitative study, absolute knowing is the stage that most first year students are in when they enter college. Baxter Magolda writes that at this stage, individuals understand truth to be held by figures in authority. The assumption of knowledge and truth is that it is certain. Authority figures could include parents or teachers.

The second stage, according to Baxter Magolda’s (2001) research, is transitional knowing. From what she found in her research, students typically enter this stage sometime during their freshman year or in their sophomore year. Most students stay at transitional knowing throughout their college career. Transitional knowing is the phase when the assumption is, according to Baxter Magolda, “some knowledge is believed to be uncertain” (p. 17). Some areas of knowledge for students in the transitional knowing phase remain certain. Mathematics and science courses might be examples of areas that maintain their certainty for students, while philosophy and religion may not. She writes that in the transitional knowing phases students move from a focus on acquiring knowledge to understanding it. She argues, in this phase students are beginning to use their own voice. Eighty percent of the seniors in Baxter Magolda’s study were still in the transitional knowing phase, with that number dropping to 31 percent in the year after they graduated.

The third stage of knowing, as described by Baxter Magolda (2001), is independent knowing. In independent knowing truth and knowledge are largely uncertain. At this stage all different points of view become equal. In other words, a professor’s opinion carries equal weight to a student’s opinion in the eyes of the independent knower. One of the students in Baxter Magolda’s study illustrated independent knowing when she
said “Everything is relative: there’s no truth in the world, that sort of thing. So I’ve decided that the only person you can really depend on is yourself” (p. 32). Essentially this student is saying no one authority is the keeper of truth.

The final stage of Baxter Magolda’s (2001) model is contextual knowing. This stage was evident in only in two percent of the seniors in her study and was more evident in young adults after college. This is another name for what Kegan calls self-authorship and Baxter Magolda refers to as the self-authored stage. The contextual knower can take all aspects of a situation into account, seek out advice and integrate that into his or her own point of view. Baxter Magolda writes that at this point “peers and authority both have valid knowledge if they can support their stance” (p. 35). Renn and Reason (2013) refer to the contextual knowing stage as “internal foundations” (p. 121). Renn and Reason write about each of the dimensions at this stage. First, the cognitive dimension, reaching the internal foundations level of development is having a “self-determined belief system” (p. 121). In the intrapersonal dimension it is having a “solid sense of identity and values” (p. 121). In the interpersonal dimension it is having relationships that are truly mutual. Renn and Reason (2013) go on to write that at this phase of development individuals are able to reflect on their identities, relationships and emotions.

Kegan (1994) refers to this stage as being able to make those same identities, relationships and emotions “object.” In Kegan’s model, that which is subject cannot be examined or reflected upon. Something that is object, however can be examined. So as one increases in their complexity of meaning making and transitions between orders of consciousness, more and more of their lives become object.
Much of this development happens in college. According to Bowen (1996), students become more self-sufficient and independent during their college years. Bowen writes college seniors are often more confident and assertive than freshman. Seniors, according to Bowen, are more resourceful, organized and motivated and have less need for self-indulgence and intense emotional expression. This supports Baxter Magolda’s (2001) theory surrounding self-authorship and how students can transition from absolute knowing to contextual knowing throughout their four years or so in college.

The ultimate goal of student development in higher education, according to Baxter Magolda (2001) and Kegan (1994), is for students to arrive at self-authorship by the time they graduate, but what does self-authorship actually mean? Baxter Magolda describes self-authorship as an ability to “construct our own visions, to make informed decisions in conjunction with coworkers, to act appropriately and to take responsibility for those actions” (p. 14). She goes on to write that self-authorship is not self-centered, but it is when the self can understand external forces, ideas and beliefs, and take them into account rather than having those external forces define oneself. In her words, self-authorship is “a set of assumptions that included viewing knowledge as relative to a context and knowledge claims better or worse based on evaluation of relevant evidence” (p. xvii).

Kegan’s (1994) fourth order of consciousness is the self-authored mind. At this level individuals can self-evaluate and self-correct because they have developed internal standards. Self-authored individuals, according to Kegan, have developed a theory or philosophy about what makes something valuable rather than the third order function of simply having values. At this level, Kegan writes, individuals can hold and understand
complex power structures within relationships. He uses the example of a person who says that a hospital administrator does not tell a surgeon where to cut. In other words, there are aspects of power in each the administrator’s and surgeon’s position, even though the administrator may be the surgeon’s boss. The fourth order individual, who made the statement, recognizes there are limits and differences to each, the surgeon’s authority and administrator’s authority. A third order individual cannot understand two kinds of power in one relationship where the fourth order person can grasp this complexity.

Baxter Magolda (2001) outlines three basic assumptions that illustrate the foundation of self-authorship. The first is that “knowledge is complex and socially constructed” (p. xx). The second assumption is based on the first and is “self is central to knowledge construction” (p. xx). The final assumption is that authority is shared in “the mutual construction of knowledge among peers” (p. xx).

All of these phases of development are meant to help an individual, as Kegan (1994) says, make meaning of life experiences. Renn and Reason (2013) write that understanding and evaluating the way individuals make meaning and “the more complicated ways in which they learn to make meaning” (p. 121) help us to understand the integration of cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal development. One of the research questions driving this study was how do students make meaning of their experience at UD? Understanding the dimensions of development provides some insight in to the integrated ways in which that meaning-making may occur.

How do colleges support the development of students from Kegan’s (1994) early orders of consciousness or Baxter Magolda’s (2001) absolute knowing phase? Both authors talk about the need for a blend of both support and challenge. Baxter Magolda
describes this concept of support and challenge as “being good company.” In the subsequent sections I explore if and how colleges provide the support and challenge needed for developmental growth and whether and how development of the student is incorporated into the collegiate mission.

**Ecology models of development.**

Renn and Reason (2013) write that authors like Baxter Magolda (2001) and Kegan (1994) offer models of development that are focused on what is being developed such as cognitive or interpersonal dimensions. Renn and Reason go on to explain another model of student development, which is the ecology model. According to Renn and Reason, this model explains how development occurs. The ecology model of development “illuminates the ways that relationships among individual inputs may result in observed outcomes, including learning, identity development, and behavior” (p. 123).


**Process.** According to Bronfenbrenner, processes occur when people are engaging in activities whether individually or in a group. Processes or proximal processes are central to development because it is through activities, that people make sense of their world. For a child this could be engaging in play, for example. Renn and Reason (2013) explain proximal processes as interactions between the individual and the environment and can occur in settings such as formal learning environments, co-curricular settings, work, family and peer groups.
**Person.** The next component in this model is person. According to Renn and Reason (2013) the person includes the “background and demographic characteristics, abilities and preferred ways of interacting with the environment” (p. 124.) Bronfenbrenner (1993) writes there are four characteristics that are most likely to shape how an individual develops because they affect dispositions towards the environment. He referred to these characteristics as developmentally instigative characteristics. The first type of developmentally instigative characteristics, according to Renn and Arnold (2003), are those that “act to invite or prohibit particular responses from the environment” (p. 268). They provide examples for each of these characteristics. For this first characteristic they simply say different students elicit different reactions from groups like peers or faculty. The second group of characteristics are what Bronfenbrenner refers to as selective responsivity. Renn and Arnold explain this as how students explore their surroundings. They use the example of students who actively join student organizations compared to those who prefer solitary activities. Third, are those characteristics that relate to how students “engage or persist in increasingly complex activities” (p. 269). In other words, do students seek opportunities to grow their critical thinking and leadership or avoid those experiences? The last group of characteristics are those that relate to how students view their agency in a particular environment. Renn and Arnold (2003) use the example of high achieving valedictorians believing they understand the academic environment and that hard work yields high grades. Understanding that different students may have different developmentally instigative characteristics is important for this study because the characteristics students bring with them help shape the way they make meaning of their experiences at UD.
**Context.** The third component of this ecological model of development is context. Renn and Reason (2013) summarize Bronfenbrenner’s career-long work, which explains context. According to Renn and Reason (2013), Bronfenbrenner developed four levels of context, which are microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems and macrosystems. Renn and Arnold (2003) developed a ring model showing these levels nested in a graduated way.

![Diagram of Bronfenbrenner's model applied to a postsecondary environment](image)

*Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s model as applied to a postsecondary environment (Renn. & Arnold, 2003, p. 268 Reprinted with permission from Ohio State University Press.)*

Microsystems, according to Renn and Reason (2013), are the locations of “direct interactions between the individual and the environment” (p. 126). Bronfenbrenner (1993) describes these as face to face interactions. Renn and Reason add that in the 21st century these face to face interactions may include those interactions that are digitally...
mediated. They are “the closest—or most proximal—context in which development occurs” (p. 126.) Examples of microsystems for UD students might include their housemates in the student neighborhood, their classes, their part time jobs, and the student organizations in which they are involved. More specifically a living learning community, a Lay Marianist Formation group, and a cohort group like the River Stewards may make up microsystems for UD students.

The next level is the mesosystem. Peer culture is one of the most influential mesosystems on college students’ learning and development. Renn and Arnold articulate three things that the mesosystem takes into account: “the specificity of individual life history, the campus milieu, and the larger societal and historical context of development” (p. 273). Renn and Arnold go on to write the mesosystem consists of interactions among all of the microsystems and together influence students’ experience of overall systems such as an academic system. The mesosystem deals with areas such as culture, race and identity (Renn & Arnold, 2003). According to Renn and Arnold, college students are “embedded in the interacting mesosystems of academic, social, family and work life” (p. 270). Each of these systems has an effect on a student’s development and those effects may reinforce or contradict one another. Renn and Arnold provide some examples of mesosystems that include groups like high school valedictorians, mixed race students, and residential students with campus employment.

The exosystem surrounds the mesosystem and the microsystems. In the words of Renn and Arnold (2003) the exosystem exists when there is a setting that does not contain the individual but “nevertheless exerts influence on his or her developmental possibilities” (p. 272). The examples Renn and Arnold give are a parent’s workplace, the
federal government and its policies on financial aid, and institutional policy makers. The financial impact of these dimensions may impact, for example, how much a student has to work, how many loans they take out and lack of appropriate resources that may contribute to their level of stress.

Finally, there is the level of macrosystems. According to Renn and Arnold (2003), this includes historic trends and events, social forces and cultural expectations. In Renn and Arnold’s words this is “the most distal level of environmental influence” (p. 272). They go on to give the example of the meritocratic ideals that come from “democratic values and capitalistic ideology” (p. 272).

**Time.** The fourth and final component of the ecology model of development is time. Renn and Reason (2013) describe time as having three meanings. Those meanings are the time in which one lives, the timing of an event and the changes in both the person and the context over time. Renn and Reason list several examples of the ways time may impact students in the ecological model including educational options at the time one chooses to enter college, the timing of life events such as parental divorce or partnering or entering military service. Renn and Reason include events in the macrosystems that have an impact on development such as the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001.

This framework of development, according to Renn and Reason (2013), does not provide exact outcomes, instead it provides a way of understanding how development occurs. They write that ecological models of development are useful “in diverse institutional settings and with students in diverse circumstances because they do not prescribe one ‘best’ way to participate in higher education” (p. 131). Both the ecology
and stage models of development contribute to our understanding of how students grow and develop within a particular educational and cultural context such as UD. Both of these models inform this study.

**Higher Education’s Contribution to Student Development**

Higher education offers a number of opportunities for students’ holistic development. Wolf-Wendel and Ruel (1999) list a number of examples of the kinds of programs that contribute to students’ education, including residence hall programming, new student orientation, Greek life, work-study, student clubs, service activities and student government. The actual landscape of a campus contributes to students’ growth and development and Strange and Banning (2001) refer to the physical environment of a particular campus as the campus ecology.

**Campus ecology.**

Campus ecology, according to Renn and Reason (2013), provides a framework for understanding educational environment; in their words it “is the element over which higher education leaders have the greatest influence” (p. 82). There are human-built, organizational and natural elements that, according to Renn and Reason, make up the environment where student learning and growth occurs. Campus ecology has its roots in biology and is based on the assumption that there is a mutual interaction and adaptation between organisms and their environments. They claim there are three basic underlying principles that make up the foundation of campus ecology. The first is individuals, in this case, students, encounter stimuli in the environment that reinforces their behavior or causes them to adapt their behavior (Renn & Reason, 2013). The second is individuals cause adaptations in the environment. A good example of this at UD is the worn grass
path to Roesch Library that was created from people repeatedly walking that route instead of on the paved walkways. Eventually that path was paved. Renn and Reason (2013) write the third principle is that outcomes are the product or result of the interaction between students and their environment.

Strange and Banning (2001) write that campus design plays a major role in the campus ecology. They suggest campus design should have four major goals and those are safety, involvement, inclusion and community building. They pair safety and inclusion and then discuss involvement and community building as individual concepts.

According to Strange and Banning (2001) safety and inclusion are “important requisites for development and learning to occur, and contributing to one will undoubtedly enhance the other” (p. 113). There are physical aspects to promoting safety and inclusion and those include placement and size of buildings, presence of lighting and emergency phones and finally a sense of territoriality and defensible space. Territoriality, according to Strange and Banning, is how groups perceive their ownership of the space. Clear boundaries of a space indicate to potential intruders that their offense will elicit a response. They argue, for example, a well lit public space that shows signs of life will be less likely to be vandalized than a space that is remote and dark.

Strange and Banning discuss the physical dimensions of involvement. These include “campus location, human scale design, layout and flexibility” (p. 141). Campus location refers to the type of environment a campus is situated within, such as urban, or rural or semi-urban. They argue all of those environments can promote involvement in different ways, whether it is internship and service learning opportunities within a city or the opportunities students create for themselves when they are somewhat isolated in a
rural town. Dayton’s location is urban, merely a couple of miles from downtown. Some of the ways UD capitalizes on its location are through the programs and partnerships that the Fitz center provides such as Semester of Service, the River Stewards and Dayton Civic Scholars.

Other dimensions of physical involvement Strange and Banning (2001) discuss are human scale design, design layout and flexibility. Human scale design, according to Strange and Banning, includes examples like class and residence hall size. For instance, residence halls that are no more than three stories and smaller class sizes are more conducive to involvement than high rise dormitories and large lectures where it is nearly impossible for a professor to know all of the students’ names. Design layout and flexibility can encourage student involvement. According to Strange and Banning, spaces that promote involvement are those where individuals can easily gather. In the authors’ words, “intentionally planned or not, these designs support the social qualities of campus life and mitigate against the personal isolation that may evolve for time in a competitive academic milieu” (p. 145). Included in design layout and flexibility is the idea of a third place. A third place, according to Strange and Banning, is where people neither live nor work but “where one goes to relax and enjoy the moment” (p. 146). Third places at UD include the library, Kennedy Union and Humanities Plaza, and the restaurants and bars on Brown Street.

Finally, Strange and Banning (2001) address community building. They argue there are environmental dimensions to community building. Communities are territorial by nature and need space to carry out their functions. In their words “Territory serves to orient the community and to create a sense of a home place, a space where artifacts of
material culture are maintained and the company of members enjoyed” (p. 165).

 Territories could include a fraternity or sorority house, a room where a group has regular meetings, or a student organization office such as the Christmas on Campus office or Daytonian yearbook office in Kennedy Union.

 Renn and Reason (2013) suggest there are a number of institutional characteristics that play a role in campus ecology and student populations. Renn and Reason echo some of Strange and Banning’s characteristics of physical ecology, but the focus of their description of defining characteristics is a little different. They identify institutional size, control, curriculum, mode of instruction and student residence as some of the primary characteristics that impact student environment. According to Renn and Reason, size is defined as the number of full-time students. Control is the next category and, as these authors articulate, this is whether or not the institution is chartered by the state and therefore susceptible to government regulation or if is a religious institution or a for-profit institution. Curriculum, these authors posit, is comprised of the certificates and degrees an institution offers as well as the academic program. This includes Carnegie Basic Classifications and the level of research an institution is engaged in for doctoral degree granting institutions. Mode of instruction refers to on-line or in person instruction and includes distance learning. Student residence is the final example Renn and Reason provide and it relates to the on-campus versus off campus living situation for students. A school that requires all of its first year students to live on campus, for example, is different than an urban community college with no residence halls. At UD around 95% of the students live on campus, which is a distinguishing characteristic.
Impact of college on students’ development.

College contributes to students’ development and growth. According to Pascarella and Terenzini, the young adults in their research who did not attend college did not show the same levels of development that the young adults who did attend college demonstrated, thus the college experience has impact beyond just the normal growth that occurs from getting older. I have already discussed the role college plays on shaping students long term values according to the research of Bowen (1996), and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) demonstrate a number of effects that college had on students in their research, including psychosocial change, moral development and development of quality of life.

Some dimensions of psychosocial change that Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) address are expansion of intellectual, cultural and social interests, promoting self-understanding, “confronting dogma and prejudice; and developing personal moral and ethical standards while preparing students for participation in a democratic society” (p. 213). According to Pascarella and Terenzini, the evidence of their research and some of the studies they examined, college reduced attitudes of “authoritarianism, dogmatism, and possibly ethnocentrism” (p. 227) in students. It increased students’ “intellectual orientation, personal psychosocial adjustment, and sense of psychological well-being” (p. 228).

In their ex post facto quantitative research Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) conclude that students who attend college make statistically significant gains in their moral development. According to their research, upperclassmen demonstrate higher levels of both principled and moral reasoning than first year students or sophomores.
Pascarella and Terenzini go on to write “the exact magnitude of the gain may not be as important as the movement from conventional to post conventional or principled judgment during college” (p. 346). Pascarella and Terenzini identify some interventions that have an impact on students’ growth in moral reasoning including courses focused on morals and ethics, service learning, extracurricular involvement and off-campus learning experiences. All of these interventions demonstrate impact on growth in students with some of the better supported empirical evidence coming from courses on ethics and morals and off-campus learning experiences. Overall, students in college make positive gains in their moral reasoning ability, according to Pascarella and Terenzini’s research.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicate college had a positive impact on what they call quality of life areas including health, happiness, community involvement and the well-being of children. They acknowledge that part of the impact may come from socioeconomic advantages that students who attend college have but argue that those advantages do not account for all wellbeing gains. After several of the economic resources were controlled for there were still positive links between well being and college attendance. Pascarella and Terenzini argue this is because college enhances in students the ability to “acquire new information and process it effectively,” and “evaluate new ideas and technologies” (p. 552). College helps students increase their “capacity to plan rationally and with a long term perspective the willingness to accept reasonable risk and the developmental and cultural level of one’s interests and tastes” (p. 552).

What authors like Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Renn and Reason (2013) and Strange and Banning (2001) are demonstrating is the complex, holistic nature of higher education and therefore its complex impact on students’ development in a number of
areas. Everything from the way the campus is designed, to its location, to the kinds of activities and organizations a campus offers contribute to a student’s growth and development. Pascarella and Terenzini demonstrate that the impact of the whole college experience contributes to positive and statistically significant gains for its students in a broad range of areas. The culture of higher education, and the way students develop are intertwined with each impacting the other. The next question asks in what ways do higher education institutions desire to contribute to the holistic growth of their students and how is that articulated through their mission?

**Catholic Mission**

The mission of higher education, much like the culture of higher education, cannot be viewed as monolithic. According to Bowen (1996), though institutions of higher education have much in common they are different in a number of important ways, including areas such as wealth, size and location, as well as extracurricular life, faculty characteristics and academic standards. Other differences between institutions that Bowen includes are institutional philosophy and traditions. According to Bowen, the characteristics of graduates vary. He argues graduates of some institutions are more liberal or religiously oriented or committed to community service than graduates of other institutions. Bowen argues only part of the difference in graduates can be explained by the institutional characteristics. The rest of the difference is explained by the type of students different institutions “attract, recruit, and retain” (p. 237).

**Mission of Higher Education**

The authors of the *Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton* identify three foundational higher education traditions that ground the mission
and identity of the University of Dayton (University of Dayton, 2013). The first is independent higher education in the United States, also known as private institutions or institutions that are not state supported (University of Dayton, 2013). The second area is Catholic higher education. The last area is Marianist higher education (University of Dayton, 2013). Understanding the mission of higher education as a whole will help clarify the elements that are distinct to Catholic and Marianist higher education.

Renn and Reason (2013) write, “when an institution admits a student, it makes a commitment to that student’s success” (p. 231). So part of the mission of higher education according to Renn and Reason, is providing an environment of policies, programs and curricula in which students can succeed.

Bowen (1996) articulates the mission of higher education as a whole, as learning. Learning, as Bowen defines it is “knowing and interpreting the known, discovering the new, and bringing about desired change in the cognitive and affective traits of human beings” (p. 8). Learning in these three categories happens through scholarship and criticism, research, and education (Bowen, 1996). The three functions of higher education, scholarship, research and public service, form the foundation for learning to occur. Learning, writes Bowen “is the chief stock trade of higher education. It occurs in many subjects, it takes place in diverse settings, and it serves varied clienteles” (p. 8).

If learning is the desired product of education, as Bowen (1996) writes, then what exactly does it look like? Learning, Bowen argues, consists of changes in people, “changes in their knowledge, their characteristics, and their behavior.” According to Bowen, learning is about transformation. It is the transformation of resources into intangible qualities in human beings. Part of the mission of higher education is to provide
Bowen goes on to articulate that not only are institutions of higher education hoping to bring about change in their students, faculty and staff, but the hope is that this change will bring about “broad social and cultural advancement of the entire society” (p. 14).

Bowen (1996) writes there are several individual goals for higher education as well as several social goals. The individual goals include education of the whole person, individuality, and accessibility. These are the three basic principles for education of the individual. I discussed education of the whole person earlier. Individuality according to Bowen, is taking into account the unique abilities, talents and characteristics of each person and helping that person develop to his or her full potential. Bowen defines accessibility as providing education to a diverse range of people including diversity in age, ability and circumstance.

Bowen argues that these three principles form the foundation for some of the specific goals for the individual in higher education. These specific goals include cognitive and affective goals, practical goals, dispositions and behaviors, personal self-discovery, career choice and placement and direct satisfactions and enjoyments.

In addition to the individual goals, there are social goals of higher education. The social goals included individualism vs. collectivism, and social change vs. social stability. Bowen (1996) writes about these two social goals on a continuum. Bowen argues that higher education in the United States has more of an individual focus, but the value is to educate between the two extremes of individualism and collectivism. So while United States higher education may fall to the more individualistic side in terms of values according to Bowen, there is some agreement that higher education should serve some
societal and national goals as well. According to Bowen, the approach to education for societal change versus societal stability is more balanced. One of the goals of higher education in the U.S. is to educate students to critically evaluate society, and to view it with a sense of detachment. This point of view encourages students to be agents of social change. However, another goal is education should help students understand and appreciate culture and tradition, thus helping students be agents of social stability. According to Bowen (1996), these two ends do not necessarily conflict. Bowen argues “the true goal may be men and women with free minds who can form balanced judgments about change and stability and who can work toward orderly and progressive social development” (p. 49). Bowen, and Renn and Reason have articulated some of the major ideas that shape the mission of higher education in the United States as a whole. The mission of Catholic higher education is founded on some of these ideas. Catholic higher education also has some distinguishing characteristics of its own.

**Mission of Catholic Higher Education**

What do Catholic colleges and universities have in common? Catholic institutions range in size, diversity, population, and focus. There are more than 200 of them in the United States and all have distinct identities. But there are some similarities they share. According to the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU), a national organization that serves Catholic colleges and universities, what makes a Catholic institution Catholic are some of the following components: a shared Christian vision and goals, reflection in light of faith, fidelity to tradition and a shared commitment to service. They have a liberal arts core and a diversity of graduate and professional programs offered (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2012).
Estanek, James, and Norton (2006) evaluate what Catholic colleges and universities have in common through their examination of institutions’ mission statements. The authors identified five general categories that identify Catholic institutions. The first is a public profession of Catholic identity. This profession can exist in everything from mission statements and public documents, to a university’s advertising. The second is engagement with culture and scholarship through a lens of Catholic wisdom and critique. The third is fidelity to the Gospel both by teaching and modeling. The fourth is service to the Church and society, in other words, using scholarly resources to respond to pastoral situations and human suffering. Service learning and reflection would fit into this category. The final category is exploring the Catholic culture and heritage through the study of humanities including philosophy, theology, literature and arts (Estanek, James, & Norton, 2006).

While some of these ideas overlap with the mission of higher education, some are unique to the mission statements found in Catholic Higher Education, according to Estanek, James, and Norton (2006). Their research shows a consensus of student learning outcomes that Catholic colleges address directly in their mission statements. Learning outcomes included intellectual development, social justice, spiritual development, service, leadership, moral development, personal growth, and education of the whole person (Estanek, James, & Norton, 2006). Their study explored mission statements from 55 different Catholic colleges and universities and their findings illustrate some of what these authors call the public profession of Catholic identity.
Catholic and Marianist Mission in Higher Education

According to Schein (1992), founders have a major impact on how a group develops. He goes on to say because “they had the original idea they will typically have their own notion, based on their own cultural history and personality of how to fulfill the idea” (p. 213). The Marianist Founders of the University of Dayton certainly had a major impact on how the university developed.

What do the three Marainist universities have in common? What are the espoused values, beliefs and goals of a Marianist education as distinct from other private and Catholic education? The Characteristics of Marianist Universities (2014) defines five common elements which are “educate for formation in faith, provide an integral quality education, education in family spirit, educate for service, justice and peace, and finally education for adaptation and change” (Chaminade University of Honolulu, St. Mary's University, University of Dayton, 2014, p. 5). These characteristics ground the mission of all three Marianist Universities. The University of Dayton, because of institutional characteristics such as size, location and residential living, is distinct from the other Marianist institutions. While the University of Dayton shares the characteristics of education of the other Marianist institutions, it also has its own distinct mission.

The University of Dayton mission statement outlines key components to its mission. First, the statement begins by identifying UD as a “comprehensive Catholic university.” It continues UD is a “diverse community, committed in the Marianist tradition to educating the whole person and to linking learning and scholarship with leadership and service” (p. 1). As I have already indicated, in general, higher education is
committed to educating the whole person, a value that is shared by Catholic universities. Catholic universities also share a commitment to service learning.

There is a paragraph in the UD mission statement that outlines components that are distinctly Marianist. The University of Dayton authors of the mission statement write, “As Marianist, the University focuses on educating the whole person in and through a community that supports and challenges all who become a part of it.” The emphasis on community and the support and challenge within that community are elements not clearly identified in some of the research around the mission of higher education or the mission of Catholic higher education. The five characteristics of a Marianist education do articulate the importance of educating in a family spirit but the word “community” is not used in the same way as it is in the university mission statement.

The mission statement of UD goes on to articulate how it accomplishes the task of forming community, “thriving on collaboration by people from diverse backgrounds with different skills who come together for common purposes. The University as Marianist challenges all its members to become servant-leaders who connect scholarship and learning with leadership and service” (p. 1).

The mission statement of UD is one of the documents that outlines its espoused mission. However, the University of Dayton has spent a considerable amount of time and resources describing what a Catholic and Marianist education is and should provide for its students. There are a number of documents the university has created including the Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton (University of Dayton, 2013), Commitment to Community (University of Dayton, 2011), and The Habits
of Inquiry and Reflection: A Report on Education in the Catholic and Marianist Traditions at the University of Dayton (Marianist Education Working Group, 2006).

Different documents emphasize different key aspects of the University of Dayton mission. Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton elaborates the University of Dayton’s mission statement to include UD’s Catholic and Marianist identity. The five themes in the mission and identity as outlined are excelling in integrated learning and scholarship, searching for truth grounded in both faith and reason, educating for practical wisdom, building community across diversity, and partnering for the common good. Articulating these themes in what the University of Dayton calls “contemporary language” (p. 26) is meant to help develop communication materials as well as “provide the ideas and concepts we will need to continue to grow and develop” (p. 26) while simultaneously remaining faithful to the founders’ mission. In other words, the themes in this document are meant to shape the University culture.

Another example of a document that is meant to articulate the university culture as well as shape that culture is the Commitment to Community. The Commitment to Community elaborates on the word “community” as it is used in the mission statement. It starts by articulating the way community is articulated in the Marianist tradition. The University of Dayton authors (2011) write that community in the Catholic and Marianist tradition shapes the “‘warmth of welcome’ we first experience when we arrive on campus and the family spirit we treasure long after graduation” (p. 1). This document goes on to articulate some of the necessary elements of an educational community and those include “intellectual, spiritual, religious, moral, physical, and social dimensions” (p. 1).
These documents help clarify the University of Dayton’s distinct mission while exhibiting characteristics that are common to higher education as a whole in the United States, Catholic higher education, and Marianist higher education. As the University of Dayton authors write in the *Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton*, although the mission of higher education in the United States, the mission of Catholic higher education and the mission of Marianist higher education “have different origins and histories, they come together in the mission of the University of Dayton like the different –colored threads in an ornate tapestry” (p. 11)

**Catholic and Marianist Mission in Student Development**

As Hunt, Joseph, Nuzzi, and Geiger (2003) discuss, student affairs professionals often find support in Catholic institution mission. The authors say, “there may be a connection between the mission of Catholic higher education and student affairs in that both entities espouse a desire to ‘develop the whole person’” (p. 245). Wilcox and King (2000) draw a direct connection between student development and Catholic mission. As they say “student development efforts bear special weight at Catholic universities, which view the cultivation of students’ intellectual, spiritual and moral growth as sacred mission” (p. 315). In this way, student affairs at Catholic colleges is viewed as more integral to the overall educational mission than it might be at secular schools. Though the authors go on to talk about some of the unique challenges facing student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities, there remains a distinct overlap between Catholic higher education’s mission and the work of both student affairs and campus ministry—intellectual development is not to be prioritized at the expense of interpersonal and intrapersonal development.
Through religious dialogue and the study of theology and religion, Catholic colleges offer an opportunity for students to explore and grow in the understanding of their faith. Thomas Klein (2008) wrote an article describing one student’s experience. A Muslim student, after reflecting on how God is experienced by the characters in a classic novel, approached Klein with questions about her religion. With a new understanding of God, she was not sure the practice of her religion made sense anymore (Klein, 2008). Klein quotes the student saying “I’ve come to think of God and God’s place in my life in a whole new way. This course has convinced me that God is real and that God is in my life, but now I don’t know what to make of my religion” (Klein, 2008). This statement and these kinds of questions are evident of a journey toward self-authorship and the stages of growth that Taylor (2008), Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda (2001) describe. As Klein says in his article, “An essential difference between Catholic colleges and their secular counterparts is that the source prompting questions about God is the one that stays to seek an answer” (Klein, 2008).

What Klein is describing is Kegan’s (1994) concept of building a bridge between orders of consciousness. In order for a student to make the transition from the third order of consciousness, where ideals and values cannot be examined as objects, to the fourth order where they can be examined as objects and even subordinated to one another, they need what Kegan calls “an ingenious blend of support and challenge” (Kegan, 1994, p. 42). This faith crisis that the student was facing, and lack of knowing what she believed about her religion is exactly the kind of environment Kegan said is necessary for growth. In his words, in order to develop, adolescents need a “gradual outgrowing of a way of knowing the world” (Kegan, 1994, p. 43). Challenging religious beliefs within an
environment of support is one way of accomplishing this. This is unique to the mission of Catholic higher education.

Earlier I discussed stage models of development and outlined Baxter Magolda’s (2001) and Kegan’s (1994) models of development. Taylor (2008) uses a similar model that describes student development beginning with students following external formulas, then standing at a crossroads, becoming self-authored, and then building an internal foundation. Taylor (2008) uses an example of a student going through these stages with spiritual identity—where the student begins with looking to a parent to decide what to believe, all the way to integrating the beliefs of atheism with other spiritual practices. Many students exhibit these transitions through their spiritual development, and through questions like the previous student’s about her faith. Dialogue with those who come from different backgrounds is also part of the transition of spiritual development. Part of the mission of Catholic higher education is to provide a place for dialogue surrounding these issues. The University of Dayton mission echoes this belief with the statement “The University welcomes persons of all faiths and persuasions to participate in open and reflective dialogue concerning truth and the ultimate meaning of life” (p. 1).

**Importance of Students Voices**

According to Stapely (1996) an organization is made up of individuals and it is individuals who create the constructs that become structure and culture. Therefore, Stapely (1996) says, “the behavior of individual actors is considered to be a key concept in the study of culture” (p. 10).

In order to understand college culture and particularly the culture at UD, I knew I had to hear from individual students. According to Bowen (1996), “Each individual
draws different consequences from college” (p. 437); some grow immensely in some dimensions while other students may stay the same in those dimensions. As Bowen writes, “Selection is inevitable and different students make different choices as to the dimensions on which to concentrate” (p. 438). Because each student has a different experience and makes different choices, understanding their individual stories may lead to some insight on how and why those choices are made and the meaning students make from those choices.

Nieto (2000) listens to a range of students in her casework with PK-12 schools. She argues there is little research that includes students’ voices, especially in the area of educational policy and reform. According to Nieto, that is a problem that needs to be solved. As she puts it, if we are concerned about both the equality and quality of education “students need to be included in the dialogue, and their views, just as those of others should be problematized and used to reflect critically on school reform” (p. 360). Though her work is with PK-12 education, the ideas nevertheless apply. Students are one of the primary constituencies in the culture of higher education and their voices need to be part of the conversation.

The culture of Catholic and Marianist education is difficult to articulate for faculty and staff as well as students, despite the number of resources available on the subject. In fact, the Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton document says a task force worked for over two years to articulate the major themes of the mission and identity of UD in contemporary language (University of Dayton, 2013). If it took a task force dedicated to the work of articulating the mission and identity of UD, how do students experience it without necessarily having the focused
conversations around the idea? How will UD know if the time and resources it has spent communicating its mission and identity have been translated into the students’ experience without some exploration into how students understand the phenomenon of the Catholic and Marianist mission? Are there elements of the Catholic and Marianist education that contribute to students’ growth and development in ways other universities cannot provide? What values do students take with them when they graduate that are shaped by their experience at a Catholic and Marianist institution?

**Challenges of Studying Student Culture**

Love et al. (1993) write specifically about student culture in their work but their ideas about how culture is perpetuated are consistent with other authors. For example, Schein (1992) discusses the difficulty of studying institutional culture at the level of underlying assumptions because individuals are unaware of assumptions and unable to articulate them. Love et al. (1993) enforce that idea. One of the challenges to studying culture, Love et al. pose is students learn from faculty and administrators what the espoused beliefs are and how to articulate them. According to Love et al., for student affairs practitioners to successfully study culture, they need to get beyond the espoused beliefs to the students’ values and assumptions. As Whitt (1993) says “Culture and its influences on behaviors in organizations are not readily apparent” (p. 81).

Kuh (1993) argues there are both quantitative and qualitative ways to address student culture but any attempt to describe student culture “must take into account an institution’s environment, the reference groups to which a student belongs, and the characteristics that students bring to the institution” (p. 53). I discuss the methods that I used for discovering student culture at UD in the next chapter.
Summary

In this chapter, I critically reviewed four major areas in the literature for this study: organizational culture, the role that higher education plays in student development, Catholic higher education mission, and the importance of student voices. I discussed the ways culture develops as well as how it is represented and perpetuated. I explored the role of values in culture as well as culture specific to higher education. I discussed both stages models of student development and ecology models of development, as well as higher education’s contribution to student development. I discussed mission in four different contexts: the mission of higher education, the mission of Catholic Higher education, Catholic and Marianist mission in higher education and Catholic and Marianist mission in student development. Finally, I explored the value of hearing students’ voices and the challenges of studying student culture.

In the next chapter I explore the research methods and frameworks. I discuss the process for data collection and analysis along with the relevant literature that supports my research methods. In chapter five I discuss the ways in which my findings reinforce the literature I reviewed in this chapter.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study was to reveal students’ experiences of the Catholic and Marianist culture, values, and mission at UD. The questions that guided my study were what is the lived experience of students within the Catholic and Marianist Culture of UD? How do students understand the culture and what experiences most shape their understanding? How do students make meaning of their experiences in this culture? How might students express their values and beliefs as related to their experience?

In this chapter I discuss the rationale for using the qualitative research paradigm, the qualitative research methods and the ethnography and life history frameworks upon which this study was based. I explore my status as a researcher as well as how I collected the empirical materials for this study. I discuss how I analyzed my data and provide the strategies for trustworthiness I employed in this study. I explore the findings from the data in chapter four.

**Qualitative Research Paradigm Rationale**

According to Ridenour and Newman (2008) “research methods must be driven by research questions and purposes” (p. 35). The research questions I asked, the research purpose, and the strengths of qualitative research as related to those research purposes are all reasons why I chose the qualitative research paradigm.
Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). Denzin and Lincoln go on to write qualitative research is not focused on results or experiences that can be “examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency” (p. 8). What qualitative researchers are focused on, in the words of Denzin and Lincoln, is “the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (p. 8). My research questions focused on all three criteria that Denzin and Lincoln write are at the heart of qualitative research. This study was designed to explore the reality of the student culture at UD and the way different students understand and make meaning of that culture. The study design incorporated student voices through interviews and written follow up questions, as well as my insider status as a full time staff member at UD, which fits the criteria of the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied. Finally, the situational constraints that shaped this inquiry were the context and boundaries of the University of Dayton’s Catholic and Marianist culture as well as the nature of this research as the focus of a dissertation.

**Research Purpose and Questions**

Ridenour and Newman (2008) describe the following as the questions or purposes appropriate for qualitative research: to describe, to uncover deep meaning, to study one unit on many variables, and to build theory (p. 95). Krathwohl (2009) maintains that qualitative research is the most appropriate method when the purpose of the study is to describe or explain using words, and when the approach is inductive and holistic. I sought
to understand students’ experiences as a whole and to describe their experience using words, therefore according Krathwohl and Ridenour and Newman’s definition, a qualitative design was most appropriate for this study.

This study was what Marshall and Rossman (2016) call exploratory in its purpose. They describe exploratory studies as those that investigate little understood phenomena, or aim to discover important categories of meaning. The research questions they identify as aligning with those purposes are questions such as “What is happening in this social program?” (p. 78) and “What are the salient themes, patterns or categories of meaning for these participants?” (p. 78). Those are the kinds of questions I asked. What is happening at UD with students, and what are the salient categories of meaning in this Catholic and Marianist culture? Denzin and Lincoln (2011) add that qualitative researchers try to understand “how social experience is created and given meaning” (p. 8). The question of how students make meaning of their experience at UD is the kind of question Denzin and Lincoln are describing.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), there are few essential characteristics of qualitative research. Marshall and Rossman write that qualitative research takes place in the natural world, it uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, it focuses on context, it is emergent rather than tightly prefigured and it is fundamentally interpretive. These characteristics determined the design of this study. First, it took place in the natural setting of the University of Dayton with current students in the ordinary context of their lives. I listened to students in open-ended, loosely structured conversations, which is an interactive and humanistic method. I focused on their experience at UD and within the bounds of that specific culture, so there was a focus on
the cultural context of the Catholic and Marianist institutional mission. The design of this study was emergent. I did not test theories about the student experience, instead I looked for domains of meaning that emerged from the data. The study was interpretative. In other words, I constructed themes from the data that were collected. Plans for data collection had to be tentative because the objective was to follow where students’ voices took me. I needed to interview more or different students to find the most meaningful data.

According to Krathwohl (2009), Merriam (2002), and Ridenour and Newman (2008), another defining characteristic of qualitative research design is that it is holistic in nature. Qualitative research does not separate an experience into individual variables that can be isolated and measured. The design of this study was holistic in that it did not separate students’ experiences into individual variables. I studied students and their experiences as a whole, with the understanding that their experiences are layered and complex.

**Benefits of a Qualitative Approach**

Schein (1992) and Whitt (1993) agree that culture is not easily studied or readily apparent. Kuh (1990) argues for the importance of qualitative assessment. According to Kuh (1990) attempts to describe student culture must take into account and consider the institution’s environment, students’ reference groups, characteristics students possess including “abilities, aptitudes, attitudes, interests, values, expectations, and aspirations” (p. 53). Kuh argues that qualitative approaches such as interviews and observations “are considered superior for identifying the complex relationships among institutions’ features, student cultures and the behavior of individual groups of students” (p. 54).
Marshall and Rossman (2016) support the claims of Kuh (1993), Schein (1992) and Whitt (1993) about the benefit of qualitative research for studying phenomena in their natural setting. According to Marshall and Rossman, context matters in qualitative research. They offer several justifications for a qualitative approach to this study. This study focused on students’ lived experiences. To study lived experience, Marshall and Rossman argue “human actions cannot be understood unless the meaning humans assign to those actions is understood” (p. 101). In other words, observed behavior alone is not enough to understand culture. Marshall and Rossman claim, “Because thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values and assumptions are involved, the researcher needs to understand the deeper perspectives that can be captured through face to face interaction and observation in a natural setting” (p. 101)

Methods

Qualitative Research Methods

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) write about qualitative researchers as researchers who “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Marshall and Rossman (2016) add to the definition of qualitative researchers as people who view reality as complex and holistic. They contend that qualitative researchers engage in reflection on “who they are in the conduct of research” (p. 3) and “remain sensitive to their own biographies/social identities and how they shape the study.” Furthermore, they write qualitative researchers are systematic in their inquiry.

Padilla-Diaz (2015) asserts “All qualitative research has a phenomenological aspect to it, but the phenomenological approach cannot be applied to all qualitative
researchers” (p. 103). She goes to argue qualitative research is based on the premise of interpretation, or what others might call subjectivity, of the informants. Padilla-Diaz posits the researcher must set aside all preconceptions in order to analyze the perceptions of a phenomena held by the informants. She continues, even though phenomenology underpins all qualitative research, phenomenological methods are not always appropriate for data collection. Padilla-Diaz’s statement is true for this study. Phenomenology is one of the philosophical underpinnings guiding this study, but the frameworks I used for data collection are those of ethnographic interviewing and life history, which I discuss more in the next section.

Whitt (1993) writes an explanation of how to study a culture by either “making the familiar strange” (p. 81) or by conducting a cultural audit. Both of her methods are qualitative in nature. Making the familiar strange was one of the principles upon which this study was grounded. As an employee of the University of Dayton, my status is that of an insider. Whitt suggests insiders already know the language and assumptions of an organization, therefore to discover those it is important to adopt an outsider perspective. I was systematic and reflective in my study of culture at the University of Dayton, maintaining an awareness of my status as an insider to the institutional culture while aware of my outsider status when examining student culture.

**Research Frameworks**

I drew from two qualitative methods for this study, ethnographic interviewing and life history methods. First, I discuss my thinking about the design of this study and the benefits of using multiple qualitative frameworks. I will then discuss each framework, ethnographic interviewing and life history, in more depth. Finally, I address the possible
difficulties of these qualitative research frameworks and address what measures I took to address those possible pitfalls.

Sherrod (2006) like others, argues there are benefits to using multiple qualitative methods. She writes “one design could not capture the richness of the data, adequately answer the research questions or provide insight into the historical context of the story” (p. 22). I needed to use both ethnographic interviewing and life history methods for this study because they are both useful frameworks and neither method alone sufficiently provided guidance to address questions I was asking. Ethnographic interviewing covered culture and how the University of Dayton culture is understood by its students. It took into account my role as a part of that cultural construction as both an insider in the culture and a researcher. Life history provided the framework for how the stories of students change as they grow and develop through their time in college. The life history framework allowed students to identify important events that may have changed the way they understood their world.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) identified ways in which both methods offered direction for this study. I did not conduct a purely ethnographic study of student culture; I used ethnographic interviewing approaches. First Rubin and Rubin (2005) define ethnographic studies as those that illustrate an overall culture. The example they use is that of college student culture. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), “this type of research describes the key norms, rules, symbols, values, traditions and rituals in that setting, and shows how they fit together” (p. 8). In their college example, an ethnography of the culture might portray aspects of students’ lives including studying, partying, sports and dating. Frow and Morris (2000) elaborate on the explanation of ethnographic or culture studies.
They write that culture studies start by working “with the particular, the detail, the scrap of ordinary or banal existence, and then working to unpack the density of relations and of intersecting social domains that inform it” (p. 327). Some of the rituals that Rubin and Rubin describe, such as studying and partying, are ordinary parts of the experience of college students. By taking an ethnographic approach I, as Frow and Morris describe, “unpacked” some of the cultural assumptions and relationships that inform those ordinary experiences.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) offer life histories as a way of understanding individuals’ experiences. According to Rubin and Rubin, “Life histories of ordinary people enable researchers to learn about the way people live” (p. 8). Life histories, according to Rubin and Rubin, can illustrate formative experiences in people’s lives.

I needed to draw from both methods in my study. The ethnographic principles helped me to understand the student culture at UD, including those important aspects of studying, partying, work and relationships that Rubin and Rubin define. But I sought to understand the formative experiences in individual students’ lives in order to focus in more deeply within that culture to the meaning of UD’s faith mission. How have their experiences shaped their identities and the ways they make meaning of the world? This is where the reflection of a life history informed this study.

**Ethnographic Interviewing**

Foltz and Griffin (1996) posit ethnography is founded on the assumption that all truth is subjective and knowledge is socially constructed. They go on to write that the role of the researcher is an important part of writing ethnography because ethnography is a cultural construction jointly made by the researcher and the participants. Ellis and
Bochner (1996) describe ethnographers as people who “inscribe patterns of cultural experience; they give perspective on life” (p. 16). As an insider and member of the University of Dayton community, and as a campus minister who works with students on a regular basis, I understand my role as a researcher. The conversations I had with students were influenced by my role as an insider and campus minister. I anticipated students would say different things to me than they would an outsider. I wrote about the experiences of students, thus shaping their narrative and contributing to the cultural construction with the purpose of providing perspectives on student culture at UD.

Ellis and Bochner (1996) go on to write, “ethnography itself tries to deepen and enlarge our sense of a human community” (p. 18). This is what I intended to do in my study with the patterns of cultural experience at UD and the perspectives of students’ lives. I intended to deepen the understanding of the human community at UD through my use of ethnographic assumptions and methods of ethnographic interviewing.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) claim ethnographic interviewing is used to discover cultural data. They write ethnographic interviewing is “especially useful for eliciting participants’ meanings for events and behaviors and for generating a typology of categories of meaning, highlighting the nuances of the culture” (p. 152). Some of the questions in an ethnographic interview are descriptive, according to Marshall and Rossman. They ask a participant to define their experiences and daily events. This sense of ethnographic interviewing guided my study. I sought to understand how students at the University of Dayton made meaning of their experiences as well as how they understood and interpreted the Catholic and Marianist culture. The cultural focus and descriptive nature of ethnographic interviewing provided a framework for those questions.
Ethnographic interviewing was one of the major methodological frameworks of my qualitative study’s design. The other major framework was life history as life history methods contribute to an understanding of culture.

**Life History Methods**

According to Tierney (2000), life history begins with the assumption “it is helpful to remember” (p. 544). According to Tierney, the premise of life history methods is that a past has occurred, and that humanity is not always in the present. In other words, memory and the memories of individuals are an important part of life history. Tierney writes that these assumptions may seem obvious but often history is assumed to be linear in nature such that all human beings share the same collective memory. Instead, Tierney argues, people experience events in different ways and memory and history are not the same. Tierney goes on to write “Memory is assuredly not outside of history; rather, the two are conjoined in mutual constructions” (p. 545). Tierney explains memories are recalled because they are important to someone. Memories have to do with “present contextual definitions of what constitutes identity, society and culture” (p. 545). In other words, memories are constructed in the present but recall past events. Marshall and Rossman (2016) write that life histories can capture critical or fateful moments as well as times of indecision, confusion, and contradiction. In this study I anticipated students would have had common experiences during their time at UD, including campus-wide events like new student orientation, or Christmas on Campus. I assumed that through their three to four years they would recall and remember different events that shaped who they are and how they make meaning of their life at UD. This is where Tierney’s explanation of life history and memories informs this study. By allowing students to
recall and tell their stories, I attempted to understand, through listening to their voices, what meaning students related verbally to me.

I used some methods of life history for this study. Marshall and Rossman (2016) define life histories as an in depth interview method that “gather, analyze, and interpret the stories people tell about their lives” (p. 155). Life histories, according to Marshall and Rossman, are useful for “giving the reader an insider view of a culture or ear in history” (p. 155). Life histories assume a relationship between the way an individual understands his or her world and the world itself.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), life histories are particularly useful in studying culture and the way one is socialized to a culture. They write that life histories show how an individual creates meaning within the culture and that this approach is often missing from ethnographies.

Possible Pitfalls

There were some possible pitfalls to this design. Both life history and ethnographic studies often involve much more time and prolonged engagement than a dissertation study allows for. Marshall and Rossman (2016) argue one of the important aspects of a life history is that it focuses on the experience of an individual over time. Arguably three to four years is not a lot of time in one’s life. According to Marshall and Rossman, one of the possible shortcomings of the ethnographic interviewing method is the researcher imposing his or her own values through both the interview questions and interpretation of data. The benefits of using both approaches, however, seemed to outweigh the costs. I discussed in chapter two the development of college students according to Baxter Magolda (2001), Bronfenbrenner (1993) and Renn and Reason
(2013). Because so much development occurs between the ages of 18 and 22 and three to four years is a larger percentage of their life, life history methods offered ways of understanding students growth within UD’s culture. To circumvent the possibility of imposing my own values through the interview questions, I created an interview guide that was reviewed by both my advisor and the Institutional Review Board. I used those open ended questions in my interviews. I employed several trustworthiness strategies, which are discussed later in this chapter, in the interpretation of data.

**Setting**

The setting for this study was the University of Dayton. The University of Dayton (UD) is a private Catholic and Marianist institution located in Dayton, Ohio. The University of Dayton was founded in 1850 as St. Mary’s School for Boys (University of Dayton, 2013). According the University of Dayton (2013) authors, it would later become St. Mary’s institute and then in 1920, the name was changed to the University of Dayton to reflect the connection the university had with the city of Dayton.

At the time of this study, The University of Dayton enrolled approximately 11,000 students, 7,900 of whom were full-time undergraduates (Office of Institutional Reporting, 2014). Most full-time undergraduate students at UD lived on campus. According to the Office of Institutional Reporting, the total number of students in UD-owned housing in 2014 was 6,235.

The Office of Institutional Reporting provides much of the demographic information for UD including gender, race/ethnicity and religious preference. Of the full-time undergraduate students that identified their gender, race/ethnicity and religious preferences, the Office of Institutional Reporting indicates the majority of the population
identifies as White (6,202) and there are more male students (4,417) than female students (3,771). There were 224 students who identified as Black, 109 as Asian and 250 as Hispanic, according to the Office of Institutional Reporting. Finally, 111 students identified as two or more races, and 903 students that identified as “non-resident or alien” (Office of Institutional Reporting, 2014, p. 2). The Office of Institutional reporting indicated that the majority of full time undergraduate students do not identify a religious preference (3,453). There were 3,301 students, though, that identified as Roman Catholic. Of the remaining categories of religious preference, the Office of Institutional Reporting indicated there are 628 students who listed “other Christian,” (p. 2) as their religious preference, 109 students who identified as Muslim, 13 students who identified as Jewish, 122 “other” (p. 2) and 272 who list no religious preference. In other words, UD is a largely residential campus, with mostly white students and the religious make-up was mostly Catholic or not identified.

There is one college and three undergraduate schools at UD. The College of Arts and Sciences had 3,043 students majoring in one of its disciplines (Office of Institutional Reporting, 2014). According the Office of Institutional Reporting (2014), there were 1,915 students in the School of Business Administration, 1,005 in the School of Education and Health Sciences, and 1,940 in the School of Engineering. UD employed 526 full time faculty members and 1,752 full time staff members according to the Office of Institutional reporting. The tuition and fees for the 2014-2015 school year totaled $37,230.
Insider/Outsider Status

Marshall and Rossman (2016) define important elements in selecting a qualitative research site. They define a realistic site for qualitative research as one where it is possible to gain entry, where a rich mix of process, people and interactions is likely present, where the researcher is able to build rapport with the participants, where the study can be conducted ethically, and there is reasonable assurance in data quality and credibility. The University of Dayton was the setting I chose for this study and because of my insider status and the design I set forth, many of Marshall and Rossman’s criteria for a realistic setting were met.

I am employed full-time at UD. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), there are benefits to doing research in your own setting, or the setting where you live and work. Some of the benefits of doing the study in this setting, according to Marshall and Rossman, are “relatively easy access to participants,” (p. 106), reduced time for data collection, “a feasible location for research,” and “the potential to build trusting relationships” (p. 106).

Marshall and Rossman’s claims about the benefits of conducting research in one’s own setting were manifest in this study. First, I did have relatively easy access to participants. I work with a large number of students on a daily basis and it was easier to make connections through students to other students than it might have been for an outsider. UD was a feasible location for research. I did not have to gain access to this setting; it was a setting of which I am already a part. The feasibility of this location contributes to the reduced time for data collection. I did not have to make arrangements or travel to a site. Finally, the potential to build rapport or trusting relationships existed. I
already had good relationships with a number of students, faculty and staff who were able to suggest participants. As I identified participants for this study, the history and trust of the relationships through our mutual connections contributed to a sense of rapport with participants I did not know prior to this study.

Alvesson (2003) explores the role of the researcher in this kind of study and refers to a study like this as a “self-ethnography,” in other words a study of a place where one lives and works. Alvesson argues for the importance of self-ethnographies, especially in universities but acknowledges some of the pitfalls. For example, according to Alvesson, the problems with being an insider are more likely to be problems such as taking for granted “assumptions, blind spots, taboos” (p. 183), as well as a desire to “avoid upsetting colleagues may create difficulties and/or self-disciplination” (p. 183). Another challenge for researchers studying their own environments, according to Alvesson, is the challenge of creating breakdowns. Alvesson writes in studies when there are differences in traditions and cultures between the researcher and the object of study, breakdowns in understanding occur and need to be resolved. In a study of one’s own setting there are less likely to be differences, thus the researcher needs to create some distance so, as Alvesson writes “significant material to resolve emerges” (p. 185). According to Alvesson, there are several ways of doing this including researcher reflexivity, and embracing positions of irony. I address some of these methods in the trustworthiness section.

While I was certainly an insider at the University of Dayton, I was not an insider when it came to the student experience. I have never been an undergraduate student at the University of Dayton; therefore, living the undergraduate student experience at UD was
foreign to me. While I am familiar with some of the language and assumptions that apply to the culture as a whole at UD, I had outsider status when it comes to the student experience. My status as both an insider and an outsider is illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Illustration of insider/outsider status**

In both cases, whether the lens I had was as an insider or outsider, there were benefits to taking the outsider approach to this study. Whitt (1993) writes taking an outsider’s perspective “can reveal the practices and underlying values and assumptions which are often taken for granted, thereby bringing cultural elements to a level of consciousness so they can be examined and understood” (p. 83). According to Whitt, the outsider perspective can “illuminate elements of the culture that need to be challenged” (p. 83). By using some methods Alvesson (2003) describes to challenge my own assumptions about UD’s culture, my distance from the UD student experience, as well as being an insider all contributed to the ways the benefits of my researcher position outweighed its costs.

I discuss the interviews later in this chapter but my positon as a researcher is as a White, female, practicing Roman Catholic. My positon as a UD employee and as a White person, did have some impact on a few of the answers students gave in their interviews.
What is notable about these responses is students said what was on their mind first, and then went back to apologize or correct what they had shared, rather than not sharing it at all. What I am not aware of is if more students were willing to talk to me because I work at UD or because I had a connection with someone they already knew.

A couple of students expressed that since their identity would be protected they were willing to share information about the drinking culture. For example, Bernice said: “Okay since it is full disclosure and confidentiality…Students who come in freshman year are like ‘let’s go drink.’ That’s just a huge thing freshman year; everyone goes out and parties in the ghetto.” Other students freely volunteered the information that Bernice suggested she might only say under the protection of confidentiality.

Two students gave answers that suggested they did not want to offend me: one because I work for UD, and the other because I am white, and the student who was making the comment identified as African American. For example, Jessica, an African American student, was talking about the Colors of Leadership conference that she is involved in, and said:

I like this conference because there is like, people of all races. So we try to have diversity in the conference. So it’s not just, you know, all white people teaching at us at the conference. I’m sorry, I don’t want to offend anyone.

Matt’s comment was similar. He was talking about the administration discouraging the drinking culture and said, “The University does a lot to discourage it, which I don’t think is always good. You work for the University; I don’t mean any…” Both times I encouraged the students to speak freely and assured them they would not offend me. There were two cases where the students’ self-corrected their use of the word
“ghetto,” the slang term for the student neighborhood. In recent years there has been an active push from various departments at UD to discourage the use of the word “ghetto” to describe what is officially referred to as the “student neighborhood.” Jon’s statement reflected his awareness of that effort but for the interview, he would use the language he was comfortable with. He said, “everybody goes out to the ghetto… student neighborhood, well I guess it doesn’t really matter which one I say, but yeah, we went out to the ghetto.” These examples are the only times when my positionality as a researcher came up explicitly.

**Participants**

When selecting participants for a study, Whitt (1993) writes it is important to “discover as many different perspectives as possible so that you may obtain as accurate a picture of the culture as possible” (p. 88). Marshall and Rossman (2016) support Whitt’s claim and write that qualitative researchers need to be careful to select a small group that represents the researcher’s purpose.

I focused my study on traditional undergraduate students aged 20-23 who were on-campus residents. To identify participants for the study, I contacted faculty and staff through email. Consistent with the plan and design of this study, I reached out to faculty and staff across the university who had direct contact with students and asked if they knew students who might be willing to participate. The offices I contacted included the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Center for Student Involvement, Marketing and Communications, the Office for Mission and Rector, Facilities Management, Campus Ministry, the University Honors Program, Career Services, the Office of Academic Support for Student Athletes, and the Office of Community Standards and Civility. Many
of them sent me names of several students, and the students’ contact information. In some cases, the faculty and staff talked to students to find out if they were interested before sending me their names. In other cases, I reached out to students who were unaware their names had been submitted. If the students did not respond to my initial email correspondence, I wrote them one follow-up email a week later. If the student did not respond to that email, I stopped attempting to contact them.

Another way I identified participants was through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling, or asking participants to identify other possible participants, helped me, as Whitt writes “obtain more varied understandings and interpretations of the institution” (p. 89) as well as “a more complex and accurate picture of the culture” (p. 89).

From these two methods I identified 42 names to contact. Of those 42, 27 responded to either my first or second attempt to contact them. I was able to set up interviews with 24 of those 27. Two of the remaining three students responded that they were not on campus during the months I was completing the interviews. The other student wrote that she was a rising junior and understood I was looking for rising seniors. Faculty and staff at UD sent me 30 of the names of the students I contacted for this study, and student participants suggested the other 12. Of the 24 total interviews, 20 names came from faculty and staff and the remaining four came from the students I interviewed.

The participants for this study were students at the University of Dayton. I planned to interview 20 rising seniors. I chose this number because it was a large enough number to get a diversity of students as well as a manageable number to carry out in depth ethnographic interviews. Merriam (2002) writes that it is difficult to determine the number of participants needed for a study ahead of time because it is important for the
data to reach saturation. Merriam (2002) defines saturation as the point in which the researcher hears the same things over and over again and no new information is surfacing as more data are collected. I did feel that I had reached a level of saturation after 20 interviews. After I had completed twenty interviews though, one of my staff contacts provided the names of several students that identified as African American and in his words “had a lot to say about their experience, not all of it good.” I felt their voices would be valuable to include in the study so I interviewed two of those students and one additional international student who responded to my initial email after I had interviewed twenty students.

For this study I interviewed 24 total students, and analyzed the data from 23 of the participants. The student I left out was a rising junior and the students I left in were rising seniors, rising 5th years, or students who graduated in May of 2015. The rising junior’s interview was different enough that the data were not as useful as the rising seniors. For instance, this student spoke much more about his high school experiences than he did about his time at UD. I noticed he did not speak about his growth, involvement in co-curricular activities, or major in a way that was consistent with the rest of the interviews. Most of the students I spoke to talked about their entire experience at UD over time, for example “it’s been a good experience,” or “I’ve learned a lot.” This student talked more in the present tense about what he was currently involved in and how his high school experience influenced some of his current decisions. These differences, as well as the fact that the data I had from the other 23 interviews seemed sufficient, led me to eliminate his interview from the data I analyzed.
According to Rubin and Rubin (2005) it is important to select informants who are knowledgeable about a topic. I was trying to understand the meaning students make of their lives at UD and the experiences that have shaped and changed the way they make meaning, thus I identified juniors and seniors as students who had enough time at UD to have noteworthy experiences to draw from in their interviews.

I conducted the interviews in July and August of 2015 so the rising seniors had three full years of experiences to draw from and just graduated seniors would be able to speak about their entire college career. This data collection fell after the regular 2014-2015 academic year ended. However, as a number of colleagues had identified, many students stayed on campus or in the local area during the summer 2015 break for on-campus summer jobs, classes, and undergraduate research experiences, so I identified students from that sizeable population to interview. My goal was to complete the interviews before the fall 2015 academic term began. I designed the data collection calendar to complete the interviews in July and early August in order to be less intrusive on students’ time. From my experience of work in campus ministry, I know the beginning of the school year and the fall term is typically far busier for students than the summer months.

I tried to incorporate diversity as Whitt (1993) suggests. I planned to include both Catholic and non-Catholic students in order to understand how students from different religious backgrounds make sense of the culture. I intended to interview a mix of male and female students, white students and students of color, and international students. I suspected the perspective of male and female students as well as the perspectives of international students and students of color might be different, and all of those groups are
part of the student population at UD. In a culture study, Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue, it is important to look for informants who understand different pieces of a particular problem. I anticipated participants from these different groups would have some overlap in their understanding of the culture as well as some unique viewpoints.

Of the 23 participating students, 8 students identified as male, and 15 identified as female. One student identified as biracial and two students identified as international. Another student identified himself as both being from Puerto Rico and Latino. Two students identified as African American, and one as LGBTQ. The class years were 19 seniors, 1 5th year student, and 3 students who graduated in May 2015.
Table 1  
*Informants demographics and subculture involvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Informant*</th>
<th>Class Year</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Subculture(s)</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Domestic/International</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Greek Life</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Campus Ministry UDSAP</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Greek Life, ETHOS</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Greek Life, Study Abroad</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Honors, Chaminade Scholars</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
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<td>Chaminade Scholars</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Greek Life</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Campus Ministry</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristina</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
<td>Tennis, Service</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirk</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Christmas on Campus</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
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<td>Pre-Med</td>
<td>Rescue Squad</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Math/German</td>
<td>Core, Study Abroad</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
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<td>Bernice</td>
<td>5th Year</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graphic Design/Marketing</td>
<td>Art and Art Club</td>
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<td>Domestic</td>
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<td>Matt</td>
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<td>Engineering</td>
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<td>Study Abroad, Core, Theatre</td>
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<td>Distance for Dreams, Rock Climbing</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>International</td>
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<td>Basketball</td>
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<td>International</td>
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<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>OMA, Greek Life</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>OMA, Greek Life</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pseudonym*
I planned to interview students who were part of different subcultures at UD. For example, I planned to interview student athletes. Many of them are recruited to play a specific sport and because of specific abilities they have in that sport. Much of their time outside of class is spent with their team and in activities that revolve around their sport. This is one example of a subculture that I planned to interview. I planned to interview students who are involved in different aspects of campus life including those involved in campus ministry, in student government, in a sorority or fraternity, and those who are not involved in many co-curricular activities. My two methods of identifying informants, contacting faculty and staff and snowball sampling, were sufficient to find students from all of these different subcultures. I interviewed three student athletes, four students who were active in Greek life, two students who did not participate in co-curriculars, five students who were active in campus ministry, three students who were active participates in the Office of Multicultural Affairs and a number of students who identified with other clubs, and organizations and worked in different campus departments.

Of the 23 students I interviewed there were two that I had met before. One was a student employee in campus ministry but he did not report to me and my connection with him was minimal. The other student I knew well from her involvement in the retreats I coordinate. She contacted me about wanting to participate in the study and after consulting with my committee chair, decided to include her as an informant. There were seven other students who participated that were involved in some aspect of campus ministry, but I did not know them prior to meeting for this study.
Collection of Empirical Materials

For studies focusing on individuals’ lived experiences, Marshall and Rossman (2016) identify in depth interview strategies as one of the primary methods employed. Whitt (1993) echoes the importance of interviews for the purpose of discovering culture. Whitt writes that because values, beliefs and assumptions are complicated, they are most accessible by interviews and analysis of verbal data.

I employed two primary methods of collecting empirical materials. The first was individual interviews and the second was participants’ reflective writing or journaling. Before beginning the process though, I gained written permission from all participants in this study as well as Institutional Review Board approval. The informed consent form I used is included in the Appendix A.

Face to Face Interviews

Marshall and Rossman (2016) discuss the importance of building trust and rapport with participants in qualitative interviews. The essential components of building rapport include trust, maintaining good relations, considering ethical issues and reciprocity (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). I began the process of building rapport through my e-mails to students contacting them about participation. In the e-mails I introduced myself, explained who suggested the student for participation in this study, explained the time commitment, and invited them to respond. When students responded that they were willing to participate, I set up the meeting location and time with the student through email. On the day before the interview I sent an email confirming our meeting time and

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3 Denzin and Lincoln (2000) use “empirical materials” as the preferred term for data generated by qualitative research. Marshall and Rossman (2016) use the term “data.” For this study these terms mean the same thing and will be used interchangeably.
place and included a photo of myself so the student would know who he or she was looking for.

To conduct the interviews, I met students in a coffee shop or local restaurant of their choosing. The three locations I used were Saxby’s, Panera and Starbucks, all of which are located on Brown Street within walking distance of campus. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), it is important to recognize what the participants of the study are contributing with their time and sharing of their stories. Marshall and Rossman argue the researcher should have a plan to reciprocate for their willingness to participate. I offered to purchase students a beverage of their choice as a way of thanking them for their participation and contribution to this study. I sent thank you notes to all of the participants through email.

I continued to build rapport through conversation with the students while we waited for our drinks. Topics of these conversations included the students’ summer jobs, travels, involvement at UD, and their plans for after graduation. After a few minutes of small talk, I explained the study, went over the informed consent form, and asked their permission to record the interviews. I explained the interviews would last no longer than an hour and I would follow up with a few questions by email about a week after the interview concluded. All the students read and signed the consent form.

I recorded all interviews using a digital recorder as well as taking handwritten notes while interviewing on behavior, and expressions I observed. I utilized some practices Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggest for managing the data including carrying a backup recorder and taking notes in a quiet place as soon as the interviews were complete. Rubin and Rubin (2005) write in order for the interview process to be
transparent, it is important to keep notes and recordings that other people can review if needed. I did both. I used two recorders, as well as took notes using a pen and notebook during their interviews. I used an interview guide with 6 questions and 7 possible follow up questions. The interview guide is in Appendix B.

I kept two digital voice recorders on the table between the student I was interviewing and me. The recorders had a clock on them. I told students in my initial contact the interviews would be no longer than an hour. When the time on the recorder approached 55 to 58 minutes, I informed the student I had one more question and asked them if there was anything I had not asked them that they wanted be sure I knew. After their answer to that question, I said “thank you” and stopped the recorder. The shortest interview was 56 minutes and the longest was 68 minutes. Most interviews were approximately 62 to 63 minutes in total. When the recorder was off, I would thank the student again, and let them know I would be following up with a written questions via email in the next week. I reminded them if they had any questions or concerns to feel free to contact me through email and I would be happy to address them. At that point students would typically say some sort of “goodbye” and depart.

As soon as the interviews were complete I wrote my immediate thoughts and reactions in a reflexive journal. I used a pen and notebook to capture my thoughts and dated each entry. In many cases, I simply stayed in the coffee shop and spent about fifteen minutes writing my thoughts and reflections before departing. In the few instances where I was unable to do that, I captured my reflections in writing later that same day.
Kuh (1993) conducted a study on college seniors to understand what students learn outside the classroom. In this study, Kuh (1993) used a semi-structured interview model with the following four questions:

Why did you choose to attend this college and in what ways has it been what you expected? What are the most significant experiences you had here? What are the major highlights of your time here? Low points? High points? Surprises? Disappointments? And How are you different now than when you started college? (p. 282)

These questions offered a good guideline for this study. Kuh (1993) was specifically looking for out-of-class experiences and learning. Kuh writes the protocol was intentionally designed to be more general to “elicit the most important things that the respondent learned during college—about oneself, others, interpersonal relations, cultural differences, academics, and so on” (p. 282) instead of the interview guiding the direction of the conversation towards specific categories or outcomes. I used some of these general questions in my interviews.

I used what Spradley (1979) refers to as tour questions. Rubin and Rubin (2005) write tour questions, or having the participant walk you through a particular experience are useful when the researcher wants to get an idea of what is important to the participant without imposing his or her own assumptions on the participant. Spradley explains tour questions as those that ask a participant to generalize what typically happens. A tour question, according to Rubin and Rubin might be something like “overall what has been your experience…” (p. 160). Spradley (1979) gives an example of a tour question as “Could you tell me about a typical day at the office” (p. 87)? So a tour question I opened
with in interviews is “overall what has been your experience at UD?” Based on Kuh’s questions, I prompted students with statements such as, “walk me through your decision to attend UD.” I also needed to use what Spradley (1979) calls “mini-tour” questions. Spradley writes mini-tour questions are those that ask a participant to explain a much smaller unit of experience, for example a particular task or small period of time. I used mini tour questions if a student was describing a particular club or class that has been meaningful to that student.

My first question to each student was “tell me about your experience at UD and what it has been like for you.” Many students answered by talking about a few key experiences, and then they would add more detail about what those experiences were. Students often began with their first year, and then worked their way chronologically through their years at UD. The students included a range of experiences. For example, one student talked about her graphic design major and shaped her story of her experience at UD around different experiences she had within her major. Another student talked about his experience in a fraternity and how he became involved, his experience with his fraternity brothers, and how he came to be elected to a leadership role within that fraternity. Some students talked about their years in terms of a number of activities, or some of the major things they learned each year. Kristina’s answer is similar to a lot of the initial answers students gave to the first question. Kristina said:

Yes, my family went to UD so it’s definitely in the blood. I came here and freshman year I was on the tennis team here so I was recruited and then I struggled a little bit with the tennis team, there were a lot of different personalities but playing wise I did really well and enjoyed that and then sophomore year I also,
I was busy with tennis, so I did that freshman and sophomore year and focused on school basically, and then met a couple of people here and there and then junior year I decided to...at the end of sophomore year I should say, I joined a fraternity, it’s a service fraternity on campus and so it’s Alpha Phi Omega...

When a student answered as Kristina did, stating a series of experiences or reflections, I followed up on each of the individual ideas she expressed in her initial answer. For instance, I asked Kristina about her experience with the tennis team, her family’s role in her experience, and Alpha Phi Omega.

The first answers to these initial interview questions had a reflective nature to them—a summary of the students’ experiences thus far and the bigger themes students seem to generate from them. Susan talked about how her experience was “both everything she expected and nothing she expected,” Ronald talked about his relationships with the professors and Dirk and Thomas both discussed the ways in which they have been challenged to grow throughout their time at UD.

There were two patterns to the informants’ initial responses to my opening question: immediate lengthy descriptions chronicling lived experiences, and silence or expressed puzzlement. The first response, immediate lengthy descriptions, was far more common. With only a couple of exceptions, students needed no further prompting to talk about their experiences. In those exceptions students seemed overwhelmed by the question. For example, Gertrude said “wow. That’s a lot.” For them, I offered something like “what are the highlights/lowlights, or things that have been really meaningful for you.” For those students, that follow up question was all that was needed to elicit a response.
In addition to the way many students structured their answers to the first question, many students began by saying something along the lines of how great their experience at UD has been. Ruth’s answer, representative of the majority of students I interviewed was, “I think it’s been a really good experience and I think you’ll get that out of a lot of people.” A few students did not answer like this, and they described their earlier years were more of a struggle. Two students, in particular, who talked about their challenges at length, started by saying how difficult their first years at UD were. I discuss their interviews more later.

Overall, students seemed eager to discuss their experiences. Two students indicated that they had thought about what they wanted to talk about prior to the interview. I asked students at the end if there was anything I did not ask about that they wanted to be sure to mention. Ronald expressed that he wanted to be sure he talked about the honors program and hospitality. Jon replied “no. I complained about the two things I wanted to,” but then went on to say, “It was a good experience though, I enjoyed it. I learned a lot in my classes.” He mentioned he had been thinking about what he wanted to discuss prior to our meeting.

While those two students specifically said they had things they wanted to discuss, almost every student I interviewed added something for that last question. The responses to that last question had three primary patterns. The answers were a final story that had an impact on them, a value that they did not express that was important to them, or something about the positive nature of their UD experience. Of the 23 interviews, only five students had a response such as “I think we’ve covered everything.”
Follow Up Questions

Follow-up questions refer to the four or five unique questions I emailed to each student after the interview. The majority of literature in the area of participants’ reflective writing in qualitative research is reflective journaling and the value that it can provide for participants as well as researchers. Giraud (1999) identifies journals as a “written record, created by the participant of the participant’s observations of a given situation over time and how the participant experienced the situation in question” (p. 3). In this case, participants’ written reflections served as a reflection of their experiences at UD over the course of their college career.

Giraud (1999) goes on to identify some benefits to journal writing as a means of qualitative data collection. Giraud argues journal writing can allow participants to reflect on their experiences without the influence of the questions or reactions of the researcher. According to Giraud, journal writing can eliminate some of the researcher bias as participants can write about experiences that are most salient to them. Practically speaking, Giraud identifies journals as rich sources of data that take less time to collect than interviews that need to be scheduled, recorded and transcribed. Both Giraud and Janesick (1998) identify journal writing as an effective way of triangulating data. According to Janesick, journal writing is a “type of member check done on paper” (p. 11).

One of the drawbacks to interviews alone that Giraud identifies is “interview data is generally retrospective and thus limited by recall interference” (p. 4). I anticipated that after participants had the chance to speak with me for an hour or so, more memories and salient experiences of their time at UD may surface. Janesick (1998) argues journal writing can allow us to “dig deeper” into “the heart of words, beliefs and behaviors” (p.
11). I provided the opportunity to offer written reflection on the interview questions as well as some follow up questions by sending students some further reflection questions about a week after I completed the interviews.

I used this form of journaling as my second method of data collection. I planned to have students submit written reflections based on some of the interview questions so they had a chance to either elaborate on the ideas and experiences they expressed in the interview, or share new experiences they thought of after the interview concluded. This written reflection fits Giraud’s definition of a journal as it will be a “written record, created by the participant of the participant’s observations” (p. 3), in this case, of their experiences at UD. I used open-ended questions in the interviews as well as in the journal writing. I did this as a way of triangulating the data and capturing more detail about students’ experiences.

I emailed a Microsoft Word file to each participant with four or five follow up questions. I emailed those questions within one or two weeks of completing the interview. The first question was always “is there anything you have recalled since the interview that you wish to share?” The other questions were unique for each student, generated from each student’s interview, following up on the ideas expressed. For example, one student frequently referenced his value of respect. I asked what respect looked like in a follow up question.

I listened to the recorded interviews and referenced my handwritten notes from the interviews to generate the follow up questions. I looked for areas where there was an idea or concept they expressed that I did not understand, or an experience they might elaborate on further. I emailed the students the questions with a suggested deadline for
their return, which was about two weeks after the date I sent the email with the questions. About half of the students responded with answers to the follow up questions within a day or two. If they did not respond to that initial email, I followed up one more time. If they did not respond to the second note, I stopped attempting to contact them. I received responses from 20 of the 23 students. The responses ranged from a few sentences to 2-3 pages written in paragraph form. Most students wrote at least a few sentences in response to each question.

The steps for data collection are summarized in Fig. 3. First I contacted students through email to inform them of the study and gain consent, as well as to gather basic demographic information. The next step was establishing a time to meet at a mutually agreed upon location and conducting an interview for approximately one hour. After one week I followed up with four or five reflection questions that are determined for each participant after the interview.

![Collection of Empirical Materials](image)

*Figure 3. Process for collection of empirical materials.*

**Analysis of Empirical Materials (Data)**

Marshall and Rossman (2016) outline seven phases for analyzing empirical materials in a qualitative study. Their seven steps are first to organize the data, second to
immerse oneself in the data, third to generate case studies and possible themes, fourth is coding, fifth is offering interpretations, sixth is searching for alternative understandings and seventh and final is writing the report. I followed an adapted version of Marshall and Rossman’s outline for my analysis of empirical materials. The only element of their process I changed was that I left out the step of generating case studies and possible themes. Because I conducted and transcribed all of the interviews myself, kept a reflexive journal and created follow up questions based on the interviews themselves, I was sufficiently immersed in the data and ready to move to coding.

In the first phase, organizing the data, I collected all of the empirical materials including the written and the transcribed, as well as my field notes, and organized those materials. Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggest keeping a log of materials collected including date and time and the individuals from whom they are collected. The digital recorders I used captured the date and time of the interviews, so I was able to create a log of dates and times of interviews when I imported those recorded files into my computer. I wrote the dates on my handwritten interview notes, and kept the notes in chronological order in a notebook. I dated each entry in my reflexive journal and kept those reflections in chronological order as well. I created an electronic file folder for each interview that included the recorded interview file, the transcribed interview, the Microsoft Word file with the follow up questions, and the Microsoft Word file with the responses. This log is what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) refer to this as a “field text” (p. 23).

To accomplish Marshall and Rossman’s (2016) second phase, immersing myself in the data, I transcribed all of the interviews myself. Marshall and Rossman (2016) argue the process of transcription can be facilitated by the use of computer software and
mentioned (while being careful not to recommend) Express Scribe as an option. Johnson (2011) found the process of listen-and-type transcriptions to be faster and more accurate than using voice recognition software. I chose to use the listen and type method for transcription. I transcribed each interview using Express Scribe transcription software with a foot pedal, and Microsoft Word. Express Scribe is a basic software program that works in conjunction with a foot pedal to play back recordings. The software allows the transcriber to adjust the speed of the recorded playback, as well as fast forward, rewind, and pause the playback using an accompanying foot pedal. Express Scribe works in the background of word processing programs. The program working in the background means I could type in Microsoft Word, while pausing and starting playback with the foot pedal, without clicking on the Express Scribe window.

I included vocal pauses, and silent pauses in the transcriptions. For instance, many students used words such as “like,” “um,” and “you know” frequently. I included those vocal pauses as well as indicated silent pauses with ellipses. I had recorded in my notes points at which participants used demonstrative hand gestures and included those in the transcriptions as well. Marshall and Rossman (2016) write there is an element of translation in transcribing. They go on to say in the written word one cannot rely on the visual cues to make meaning in spoken conversation. I found some interpretation was needed in the transcriptions. Examples of interpretations include encountering words difficult to understand on the recording, sentence breaks, and emphasis. My notes from each interview were useful in helping me make decisions about these interpretations, as was my memory of the interviews. The interviews were completed on August 19th of 2015, and I completed all transcribing on October 11th of 2015. Because this time lapse
was somewhat less than two months, the experience of the actual interviews were still fresh in my memory during transcription.

I used an open coding method that Marshall and Rossman (2016) describe as informally and intuitively generating key ideas based on the data. After the transcription process was complete I began the process of coding the data. I printed every transcript single-spaced and with 1.5 inch margins. The total number of pages of all of the transcripts was over 600. I kept all of the hard copies of transcripts in a binder, in chronological order according to the dates the interviews occurred. I included the paper copy of each student’s follow up question responses with that student’s interview in the binder.

I read through the transcripts line-by-line and marked codes by hand using highlighter and colored pens. I used both what Marshall and Rossman (2016) describe as open coding and what Saldaña (2013) describes as In Vivo coding. Saldaña (2013) describes in vivo coding as using codes based on the participants’ own words or phrases. I used participants’ words such as “community” or “drinking” or “UD Bubble” as codes.

In some cases, I assigned broader categories to the codes, such as “student employment.” In many cases students’ voices encompassed a lengthy text of scores of lines as they talked about a particular program—such as Distance for Dreams, or a fraternity, or UD’s Summer Appalachia program. Within their description was included what they learned or how it impacted them. In these cases, I used one code, such as “Greek life,” for an entire section. I underlined sentences within those sections that captured the meaning the students made from that experience and assigned them additional codes such as “growth” or “fitting in.”
After the open coding process, I engaged in a process of axial coding, or grouping of initial codes into conceptual categories (Marshall & Rossman, 2016.) For this step I copied and pasted the entire text from the interviews into tables in Microsoft Word. The tables were titled by a code, or category—for example drinking culture, community, study abroad/immersion, and classes/studying. I constructed two columns in each table, one headed with the pseudonym of the student, and the other headed with the quotes that pertained to the category of the table. I constructed one row for each student whose words pertained to the category.

I sorted all of the students’ comments in this manner. Some tables, such as “major,” and “Greek life”, “community,” and “advice to future students” included a lot of data, because many students had discussed them; they were more common than other topics or categories. Some categories, like rescue squad, for example, included minimal data because fewer student voices included those experiences. In total, I used 44 different categories of data into which all of the transcribed and coded data were sorted and those categories are listed in Appendix C. Those categories were determined from the original codes. Most sections of data were only sorted into one of the 44 categories. There were a few instances where a section of data pertained to more than one category. In those instances, I put the same section of data in two categories.

The next steps are offering interpretations and searching for alternative understandings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Marshall and Rossman explain offering interpretations as telling the story, or identifying themes and categories and linkages that “makes sense and is engaging to read” (p. 228). Through the process of identifying larger categories of data and organizing the codes into categories, I was constructing an
interpretation of the data and in making those decisions, I considered alternate understandings. For example, codes related to the subject of “student neighborhood” frequently came up in conjunction with codes that represented “drinking culture.” I created a category for student neighborhood, and drinking culture and considered sorting the data that might fit either category based on my understanding of the data, and possible alternative understandings.

Krathwohl (2009) writes “reading and rereading the data seems to facilitate seeing patterns” (p. 317). Krathwohl goes on to argue for letting one’s unconscious process the data. I found Krathwohl’s writing represented my process. Having served as both interviewer and transcriber, I was deeply engaged with the data over many weeks. Intuitively, I found myself organizing data by the way students talked about their experience. Frequently students discussed their experience in terms of a few key activities, classes, their major and/or friendships. Students talked about their experiences chronologically for the most part. It was through the lens of their involvement, whether that was in their major, with social groups, or in co-curricular activities, that students described how they had grown and the meaning they had made from those experiences.

There are certainly a number of ways I could have sorted these data and grouped them into categories. I started by trying to code each sentence or line in the transcript, but as I continued to read through the interviews, I noticed students generally talked about one topic at a time, so it made more sense to me to have one code for a larger section that was all covering the same topic. I struggled with trying to find the balance between each individual student’s voice and the codes that seemed consistent across the whole body of data. When I reviewed the codes, I felt I found a balance by the 3rd or 4th interview. In my
first two interviews, I used a lot of codes for a line or a few words. In my process, I found it more useful to have a few lines or a paragraph assigned to a code. It was easier for me to understand and interpret meaning when I was sorting the data and analyzing it with a few extra sentences of context for a particular idea and helped me remain faithful to students’ stories.

I initially created hundreds of codes for the data. To group it into categories I had to make some decisions about the broader themes across the data. I used different colored pens and highlighters to code each section of data. If a code was repeated in several interviews, I used the same color of pen or highlighter to mark it. For example, everything that had to do with the word “community” was highlighted in green. In addition to my knowledge of the data from having conducted the interviews, having transcribed them and read through all of them again in the coding process, the color coding was useful to me in getting a visual sense of the themes and topics discussed by a lot of the students I interviewed.

I began sorting the data with the topic of “community.” I knew almost all of the students I talked to mentioned that word, and what it meant to them, it seemed like a logical category to begin with since I knew I had a lot of data that fell within that category and it would give me a sense of how the process could work. I went through all of the interviews, digitally copying and pasting every section that had been coded as “community” into a table headed with that word. As I was digitally pasting sections into the “community” table, I noticed a lot of data about the following categories, “drinking culture,” “diversity,” “UD visit,” “Majors/classes,” and “advice to future students.” I created tables with each of those headings as well. Having those categories established
helped me to sort a lot of the data in the first few interviews. As I continued the process I started to see groups that naturally fit together. For example, several students mentioned Greek Life, so it made sense to me to have that data in its own category. In a lot of cases, only one student would talk about being involved in a particular club or organization such as Distance for Dreams or studio theatre. I noticed their way of describing those groups, though was similar so I created a category called “co-curricular involvement,” and grouped the individual clubs into that section. I noticed a lot of students had some criticism of UD. While their critiques were different, I chose to group them together in one category.

Figure 4 summarizes my process for constructing codes and categories. Each circle is numbered in order of my process, so circle one, titled “codes,” was my first step, circle 2, titled “key codes” was my second step etc. I first identified individual codes, using In Vivo codes (Saldaña, 2009) or codes I identified through the open coding process. Next, I identified some “key codes” or codes that seemed like they represented a lot of data or data where students seemed to have made a lot of meaning. One key code, for instance was “community” another was “growth.” Some of the key codes were new codes and some were the same as the initial codes. This is why there is an overlap between circles one and two. The next step was to identify categories. Some of these categories were the same as either the codes or key codes, which why there is an overlap between those circles, and some categories were new and based on broader groupings of the data, for example, the category of “clubs/organizations” was new as I needed a broader category for those data. Finally, I used the codes, key codes and categories to
construct themes. The themes were new and represented the data as a whole, which is why that circle is not overlapping any others. I discuss the themes in chapter four.

Figure 4. Process of data analysis

Searching for alternative understandings according to Marshall and Rossman (2016) includes using a constant comparative data analysis approach as well as the trustworthiness strategies I describe in the next section. During data analysis, Marshall and Rossman argue it is important to challenge the very themes and categories that are emerging and question whether there may be alternative themes, or explanations. The researcher should be constantly looking for saturation and determining whether he or she needs to collect more data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As I analyzed the data for my study I did search for alternative explanations for my categories and evaluated when I reached saturation. I found I did reach saturation after all 23 interviews were complete.
The last step Marshall and Rossman (2016) identify is writing the report. After systematically going through the steps I outlined here and employing the trustworthiness strategies I am about to mention, I wrote chapter four, which is a report of my findings. I write my interpretations, study limitations and suggestions for future research in chapter five.

**Trustworthiness Strategies**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) address four questions that should guide the qualitative researcher in establishing trustworthiness. Those questions have to do with four major areas and those are truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. Lincoln and Guba go on to explore these terms as well as alternatives in the qualitative or naturalistic process. The four operational words they use are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), truth value is not the same in qualitative research as it is in quantitative research. They argue in quantitative research there is one truth, and trustworthiness strategies deal with finding that truth. They go on to write in naturalistic inquiry or qualitative research, there are multiple constructions of reality. Truth value then is about credibility or answering the question “is this information portrayed accurately?” I addressed the question of credibility in the following ways including member checking, peer debriefing and leaving an audit trail. Several authors identify these as useful strategies for building trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Ridenour & Newman, 2008). I used member checking to build trustworthiness in credibility.
According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). Member checking, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Marshall and Rossman (2016), is sharing the data and interpretations with participants in order to make sure they are accurate and the intended meaning was captured. I used my follow up questions as a means of member checking. I chose to use this method because it allowed students to elaborate on their interviews, share anything they wanted to correct or change and correct anything that I may have misunderstood. For example, one of my follow up questions was “You mentioned a few times that everyone helps each other out, that people help each other succeed. Can you give an example of when you have seen or experienced this?”

Another strategy Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify for establishing credibility is peer debriefing. According to Lincoln and Guba, peer debriefing is exposing the study and process to a “disinterested” peer for the purpose of “exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). This is a dissertation study therefore I had a chair, and committee of faculty members at UD that reviewed and analyzed this study, providing what Lincoln and Guba refer to as searching questions.

I left an audit trail. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), leaving an audit trail is a strategy for establishing trustworthiness in confirmability and dependability. Lincoln and Guba write in order to leave an audit trail the researcher needs a lot of raw materials and records. Some methods Lincoln and Guba suggest for leaving an audit trail include keeping raw data, which in my study are the interview recordings and written submissions from the participants. Lincoln and Guba identify keeping write ups of
interview summaries, process notes, write ups of theories, working hypothesis and hunches as well as personal notes and drafts of the study proposal as methods of leaving an audit trail. I kept all notes, my reflexive journal and raw data as my audit trail for this study.

I used the strategy of triangulation of data. I identified earlier that I used both interviews and written reflections from participants to gather data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) using two forms of data collection is a form of triangulation and thus a method of establishing trustworthiness in confirmability.

Finally, I kept a reflexive journal throughout the process, which is a way Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify to establish trustworthiness in all four areas. They write the reflexive journal is a way for the researcher to record information about self and method. According to Lincoln and Guba, since the researcher is the instrument of data collection the reflexive journal can provide the same kind of information about the human instrument that is often provided about non-human instruments in quantitative studies. I included in my reflexive journal the elements Lincoln and Guba suggest the journal should consist of and those are the daily schedule and logistics of the study, a personal diary and a methodological log.

The trustworthiness strategies I employed for this study are important because in the words of Lincoln and Guba, “the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability must be met” (p. 328) to generate confidence in the researcher’s findings. If decisions and policies are going to be made on the basis of this research, establishing trustworthiness in these four areas is essential for consumers of this research to have some confidence in the decision that are based on this research.
Summary

I designed this study to best answer the questions what is the lived experience of students with in the Catholic and Marianist Culture of UD? How do students understand the culture and what experiences most shape their understanding? How do students make meaning of their experiences in this culture? How might students express their values and beliefs as related to their experience? These questions were best answered through a qualitative approach.

This study was based on the assumptions and theoretical frameworks that ground qualitative research, and more specifically ethnographic studies and life histories. I discussed my thinking around using these two frameworks as well as the possible pitfalls and how I would address those difficulties in the research design.

I discussed all of the methods I used for collecting data including face to face interviewing and the use of written, open-ended follow up questions. To provide context for the study, I discussed the setting, my position as a researcher and the demographic information about each of the informants. I also explained how I analyzed my empirical materials including how I developed codes, key codes, categories and themes. Finally, I explained the trustworthiness strategies I used to ensure the findings are what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable.

These qualitative research frameworks and methods, along with the qualitative strategies of collection and analysis of data, and building trustworthiness provided a design that accomplished the research purpose of exploring students’ experiences of the Catholic and Marianist culture at UD. In chapter four, I discuss the findings.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to reveal students’ experiences of the Catholic and Marianist culture at UD. This chapter presents the findings from in-depth interviews with 23 students. The findings include results from analyzing data from the written answers to open-ended follow up questions. Twenty of the 23 students I interviewed emailed written responses to the follow up questions and these data are included in the findings.

As I stated earlier, I followed students’ voices in my construction of the themes and organization of the findings. I constructed themes from the codes, key codes and categories and I structured my report of the findings by research question. I organized the findings by each of the three research questions and then by themes. The themes I constructed are the subheadings under each research question in this chapter. Under each research question I present the rationale for the findings and themes included in that section. The interpretations, implications and suggestions for further research are discussed in Chapter 5.

Research Question One: What is the lived experience of students within the Catholic and Marianist culture of UD?

This was my first research question. I discovered as I was interviewing students that they expressed a trajectory of their experience through their time at UD. I wrote after
my 4th interview that I was “already seeing themes emerge” and two of these preliminary themes were “the welcoming community” and “freshman living arrangements. So many people find their groups from those situations.” After my 14th interview I wrote there is a “sense of bonding through struggle,” and that the Learning Living Community and Core were important. In my analysis of data, I organized Living Learning Communities and Core as categories. I discuss both of these categories more in this section. The subheadings in this section are the themes I constructed from the data, and those themes are the labels on Figure 5.

I began constructing categories and key codes in the middle of the interviews and continued to capture notes and ideas in writing in my reflexive journal through the process of interviews, coding and data analysis. From my notes, and my own reflection, I started to get a sense that there might be a common trajectory to student’s experiences at UD. I constructed themes that seemed to represent most if not all of the students I interviewed. After I wrote those themes down, I circled them and drew arrows between them. I made about six sketches of diagrams that I felt represented all of my data around the answers to the question “What is the lived experience of students within the Catholic and Marianist culture at UD” before I landed on Figure 5. The themes I constructed that are represented in a sequence in Figure 5 are, (A) the fit between understanding of oneself and one’s values and first impressions of UD’s culture and values, (B) sense of “fitting in” within the first three weeks of school and positive experience of UD’s culture and values, (C) Sense of isolation and difference/not “fitting in” at UD, (D) encounter with challenge, (E) struggle, (F) shift in awareness and understanding facilitated by a
group of influences (G) finding a sense of community with shared values and (H) trajectory.

While students’ specific experiences were different, Figure 5 represents all of the students I interviewed. Figure 5 shows the trajectory of the students’ experience through their four years and illustrates the phenomenon of the lived experience of students. Once I constructed Figure 5, I skimmed through all of the interview transcripts again to make sure it was representative of the experiences of the students I interviewed. I labeled each oval in Figure 5 with a letter. Each subheading corresponds with both a letter and a label on Figure 5, so I included the corresponding letter for each label in the subheading.

Figure 5 progresses from oval A to oval F. A represents two aspects of students’ understanding both preceding and during their first year as UD students. The first is the student’s perception of the culture at UD. The second is their understanding of themselves. The overlap between those two ovals represents the students’ fit within UD’s culture. There were a couple of instances where students did not see much of a fit and I discuss those later. Most students I interviewed did perceive that something about themselves, whether it was their academic interests, their desire to participate in co-curriculars, the overall friendly feel of UD, or something about their first experiences of UD resonated with who they perceived themselves to be. That fit was the reason they chose to attend UD, and the reason they stayed at UD. Their campus visits had a significant influence on their perception of culture. I listed as bullet points in the ovals, in A, campus visit and first year at UD. The first year for students who did not have a campus visit (only two of the students I interviewed) shaped the way they understood themselves fitting within UD’s culture. I discuss the way the campus visit impacted
students’ understanding of culture in the section that follows. I address the first year experiences of students who did and did not have a campus visit after that.

**Figure 5.** Trajectory of lived experience of UD students over four years
First Impressions of UD’s Culture and Values (A)

Students’ lived experience within the Catholic and Marianist culture often began with their campus visit. I asked most of the students how they chose UD. Some students identified academic programs, others the Catholic identity, and still others being recruited for a sport as key factors that influenced their decision. In many cases family members or friends who were alumni encouraged students to consider UD as a college option. While the campus visit was not mentioned as a factor for every student, it was a determining factor for most of the students. The students who talked about their campus visits were consistent in the way they talked about their experience. It was the visit that helped students identify whether or not UD was a good fit.

Elizabeth talked about how, after visiting the city of Dayton as a sophomore in high school, UD was not even on her list of schools. She was not impressed by her drive through the city or the outskirts of campus. A number of friends who attended UD a year or two ahead of her though, recommended she “check it out.” She visited the campus the summer before her senior year and said, “I just fell in love with the campus. It was exactly what I wanted.” Many students described “falling in love” with the campus on their visits. Elizabeth, like other students, talked about feeling comfortable here. On an informal visit to a friend after her official visit she said:

I had dinner with that friend on campus and just met her friends and had dinner in VWK and so it was a normal, this is what you would do on a Friday night and I just immediately knew then that this is it. I can see this.

Her experience is reflective of other students’ experience. Emma expressed what a number of students said about their visits: “So UD just had a, it’s the whole—you’ve
heard it—just the feeling when you’re on campus.” A number of students talked about “the feeling” when they were on campus. Emma further articulated the feeling as “just knowing that a lot of the people are going to be so much like me…it’s nice to know you’re going to feel comfortable.” Ronald described it as a “warm fuzzy feeling” and said, “I had the warm fuzzy feeling that people always talk about. That’s pretty common, most people are pretty happy when they walk on campus.” Jenna described UD’s campus as, “it’s own little community.” Dirk said, “I walked on campus for the tour and it felt like home.” Dirk attributed some of that feeling to the beautiful, and well-maintained campus, as well as how friendly the people on campus are. He said, “I mean it’s such, it’s an open place. It’s a beautiful place. It’s so friendly. The professors are all very approachable. There are very few people who don’t have a minute to give you advice or if you ask for directions somewhere.”

Other positive factors students mentioned were how compact the campus is, the sense of safety and security that exists, and the friendly and helpful nature of the people they encountered during their visit. Sawyer told the story of her visit to UD, which was not an official campus visit because she had come on an unscheduled day. She talked about walking around campus with her dad, trying to make the most of her time, and described her experience in this way:

Yeah so we walk in [the library] and we walk up to the desk and they’re like oh yeah you know, here’s what our floor layout’s like you can check it out. The best views on the 7th floor… and so they took us up there and we got a view, and we left and went on our way and were like “do you know where the bookstore is or somewhere where we can eat?” I went to the bookstore and I got my hoodie. And
then that person, the next person we talked to sent us to KU, and somebody walks up and says, “hey are you guys lost, do you need help with something?” I don’t know why we looked so lost. I don’t know why people kept talking to us but they were like “oh my God you have to go here. I had the best four years of my life and I can’t imagine going anywhere else” and so, by the time we sat down with my food my dad was like well I guess you’re a Flyer. You know just because people kept stopping us and being like “hey are you lost, do you need help?” It happened like three or four times on a Sunday morning.

She went on to say, “We drove six hours and didn’t get a real tour, but obviously we loved it.”

Ann had an official tour but only after some hesitation. One of her parents works at UD and as she said “I refused to do an official campus visit because I’m like I know everything UD has to offer. I’ve grown up here” But her mother insisted she take a tour and she put her experience into these words:

I thought I was so high and mighty knowing everything about campus cause I had been around and seen my dad work and grow up here, but there’s always new things to discover here, too. Like we have a SCUBA diving class, we have a wine tasting class, we…have an equestrian team now apparently, and I don’t know just things like that. People always shouted at the tour groups like “oh my gosh, go Flyers, YAY!” And I think to have such a warm receiving presence on the campus is why it was home.

One of Ronald’s visits was by bus and with a group of high school students from his home town who were also considering attending UD. He said, “at the end you could tell
people had a good day, and I didn’t feel like I was the only person that was excited. Everybody else was excited about UD too.” He had visited UD before the bus trip and said, “I was pretty firm on UD but that confirmed it completely.” Frank described his visit as the first of many college visits. While he didn’t articulate a lot about his visit he did say this “I wasn’t too sure at first but I noticed that when I was at other schools I kept comparing them to UD. I realized if I keep comparing everything to UD, I have already made up my mind.”

Kristina and Justice both mentioned their campus visit was not necessarily a positive experience. Rather than a traditional visit, Kristina came on a recruiting trip for tennis. Her first encounters with the team led her to believe UD would not be a good fit. She described her visit as “kind of shaky.” I asked her why and she said:

I was staying with an upperclassman. Typically, they have you stay with a freshman so you can see what it would be like the next year for you. She was really busy. She had tests coming up so she kind of brushed me off and stuck me with more girls on the tennis team. I felt like I was intruding on her and just kind of a hassle.

As much as feeling welcome was important for students during their visit and was a reason they liked UD, not feeling welcome had an impact on Kristina and her perceptions of how she fit in with the culture.

Justice did come on an official visit and viewed her experience through the lens of her identity as an African American woman on a predominantly white campus. She said “I was like okay this is cute, but I wasn’t like ‘yes this is the school for me.’ It was okay.” She mentioned it was important that her mom was with her on the visit because “she
knew the right questions to ask. ‘Cause she went to a PWI [Predominantly White Institution] herself, so she was making sure that there’s an office of multicultural affairs and that there’s someplace I can get my support.” Justice’s perception of the reason most African American students choose UD, is due to scholarships. She said “I’m pretty sure a lot of African American students if they had their way they would transfer today if another school offered them more money.” Of her own choice to attend she said “well this is what I’m goanna have to do. Kind just a forced decision, I guess.”

Jessica, another African American student, said the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) played a major role in her decision to attend. She said:

I mainly came because I visited this school, and I got connected with the office of multicultural affairs. When I first came I wasn’t going to actually come because I didn’t really feel comfortable. But I had the opportunity to spend the night and to stay in one of the residence halls with students and just talking to them and learning about their experiences and just getting connected with the office of multicultural affairs, that really helped with my decision to attend this school. Jessica explained that her visit was a program through OMA rather than one through the admissions office.

The visit was only the beginning of how students experienced the culture at UD. Not every student had a campus visit or talked about it as having a lot of meaning for them. For those students who were unable to visit and even for those who did have positive or negative visits, their first year on campus played a significant role in how they came to understand themselves within UD’s culture.
Positive Experience of UD’s Culture and Values or Sense of Isolation (B and C)

B and C of Figure 5 represent the students’ first year, which is why I chose to put those two parallel to each other. B represents students who discussed a positive first year experience and how that coincided with their positive view of UD’s culture and values. C, (labeled: “sense of isolation and difference, not ‘fitting in’ at UD”) represents the five students I interviewed who spoke at length about the challenges of their first year and how they felt they did not belong at UD. While only five students talked about their experience this way, they talked about their struggles at length. Students who expressed a sense of not fitting in said that experience shaped the entire trajectory of their years at UD. They expressed experiences of growth and deeper understanding of themselves as a result of their difficult first year experience. I think it was important to include their stories.

Two students who talked about their challenging first years were athletes and from the way they described their experience, their sense of isolation came from not fitting in on their teams. For this reason, I included a bullet point with “on a sports team” to represent that category. The other three did not talk as extensively about their challenges, but two expressed a sense of isolation. Finally, four different students mentioned their difficulty in facing the death of one of their classmates in their first year and I indicated, “student death” under C as a bullet point to represent this challenge.

Sense of fitting in and positive experience of UD’s culture (B).

The majority of the students I interviewed experienced a sense of fitting in (blue oval) and expressed a positive experience of UD’s culture (yellow oval). B, in Figure 5, shows an overlap (common meanings) in students’ sense of fitting in and their positive experience of the UD culture. This connection between fitting in and the cultural
experiences at UD that provided opportunities for students to connect with a group of people with similar values, is represented by B, the overlap. I found if a student discussed a good first year it was often connected with finding a group of friends quickly, which is represented by the blue oval (“sense of fitting in.”) Their experience of finding a group of friends seemed to stem from positive experiences of UD’s culture and values, whether that was at parties in the neighborhood or in a classroom or as part of a living learning community (“positive experience of UD’s culture and values.”)

Students who had an easy transition frequently talked about the friendships and relationships they formed early on through the people they met on their floor in their residence halls, as well as through co-curricular activities. Connecting with other students right away was sufficiently important that it was addressed by those same students in their advice to future students. Students expressed finding a group of friends within the first few weeks of the year as essential to feeling at home at UD.

Jenna articulated her early days this way, “I met my best friends here three days into college orientation, like so I’ve never really felt like didn’t have a family. We’ve always just referred to ourselves as a family.” Both Susan and Gertrude talked about forming friendships with the girls on their floor through LLCs (Living Learning Communities). In both cases they talked about bonding with their floor mates through studying for difficult tests together. Susan could point to a moment where her group came together and described it:

I was doing really well in my classes but then midterms came up and one of the exams we were having was going to be very difficult. It was for physics, and our entire floor, I was in an LLC for education majors. So our entire floor had to take
it, and there were some girls that I did not know at all, had no clue who they were, but we were all studying for the same thing, and then it just kind of, we all started talking and one had an answer I didn’t have, I had an answer they didn’t, and from there we actually became good friends and continue to try and sign up for classes together.

Gertrude had a similar experience in her LLC. She was in the Core program. The Core LLC is a living and learning community that combines four classes. Gertrude explained it this way:

It combines English, history, religion and philosophy. It’s a three-year program, so first year, first semester first year it’s worth eight credits, and second semester it’s seven. So you go to class Tuesdays and Thursdays in the morning with all like 150 or so kids in one big lecture hall. It’s in Sears. That was like an hour fifteen. And then you go to your other classes and stuff and back at like 3 or 4:30 and you meet in groups of 15.

She went on to describe how important it was to the friendships she formed with the students in those classes who lived on her floor. She said, “The seventh floor of Mary crest was pretty close because of Core.” She went on to explain:

It was really challenging like all the nights we’d stay up the night before tests just like sobbing over the fact that we all thought we were just gonna constantly fail and then somehow we got through it the next day and then, just the next night was just a celebration of wow we don’t have to do another test for another couple of weeks. So that was awesome. I loved core and um, and like the guys right below
us we got to know them really well cause of course we’re in class with them four times a week.

Many students who indicated they had positive and enjoyable experiences their first year discussed “hitting it off” with the people on their floors in their residence halls even when they were not in an organized living learning community. Emma said about her roommate and her floor freshman year “I just got really lucky with the girls that I was living with.” She continued, “our hall just kind of had the same values and like the same weird sense of humor and then it just all fell together and so that was amazing. Just instantly feeling like I had this family at school.” Bernice mentioned the relationships she had with the girls on her floor her freshman year. She said “the people I lived with freshman year are actually still my friends today. So like the people I lived with on the same floor that year, I am still friends with every single one of them.”

Jon connected with people on his floor right away through drinking and the parties in the “ghetto.” He describes the first night meeting his roommate “the first time meeting him he just broke out 99 bananas [a type of liquor] and was like let’s take a shot. And we went out and met a whole bunch of people and had a whole lot of fun.” He said of his floor on his residence hall:

We went out to the ghetto. We walked around in probably too big of a group and all of the houses, everybody at the houses just yelled at us “come in, drink our beer.” And all of that was a good experience.

Other students spoke of parties and drinking in the ghetto, which I address more later but here it was part of Jon’s experience bonding with the people on his floor with the first few days of his first year.
A couple of students talked about some of their experiences in courses or with faculty and staff that contributed to positive experiences and a sense of fit at UD in their first year. Ronald talked about liking a Religion 103 class his freshman year. He formed a connection with the professor who was involved with a program he came to be heavily involved in, the Chaminade scholars. He said about UD “I think one of the most exciting things about UD is the relationships you can have with the teachers.” Ronald talked a lot about that religion 103 professor and many other professors shaping his experience at UD in a positive way.

Elizabeth talked about relationships as having an impact during her experience at UD and clarified that she meant relationships with staff and students. She was able to form some connections to both students and staff through the Callings program that is offered to incoming freshman a few weeks before orientation. She specified that she met the campus minister in charge of Callings that week and describes her as a “guiding force over the past three years.” She talked about the connections with other students she formed through that program. She said “I had peoples’ numbers in my phone so it’s easy to say hey do you want to get lunch today. And its good cause they don’t have other friends yet so you bond together, you know?”

These were some of the students who had positive first year experiences. These students were able to make friends quickly and found a sense of home and family early on, whether it was in a class discussion or through studying together or through going out and drinking together. The majority of the students I talked to spoke of their first year in this way but the experiences of the students who did not have a great first added valuable meaning.
Sense of isolation/difference and not “fitting in” at UD in first year (C).

There were five students who described their first years at UD as “tough.” Those students are represented in oval C on the Figure 5 labelled: “Sense of Isolation/Difference.” Their early challenges were unique and specific to each student but the broader categories and meaning students made from those early experiences were similar. These students did not feel a sense of belonging at UD and did not connect with the groups with whom they spent the most time. The oval labeled “positive experience of UD’s culture and values” does not connect or overlap with C, because students did not have a positive experience. A few other challenges for some students in their first year were prompted by external struggles, such as with the student’s family. Several students struggled with the suicide of one of their classmates.

Two students’ experiences conflict with their athletic teams. Cameron, an international student on the basketball team said, “Freshman year I hated it.” She described that she didn’t like the girls on the team and when she told a coach she wanted to meet people “he made fun of her.” She went on to say, “I really felt like homesick. I guess that’s called homesick. I don’t know if I was homesick, I just didn’t like it here.” Kristina had a difficult experience her freshman year with challenges on the tennis team. She described holding a different set of values than her teammates. Working hard in matches, having family present at her events and abstaining from alcohol during the season were important to her, and her teammates demeaned her for holding those values.

It was not only athletes who had difficult first years, though. In fact, Autumn was clear that her first year was difficult and finding a place on the rowing team her sophomore year was the positive turning point. Ann had a difficult freshman year, in part,
she said, because her parents were going through a divorce at that time. Jenny, an international student, said she felt she did not make friends and become involved in campus life as quickly as other students did. Other than Ann, all of the students who faced important obstacles in their first year described a feeling of isolation from the people around them. Thomas, who, overall, describes his experience at UD over the four years in a positive way, expressed exactly the feeling of isolation that so many students seemed to have experienced. He said “I really struggled with things that went on in Dayton, especially on the weekends—how people live that way—and I really had a dry period where I was searching for some friends.” He went on to say “I actually even considered switching schools midway through my freshman year.” Autumn, talking about her first year simply said, “it was my first year that was tough. Everything sucked.” Kristina had a very difficult experience her first two years and in her follow up questions summed up the entire two years this way:

I just want to say the two years of tennis I experienced were pretty dark for me. I honestly didn’t know what to do and I felt that I was at the end of the rope. For the longest time I blamed myself for what was happening and felt like I was letting my family, Dayton, UD and the tennis community down. It was a toxic environment and feeling.

The kind of challenges Kristina, Cameron, and Thomas faced had to do with fitting in and finding a group of friends. This is the type of struggle I identify on Figure 5, labeled C: sense of isolation/difference and “not fitting in” at UD. For Kristina and Thomas, a large part of their feeling of isolation came from not wanting to participate in the drinking
and party culture in the same way their friends were. I address the drinking culture more later.

Another important life altering difficulty that Dirk, Steve, Cameron, and Matt addressed was the death of one of their classmates. Dirk, Steve and Matt lived on the same floor as a student who committed suicide in April of their freshman year. All of them addressed how hard that was for them. Dirk specifically talked about how he did not feel the support from UD that he would have hoped to experience. He said about the response from the University that it was “generic.” He went on to say:

There was no talking about pain in the person who would do something like that. There wasn’t really any connection, I felt to those actions that none of us were understanding at the time. I don’t know if it’s something you can ever really truly understand, but I never really saw any connection to his actions from the words of the counselors. It just more felt…it felt like it was generic. And I can kind of see that operating in a university standpoint in that hundreds of students were hurt by that, but in the generic way of we lost a fellow student. Where not as many people who could claim, I was good friends with him and this is hurting me personally.

And I don’t think we were really catered to.

Cameron talked about her troubles with this death but did so in a different way. She said his funeral was her first and that it had an impact on her. She went on to say:

Then they took the coffin away and I saw his mom. And that’s the kind of thing that really affects me. I felt so bad for them. I couldn’t imagine. And I wish we found out the truth because nobody knows if it was suicide or he was pushed over.

And every time I go by that place [his residence hall] I think about him.
All these students brought up this suicide as a time of tragedy and the support they experienced or failed to experience made a difference in their beliefs about their faith and impacted their trust in the administration of UD. While both Matt and Dirk talked about UD not providing much support, Steve, who lived next door to this student, talked specifically about the support he received from his boss at the RecPlex and campus ministry. He mentioned he had only been working at the RecPlex for a month and a half when his boss called him right after the student’s death. He described this time of tragedy but as one where he felt the “strength of the community.” He said it was one of the first times he felt that power of community.

**Encounter with Challenge and Struggle (D and E)**

On Figure 5, Oval D represents the encounter with challenge and struggle. The second step for the students who had a positive first experience at UD was an encounter with challenge. I created an arrow from B to D to represent the move from feeling a sense of fit and belonging to the encounter with a challenging experience. Even when students had a positive initial experience at UD, at some point most expressed encountering a significant challenge of their assumptions, whether it was their assumptions of themselves, their relationships or of the world.

Students’ first year difficulties were immediately followed by a phase of grappling with finding a sense of belonging at UD. I discuss the types of challenges students faced in the sections that follow, each type of challenge is represented as a bullet point in Oval D on Figure 5. E represents the struggle students faced to make sense of themselves and their place within the culture. Students who had a difficult initial transition to UD encountered challenge at the beginning of their time as students. The
quest to make sense of themselves and their place at UD followed that first phase, the arrow between sections C and E.

The challenges students faced centered on changing relationships and friendships. This was true for students who struggled initially and those who faced challenges later. For these students were the difficulties underrepresented students faced, including African American, International, and LGBTQ students. Other categories of meaning were lack of self-care, difficulty with academics and challenges with the administration at UD. Often the encounter with challenge was prompted by an external experience, e.g., study abroad or an encounter with administration, or involvement in a class or co-curricular activity and that led to the internal conflict. An encounter with challenge often, but not always, coincided with some emotional struggle, including a time for the student to reexamine his or her assumptions.

Some challenges students encountered but did not identify with emotional hardship included being challenged in a class, or learning something from a long conversation with a roommate. Encountering a different perspective from their own, whether it was meeting someone with that perspective or learning about it through a book, class, film or lecture, was challenging for students. Other examples include what students described as “going outside their comfort zones.” While those challenges were described in a positive way, they did force students to examine values, points of view and previously held beliefs. I discuss these challenges more in the sections on new awareness of values and in the growth section later in the chapter.

Challenges that were more emotionally difficult included those with academics, changing relationships with friends, challenges with administration, and those struggles
that led to a sense of growing apart from family or friends. Another major challenge that students identified was not fitting into the UD culture because of some aspect of their identity or their beliefs about the lack of diversity on campus.

**Difficulty with academics and major.**

Both Jon and Bernice grappled with academics. During his sophomore year, Jon talked about not performing very well in his classes. Sophomore year was the most difficult for him. He said, “sophomore year grades kind of shook me.” He mentioned that sophomore year he “broke up” with his girlfriend. He said it was “kind of unexpected and kind of rough. So my first semester sophomore year I did very bad and I didn’t hear a word from anyone about it. So it was clear they don’t really care that much.” By “they” he meant advisors at UD. Jon expressed his poor grades were a “wake up call” and he did learn to “buckle down” and study by his junior year. He learned from this experience that he is an introvert and needs a lot of time alone to have the energy to study. But Jon interpreted the lack of support from faculty/staff when he was doing poorly as a lack of emphasis on the importance of academics at UD. He said:

I mean I’ve done bad in some classes and there was no like sitting me down to talk about it. I feel like if they actually promoted academics they would have sat me down and asked me what happened or why that happened. My advisor would have, or someone would have.

Bernice faced difficulty with professors in her major when she wanted to double major in Graphic Design and Marketing. She said she added the marketing major to be more competitive when it came time to find a job. She experienced support in the business school for this decision but felt a lack of support from the art department. She
said during her sophomore year portfolio review “they didn’t talk about my artwork at all. They grilled me on the fact that I had two majors. So they were like trying to make me second guess the fact that I had my marketing major.” She went on to say, “they were like ‘you’re not gonna have time to do both’” and “your artwork is gonna be worse than it is now.” Despite that experience, Bernice kept her double major and as she said, “when people tell me I can’t do something it just makes me wanna do it even more.” Both Jon and Bernice were able to learn from their experiences: Bernice, needing to keep her double major despite being opposed by the art department; Jon, that he needed to change his study habits and find more time on his own.

**Experience of lack of diversity.**

Jenna, Emma and Ruth all articulated difficulty with the lack of diversity on UD’s campus after experiences with different cultures through programs like study abroad, a class on creating inclusive communities, and engaging in community service work outside of UD. Each of them mentioned contesting the closed mindedness they perceived in the UD culture after having these experiences.

Ruth talked about the difficulty of fitting in after studying abroad and learning about cultural differences, which led to her seeing things differently than what she described as the typical UD student. She found herself needing to keep some of her viewpoints to herself. Ruth said, “I have all these thoughts and perspectives and varying ideas that no one else can really understand.” Jenna talked about the closed mindedness of the UD community. She expressed frustration after spending time in service in the Dayton community and working in Dayton Public Schools. She said, “I really want to work with kids in poverty…but sometimes the things I see are really hard.” She struggled
with other students not understanding her experiences. She said, “a lot of the ideals of the population that we have here are the same and so the few people that do kind of fall out of line are looked upon differently.” She went on to say, “It’s hard seeing that and not having the chance to talk about it with people or try and make change because I feel like a lot of the people are really set in their ways here.”

Emma grappled with a feeling of people being “set in their ways” and not open to some of the new perspectives she gained from both her study abroad and her experience of taking a creating inclusive communities course. She described many of the things she learned about white privilege, identities and communities of oppressed people. She expressed a desire to talk about these things and take action towards change but was running into resistance from the people around her. She said, “I really need to start having these conversations because it’s making me practice being able to speak about it.” She continued:

you get in these situations where somebody says something racist or like sexist or anything like that. I want to say something but I don’t know. It’s just I have this responsibility now at UD and this is the thing. At UD we’re all white and we’re all privileged. Well not all white. But majority white and majority middle class but still it’s like a lot of kids don’t notice.

Emma’s awareness of current events such as the riots happening in Ferguson, MO and the conflicts with racial issues on campus, and awareness of her white privilege led her to want to have conversations about what she was learning and now understood about diversity. In her view, there were not many people she could talk about that with. She said, “I don’t know what to say and I don’t want to get angry at people and I don’t want
to call them out because I know it’s not going to help but sometimes it’s just so hard not to be like ‘you don’t get it.’”

These were some of the ways students were at odds with UD’s lack of diversity from the perspective of identifying with what most of them classified as a white, upper middle class majority. Students who identified as a part of an underrepresented population encountered difficulty but their stories were a bit different.

**Experience as part of an underrepresented population.**

Justice, Jessica and Jenny talked about UD’s campus not being diverse, but from the perspective of students who are part of underrepresented populations. Jessica and Justice both identified as African American and both talked about encountering microaggressions and classmates who lacked open-mindedness. Jessica gave an example of being in class and hearing students say things like, “we shouldn’t have affirmative action because it is taking jobs away from white people.” In her words, “they don’t really understand” and “they don’t listen to anything.” While she said she struggled with not being around people with the same mindset she said, “as much as I would like to be around people who think like me and are passionate about the same things, it doesn’t help me as much.” She explained it’s helpful to go to UD and “experience the different mindsets of people.”

Justice talked about much more explicit forms of racism and microaggressions she experienced. For example, she described people frequently touching her hair. A supervisor said when she had her hair straightened “that’s your professional look.” Her comment in response to that was “as if my natural hair is not professional.” She encountered comments in the classroom that made her, as she said, “see UD in a different
light.” For example, when discussing racism in a class one student said “now it’s not as bad cause now they can drink off the same water fountains so they have nothing else to complain about.” Justice said, “I literally had to turn around in my chair and I said “What? Where am I?” Justice continued to experience an environment of racism in her experience with the social media platform Yik Yak⁴. As she put it:

When we had our protest for Black Lives Matter and the die in, there were just so many disgusting, disgusting things that were said that I was really expecting UD to respond, and I feel like nobody’s really responded to the Yik Yak.

Justice repeatedly expressed her experience of lack of support for African American students on the UD campus, whether through a lack of sufficient resources for African American students, the lack of an African Student Union and replacing Black History Month celebrations with I Heart UD month celebrations. Both Jessica and Justice talked about positive experiences within the Catholic and Marianist culture but that UD “has work to do” to be a more hospitable place for African American students.

Jenny had some difficulty finding her place as an international student. She said she did not feel like she completely fit in with neither the international students nor the domestic students. She felt different from the international students because “they’re not as involved on campus.” She found that many international students asked her for help on homework because they “perceived she had better English.” At the same time, she expressed a feeling of not being “caught up to the domestic students.” She said:

⁴ Yik Yak is a social media platform and phone application (app) that allows people to create anonymous posts that can be seen by anyone within a certain radius. (Wagstaff, 2015)
I feel like I don’t quite fit into the UD, like the normal UD student stereotype as in like going out to party and things like that. I was in a relationship with someone throughout my college so my priority during the weekend was to go to Huber Heights and visit. I don’t normally hang out with my friends going out to get drinks. I wasn’t involved in that so that was kind of like why I was falling behind…the social aspect.

She mentioned a number of times that she compared herself to other students and did not quite fit. The financial struggles and visa requirements she faced as an international student were challenges she expressed that domestic students do not understand.

Sawyer talked about struggles she had after “coming out” as a Lesbian. She was quick to say, overall, her time has been “very positive,” but went on to tell stories about difficult experiences including the aggression she experienced because of her identity. For example, she was holding another person’s hand and someone kicked snow at her and said, “you need to stop being such fruitcakes in public.” This continued to be a problem for Sawyer as the person who said this became her supervisor at the RecPlex. When Sawyer talked to her boss about why this person should not be put in a position of leadership, her boss responded “what a great learning opportunity for this person to learn to work with people of your kind.” She did report the incident to another professional staff member who was supportive, but she ultimately wound up quitting her job after trying to have a conversation with her boss that Sawyer perceived as “condescending” and “not very helpful.” She went on to say that she did not think her experience spoke for the whole University, just the individual, and that other friends of hers were supportive of her through this time.
Difficulty with administration.

Frank described his challenges with some in the UD administration. Frank had a positive experience with Greek life through his time at UD and was elected to a leadership role within his values-based fraternity. He was actively involved in his political science major and secured an internship with the City of Dayton fire department the summer between his junior and senior year through the experiential learning program. He planned to live in the fraternity house when he returned to campus his senior year. He had lived in a landlord house during the summer and his lease ended August 3rd. He was not allowed to move into the fraternity house until August 12. The way he described it, he was “homeless for 10 days” while he was finishing his internship before classes began. When we spoke, he had not resolved the issue but said he was “frustrated” with the “lack of help” from the staff in the Office of Housing and Residence Life. He said he talked to three people and no one was willing to let him move in either to the house he would be living in or somewhere else on campus for 10 days despite his offers to pay and recommendations from his internship. He said he found out one of his fraternity brothers was allowed to move into the same house on August 3rd. He said what he heard about the houses not being ready did not seem true to him. Frank repeatedly said, “they weren’t willing to help,” and that situation, “left a sour taste in his mouth” about the administration at UD.

A few students mentioned their primary conflicts with UD Administration was with the Office of Housing and Residence Life, the administration and staff who worked in that office, as well as the policies surrounding student housing assignments. The students referred to the Office of Housing and Residence Life, the staff who work in that
office, as well as all of the policies connected with student housing assignments as “housing.” As much as they mentioned student housing, which consists of the hundreds of UD owned houses that occupy several city blocks creating “the student neighborhood,” as a unique and beneficial part of UD’s culture, they had several problems with the way housing is assigned. Frank’s issue, however, spoke more to the lack of support he felt from UD when he had a genuine need for help.

Most of these challenges led students to perceive a lack of support from the UD community. Sometimes the lack of support was felt from faculty such as in the cases of Jon and Bernice with their majors. They expressed frustration, that professors were making their experience more difficult. Jon felt his teachers did not step in and help him when he was struggling with his grades and Bernice felt the art department doubted her ability to succeed in a double major.

Sometimes the feeling of lack of support was from staff as in the cases of Jessica, Sawyer and Justice when they were facing oppression based on their identity. Sawyer and Justice both mentioned not feeling a sense of support from supervisors and administrators when they experienced aggression based on their identity. Frank described more of an issue with a general unwillingness from staff to help him when he faced the crisis of no housing for the days between sessions.

Other times, students felt a lack of support from other students, such as the experiences of Jenny and earlier examples of experiences of Kristina and Cameron. Kristina and Cameron both described their team mates marginalizing them, in Kristina’s case for having her family attend tennis matches and her refusal to participate in drinking
during the season. In Cameron’s case, teammates demeaned her for what she described as cultural differences.

These students described not being able to find help or support from administrators that they perceived had the power to help them. Students seemed to believe if a coach, supervisor, professor or administrator had expressed a desire to help them solve their problems, their experience might have been different. As they perceived it, UD people in those roles did not help them when they were facing important challenges.

**Shift in Awareness and Understanding (F)**

Many students talked about how they understood themselves, their values and their culture better as a result of having some of their previous ways of knowing challenged. F on Figure 5 represents this shift in awareness. Students faced a time of challenge and then a subsequent experience of grappling with those challenges. The grappling that students engaged in included trying to make sense of their own values and beliefs to making sense of the culture they were a part of, to finding a group of friends that shared their values. These struggles led to a shift in students’ understanding of themselves in the areas (oval F on Figure 5) of their: faith, identity, personal strength, and their schedule and priorities. I address more about each of these areas in this section.

The box pointing to F on Figure 5, is titled “Influences” and includes: mentors, professors, supervisors, friends, clubs, Greek life, and campus ministry. Students mentioned these people, or groups as having an influence on their new awareness. Students’ grappling with better understanding themselves and their values did not happen in isolation. It occurred within the context of groups they belonged to, or in the context of
relationships they had with others at UD. I found students connected what they learned with where they learned it whether that was in a class or as a result of a conversation with a roommate or because of their leadership in a club. Because students naturally drew those connections, it was, at times difficult to separate the meaning they made from the setting or context in which they made it. In my initial coding and data analysis this was a challenge as I was trying to create separate categories. As I began to sketch diagrams though, it made sense to me to connect the common learning students identified and then illustrate that those lessons could come from a number of different influences. For example, Dirk and Emma talked about having their values and beliefs challenged in their classes, while Jenna and Ruth talked about having their values and beliefs challenged through people they met.

The students’ experiences of challenge and struggle frequently led to new understanding and awareness of themselves, their values and the kinds of relationships they needed to support their values. The shift in awareness along with the situation in which the new understanding occurred are described in this section. The students expressed a range of meaning they drew from their experiences. One student talked about learning he was an introvert and studied better when he was by himself. Another talked about trying to achieve balance in life between friends, academics and clubs. And yet another talked about her awareness of her white privilege and desire to make sure her classroom (she is an education major) is a place of diversity and inclusivity. These lessons and understandings all came from those encounters with situations that were challenging at first.

Faith.
Dirk, for example, talked about questioning his faith. He said there were two experiences that challenged him to think about his faith differently: one was his roommate and the other was the suicide of his freshman year classmate (which I mentioned earlier.) He said his roommate was questioning his faith even more than Dirk was. He said that the school’s response to the suicide, as he put it “caused me to question a lot of things.” His perception of the experience was that:

the whole school was very uncomfortable using the term suicide. The school and Catholicism, both tended to almost, demonize is too harsh a word but that the actions around it seemed to condemn people that would take that route.

Dirk said that experience and those conversations with his roommate helped him to think more critically about his beliefs. He said “I’ve found I still identify as Catholic, now, but I don’t really agree with many of the things that the Catholic Church does.” He said he still holds what he calls the “core beliefs,” “the trinity and God and Jesus, and the host at Mass becoming Jesus, all of that” but he does not agree with what the Catholic Church teaches about other religions or what it teaches about the nature of homosexuality.

Ruth came to identify with her Catholic faith differently through experiences abroad and meeting other people. She said she was at first excited to spend a semester studying abroad in Spain because it is a Catholic country, but she struggled to attend Mass because it was in Spanish. As she put it “I wouldn’t get as much out of it as I did here.” She went on to say that meeting other people and learning different viewpoints taught her to question her previously held beliefs. She said:

seeing the different viewpoints on, say, abortion or chastity or whatever, there’s a lot, you know, lots of different issues within the church, you know gay marriage.
Just hearing different people, what they had to say, I was kind of starting to see
different perspectives and that changed the way that I thought
She said she used to think of herself as open-minded but hearing different points of view
convinced her that she was not. She continued:
I would be that person who if you told me something that I didn’t agree with I’d
listen to you and I’d hear you out but in my mind, I’d be like “that’s so wrong.”
Now I understand. I am beginning to understand different people’s ideas on moral
issues.
Identify.
Emma learned a lot about feminism and her identity as a woman through her
classes and in theatre. She said, “I’ve learned a lot about feminism. Because, I mean that
would be my oppressed identity. And just the whole patriarchal system. It’s so prevalent.”
She said when she was growing up she “was super religious” and exposed to ideas like
“slut shaming.” But she has learned, in her words, “how women are pitted against each
other competitively.” She went on to say how learning about feminism has changed her
outlook. She said “it made me look back” and “changed my perspective on how to treat
people.” She has brought that new awareness to theatre. In her involvement in the UD
Monologues, she wants to be “more about identity, not just female but culture and race as
well.” She said it was her “dream for this year to create a more diverse studio theatre
group.”

Kristina learned about her own strength and which “parts of her identity” were
most important to her through her struggles on the tennis team. As she discerned whether
or not she wanted to quit the team she struggled with her identity as a tennis player. She said:

“I’d been playing tennis since I was four so it seemed like all I knew at the time. In high school that was my identity so I really was like “oh crap,” did I lose part of my identity and what I was known for? It was really conflicting emotions. She mentioned that she “was glad” she went through it because “it wasn’t really until after all of it that I realized how much stronger I got as a person.” She said prior to her experience with tennis “Unless I’m very comfortable in a situation I don’t really stick up for people or myself. In college I really learned what I feel is the right thing to do.” She went on to say that she did learn “to stick up for myself without even realizing I was doing it.” As difficult as her two years with tennis were, Kristina was able to articulate many lessons she learned about her own identity and values as a result of that experience.

**Sense of priorities and value of simple living.**

Several students mentioned how their schedules and priorities shifted during their time at UD. Some students talked about shifting their sense of priorities in terms of activities and others in terms of relationships.

Ben talked about “spreading himself too thin” during his time at UD. He said going into senior year he had medical school applications and rescue squad as his two priorities and “everything else was going to be 2nd or 3rd.” He said “spreading himself too thin” was a good experience because, in his words “you learn what your limits are. You saw how much you can do and how much you can handle at a time.” He went on to say, “I learned a lot about how I’m able to manage myself and how much I can take at a time.”
Susan talked about how the process of sorority recruitment demonstrates what the time commitment was going to be for new members as well as how that experience had an impact on her own priorities and time commitment. She said the new member process is supposed to help potential new sisters realize “you don’t want to be the girl who doesn’t go to anything, but then you have to realize that you can’t go to everything.” She said:

when you are in the new member process you can still go to the sisterhood events and get to know everyone but it gives you a sense of what you’re getting yourself into. So if you can’t do it then you’re not going to be able to do it when you are a full-fledged, initiated member. They want you to find that balance.

She has changed her priorities through her time in Greek life. She said:

when I was a new member it was like my academics are more of a commitment, where as an initiated member, I can take that hour it’s going to be okay...As I’ve gotten older work and school have gotten busier so of course I will take those breaks a bit more.

Ben and Susan talked about a shift in priorities that they experienced through their student organizations and many others mentioned the importance of time management and “finding a balance” during their time at UD.

Ruth talked a lot about learning to balance relationships and her schoolwork through study abroad, and her involvement with Greek life. Ruth said she learned to put more value on enjoying the moment. In her words, “life isn’t just about working hard and focusing on your studies. You just want to enjoy the time you have with people.” Ruth said she discovered how much more there was to learning outside of classes when she
was living with a family in Spain. She said “I’m in this beautiful country once. I want to spend time with my family. I want to get to know my city.” She went on to say “I can learn more about food, and I can learn more about the culture which I think is more important than just finishing an assignment.”

Ann gave an example not only of time, but of learning to shift her priorities in her friendships and relationships and how to live more simply. She said participating in UD’s summer Appalachia program helped her to learn this. Ann said during her time in Appalachia she learned to live simply. She described this as “just taking a step back from everyday life and really being present and recognizing what you can give up.”

The value of simple living she experienced helped Ann to change her priorities around relationships. She said, “a big thing for me coming back was prioritizing people in my life too.” She listed some important questions she started asking herself about her friends, including “are they building me up instead of pulling me down? Are they positive relationships or are they just negative? Do I feel good when I am around this person? Do they actually listen and care about me and want what’s best for me?” In her words, “I can’t be friends with everybody.”

Many students talked about learning to shift their priorities while they were students at UD, whether it was through time management, experiencing their own limitations, or with difficulties in relationships. Students expressed the importance of finding a balance in their lives. They discussed how they focused on what was important by adjusting their schedules and relationships to reflect the values they learned through their experiences.
Finding a Sense of Community with Shared Values (G)

G on Figure 5 represents this next phase of students’ experience. Their challenges and shifts in their values led to students’ new understandings of themselves and where they fit at UD. A number of students expressed the importance of finding a group of friends who shared their values and beliefs. As the beliefs of the students changed, some parted ways with people they had lived with, or with whom they previously had close relationships in order to spend more time with people who were like-minded. For example, Jenny figured out her fit was in the Office of New Student Programs and with her family off campus. It was not in living with a group of students as she initially thought it had to be. Many students discussed finding “smaller communities” within the UD community. Over the course of their years at UD students moved from seeing themselves as part of the UD culture as a whole (A) on Figure 5 to finding a place within that culture (F). This next section describes students’ experiences of finding their niche at UD based on their new levels of self-awareness that resulted from challenges they had faced. Often students found those niches in what they called surprising places.

Kristina found a sense of community within her service fraternity. She described how she frequently missed events because of tennis and the group was not only “okay with that,” but invited her to more events. She described it as “basically going into a nice crowd of people.” She followed up with the statement that:

there’s a lot of diversity in there [the service fraternity] I would say. Normally I would say, I wouldn’t be friends with those types of people but it’s really been about the person that they are and that’s what I was learning.
I asked Kristina what she meant by “those types of people.” She responded, “this is going to sound terrible.” After I assured her it would not, she said there were a lot of people in band in the fraternity and in her words “in high school, band was not a popular thing.” She said, “a lot of the guys are gay actually and that’s not something I was very used to.” She continued “those were the two biggest things and those are probably my closest friends.”

An important part of many student experiences was finding their niche within the larger community. Many students addressed the importance of finding a smaller group of people with whom to share values, interests and experiences. Steve had this to say:

everybody sits there and jokes around oh community, community, community, but you don’t really fully experience community until you find your community within the great community, and I mean it’s yeah the greater community is great. It’s holding the door open and it’s the smiling at you and saying hey how are you doing and actually meaning it, but you won’t find it in that true community until you do something like the UDSAP [UD Summer Appalachia Program] program or you do ETHOS [Engineers in Technical Humanitarian Opportunities through Service Learning] through UD, you work at a place like the Recplex [University of Dayton Fitness and Recreation Complex] where you find people that have common interests that are truly looking out for you and that’s the moment where you’re gonna say this is really what community means.

Steve found his fit within his community on UDSAP and at the RecPlex. He described those groups as a family. Ann talked about finding her niche:
it might just take a little time for you to find your niche but I also recognize I’ve been involved in several different communities on campus whether that’s my UDSAP community, my lay Marianist community, just people who I live with in the house or like my classes. And I really like how small the classes are at UD because I’ve been able to form some really great connections with faculty and staff.

A few students talked about finding a supportive group within the Marainist Student Communities. A couple of others talked about finding that sense of connection with their sororities. For example, Susan described connecting with other girls in her sorority this way:

we could just talk and laugh and we had the same sense of humor. Each person that I spoke to I got this like nice connection with. And it’s just like, when you’re out with your friends and all of the sudden you’re sitting there and someone comes up and starts a conversation with you and you get that connection. It’s like oh wow, this is great. I found myself talking to you for way longer than I expected.

Jenna expressed similar thoughts about the sorority she joined. She described getting dressed up and “trying to look perfect” for a couple of hours before meeting up with the girls and then said “I mean I look cute but I didn’t need to do this for two hours, I could have come in jeans and a t-shirt and I still would have felt like they wanted to like talk to me and get to know me.” Both Susan and Jenna expressed a sense of comfort and connection with the girls in their sororities and both of them expressed these were the kinds of people they would want to hang out with, whether it was in a sorority or not.
Some of the students who lived in Marianist Student Communities talked about the sense of family and shared values they had with the people they lived with and how important the intentional time together was to forming those relationships. Ruth said:

It was nice and it was nice kind of having this family to come home to and sometimes you’re gonna have a whole meal together. I mean when does anybody have that all the time? Even in my own home in Toledo with my parents and with my siblings it is probably once a year if ever that we all get together to have a whole meal.

Emma mentioned the importance of the commitment of spending time together. She said:

It’s like a marriage between all six girls, which is a lot. But it’s an experience that I’m not going to have in the future so it’s just a good opportunity. And the Marianists like the, so we’re supposed to eat together twice a week and pray together three times a week and that is just phenomenal.

Emma went on to say that she and her roommates were busy people and would not necessarily have time to catch up if it were not for the commitment to shared prayer, conversations and meals. She said:

But when you come together for prayer it kind of just becomes sharing circle. So being able to share our lives with each other and have that as a requirement has been phenomenal so even though we like have had rough spots, like I hear about like drama in other people’s houses and I’m just like yeah, we wouldn’t. That would come up in conversation.

Steve was getting ready to move into a Marianist Student Community when we spoke and expressed excitement about what that opportunity would provide. He said:
That’s something that I’m looking forward to in a couple of weeks, living in the MSC [Marianist Student Community]. I’m gonna have best friends that I can sit there and talk about my faith with, that I’m gonna be able to dive down into those deep topics with.

While Susan and Jenna described their connection with the sororities as natural, the students found meaningful connection but expressed that connection happening through a shared commitment to spending time together through meals, conversation and shared prayer. All of them, however, talked in some way about the importance of the relationships those smaller communities provided.

I mentioned Kristina earlier and how she found her place within her service fraternity in a group of people she would not have expected to become her friends. Kristina talked about the struggle to find a fit and the patience that required. She said:

I didn’t know what to do my freshman and sophomore year. It got to the point where I considered transferring schools. And just a constant state of unhappiness every day. And I thought I made the wrong decision. I mean my family loved it here and I thought I was never gonna get that.

Kristina said one of the things that is unique about UD though, is that “there is a place for you here.” She persevered through her struggles on the tennis team and finally found the places where she fit. She described it this way:

I did find my place here. I found it in a fraternity. I found it in study abroad. And I haven’t mentioned this as much as I should but in my classes, I love my professors. I think academically this has been a really strong place for me. And the teachers here… truly care about what you do.
Whether it happened immediately for students or through a pledging process through a fraternity, or through experiences like living in Marianist Student Communities that happened later in their time, experiencing a sense of belonging within a smaller group emerged as an important part of the UD experience. Ronald summed up finding a niche at UD this way:

You know you find your community. For me it’s been the honors program. That’s my community and that’s my bubble here on campus and I think whatever it is people are very good at finding that community. And it can be vastly different from student to student but I think most students here find some kind of group that they identify with no matter how small or big.

**Trajectory (H)**

On Figure 5, trajectory is represented as H. As I conducted the interviews I found students frequently had lengthy answers to the question “what advice would you give to an incoming student to help them make the most of their experience?” Their answers summarized their experience at UD, and highlighted key memories, and turning points in the form of advice to an incoming student. It seemed to me that what the students valued about their experience at UD was reflected in their responses to this question, whether it was that they found a place eventually, or that they got involved, or that there were many opportunities to explore in four years. Because the nature of each student’s advice summarized his or her four-year trajectory of experience, including the themes represented in A-G on Figure 5, I included trajectory as a theme and label on Figure 5.

The students’ advice seemed to be a part of their experience or a valuable lesson they learned. For example, Thomas said, “be patient. There were a lot of times when I
thought I was figuring things out but then it ended up that it went to a dead end and I had to switch gears a little bit, so there was a lot of patience.” Getting involved early was a key to success, and patience was a key to the students eventually “finding their way.” Both conclusions come from my data analysis and are discussed in the next section.

For the students whose time at UD began by finding a group of friends early, they expressed some agency over this outcome, highlighting the importance of getting involved early and getting out of your dorm room in the first three weeks and trying to meet people. Many seemed to attribute their ease of finding friends with these efforts. For the few students who had a more difficult transition to UD, their advice was to be patient and to be true to who you are and what you value.

Many students talked about the importance of getting involved and experiencing things outside the classroom. Elizabeth’s statement is a good example of what many students echoed, “overcommit is a good piece of advice but then be intentional and pick the things that are important to you. And that comes with time. I think it’s so important to get involved. Because that’s how you meet people.” Many of the students said something to this effect.

A few students, in particular those who had significant struggles while here, advised future students to be patient and that finding a place here takes time. Kristina talked about how she did not make friends right away. She said of her experience and the advice she would give is that it takes time. In her words:

I don’t, now it’s easy to say cause you know I’m with people I like and but you

know sometimes you don’t get that lucky freshman year to find your soul mate

and a lot, there can be drama with that, and you just have to everyday find your
own way just a little bit. Everyday you learn something else so you find a part of you, you didn’t know you had and eventually all those pieces kind of come together and there you are, it’s your way at UD.

Notable about these pieces of advice is that students talked about the importance of being involved in things that were important and meaningful for themselves, but they talked about the importance of being involved in clubs and organizations because it is how you meet people. Even Bernice who admitted she did not have time for a lot of clubs and organizations due to her major talked about the importance of getting outside of her room. She said:

find something you like…if you find something you like to do, eventually friends will come along with that. Like I know a lot of people say like join like go and join an organization and meet friends that way. But just making sure that you’re not closed off those first couple weeks, it’s like the best thing you can do. Cause everyone’s like I want to meet people, those first couple weeks of school when it starts.

Another student, Matt, who was not actively involved in organizations or clubs advised future students to “go out and talk to people.” Students like Matt and Jon who did not mention any involvement in co-curricular groups or activities, did talk about meeting people on their floor their freshman year and going out to “the ghetto” in the first three weeks. Matt’s advice was “talk to people. Go meet people. We used to play ping pong probably four times a week in the lobby of Stuart hall. Just get out of your room.”

A few other students mentioned the importance of being uncomfortable or going outside your comfort zone. But the very next sentence after Sawyer’s advice, “don’t be
scared” and Emma’s advice of “do things that make you uncomfortable” was “people want to be your friend so you know, just dive in,” and “have conversations” respectively. So in these cases, going outside your comfort zone was said in regards to forming friendships and talking to people.

These students seemed to attribute their success with making friends to their ability to get outside of their room and talk to people. Students expressed a sense of agency about getting out and meeting people and then credited the friendly, welcoming culture for rewarding their efforts with new friendships.

Another category was asking for help when you need it. Ann included both teachers and students in the asking for help category. She said, “don’t be afraid to ask for help because upperclassman are more than willing to give it. Same with teachers.” Jenny, who has a job with the Office of Community Standards and Civility said “I see a lot of students’ struggle coming through the hearing board, so if you need help we really do have the resources, so we’ll find one. If I don’t know I’ll find it for you. So yes, just ask.”

Jessica mentioned that resources are here for students but “you have to find them,” “they won’t just come to you.” She targeted some of her advice to underrepresented students. She said the students here are friendly and want to help. In her words, “it wasn’t like I am a freshman, you’re a junior, eeewwww get away. It was more like let me help you out, come to this event, oh you need a ride?” She continued from her point of view as a senior and as student of color, “we want to help you out because we don’t want you to leave. If you leave, there goes their 1%, so we want you to stay here.” Whether it was students who struggled, students from majority populations or students from underrepresented populations, many of them mentioned the importance of asking for help.
and finding resources, because they exist and are available to students at UD. This was a lesson they learned from their early struggles of not finding support right away. I gave several examples of students who struggled with finding resources in their early years at UD, but eventually most of them found what they needed. It seemed the students I interviewed offered this as advice to incoming students because they felt if incoming students were more persistent in seeking out resources, they would have a better experience, and possibly avoid the feelings of struggle and isolation that the students I interviewed experienced. In other words, incoming students could benefit from these students’ mistakes and challenges.

**Research Question Two: How do students understand the Catholic and Marianist culture and what experiences most shape their understanding?**

I described the themes that offer some insight into the first research question—what is the lived experience of students within the Catholic and Marianist culture of UD—in Figure 5 and in the preceding narrative. In this section, I write about the themes I constructed from the data that provide some answers the second research question, how do students understand the Catholic and Marianist culture and what experiences most shape their understanding. The students had a diversity of experience at UD and I expressed a number of different perspectives but I constructed several common themes from the data. The themes under research question one were more of a common pattern of experience students had through their 3-5 years at UD. The themes under research question two represent some of the deeper meaning students made about UD’s culture and include some of the aspects of culture that students experienced as unique to UD.
The themes I constructed about the understanding of the Catholic and Marianist culture students expressed include that it is built on relationships and community, it is based on co-curricular involvement, it is empowering of students, it is a bubble, it lacks diversity, it is socially rooted in drinking and bounded within culture in the United States. The experiences that most shaped their understandings were diverse. For example, some students understood UD to have a lack of diversity from their identity as an underrepresented population. The students who identified as part of the majority population understood the lack of diversity at UD as a result of experiences such as study abroad or taking a course on creating inclusive communities. The themes I constructed for this section emerged as I saw similar patterns in the meaning students made about UD’s culture, even if their experiences were different. For example, students who thought the drinking culture “brings people together” and students who found it limiting both talked about it as part of the culture at UD. Some themes emerged naturally. For example, several students talked explicitly about the drinking culture, community, the UD bubble, and the culture in the United States. Students’ directly stated those categories as “part of the culture at UD.”

The themes of lacking diversity, based on co-curricular involvement, and empowering of students were themes I constructed only after further reflection on some of the categories of data and groups of codes. For example, I read through the data sorted under the category of “jobs/experiential learning” as well as the category of “co-curricular involvement” and noticed students talked about experiences in both of those categories as being empowering, sometimes explicitly mentioning “UD empowers its students.” I noticed that students mentioned how important it was to “get involved” and
went on to describe co-curricular activities. In these instances, it made sense to me to construct a theme around how students described the culture at UD as a result of their experience, rather than the specific experience (such as a job or particular club). Examples of these themes are “Includes Co-Curricular Involvement” and “Empowering of Students and Student Leadership.”

In this section I report the themes I constructed as well as the data that supports those themes. The statement of each theme is written as a subheading. The themes that follow, with the exception of bounded by the culture in the United States, were from students’ words that conveyed phenomena unique to UD. Some students explicitly compared their experiences to their visits to other schools or their perceptions of what other schools might offer. From what they said, phrases such as “At UD…” or “UD Students…” it seemed to me the students’ perception was that they would not have had these experiences at other schools, thus their understanding was their experiences were part of the UD culture, not necessarily college student culture in general.

**Built on the Experience of Community**

One of the primary themes that emerged was the emphasis on the importance of community to UD’s culture. I already described how finding a sense of community with shared values was part of student’s experience. This section is about the value of community as part of the UD culture and goes beyond the students’ individual friendships and relationships with small groups of people. This section describes how students define and understand community as part of the culture at UD.

I asked several students what was unique about UD, or something distinctive about the culture, and the word “community” came up over and over again. Students
frequently responded with their love/hate relationship with the word “community.” Dirk described the love/hate relationship with this word this way:

The only reason I would say hate is because it’s said so much so it’s like almost grinds on your nerves that you hear it 100 times a day. But the truth to that word is why everyone loves it.

Dirk’s response was fairly typical of students who discussed community. Jenna, when asked about what made UD unique, said, “I hate to use the word, really hate to use the word…community.” Of the students I interviewed, 17 of the 23 spoke about the community and how they experienced it at UD. Students shared some common ideas about what community meant to them.

A few examples that students repeatedly expressed were the welcoming atmosphere, opening doors for one another, and a sense of camaraderie and connection that comes with “being a Flyer.” People holding doors open was repeatedly mentioned by students in conjunction with the word “community.” As Sawyer said “I’ve never had to open a door in my life because someone’s always holding it for me. So that’s kind of the idea of community is you never have to open a door because someone’s already holding it open for you.” Besides opening doors, other behaviors students used to describe community, included people smiling at each other, saying “hi” and stopping to help if someone needed directions on campus. Bernice put it this way “when you walk around campus and you see people holding doors for other people. You walk around even though campus is pretty big, you’ll see someone from across the way and wave and smile.”

Many students used the word “open” to describe community at UD. Ann said:
I think everyone’s willing to extend a hand and reach out, you know. Like we open doors for each other…or people help pick up their books if they drop it, share study rooms in the library. Or even house parties. There’s no charging for guys or girls at the door. You can walk in.

A number of students used house parties as examples of what “open” meant to them as part of the community description. Bernice, like Ann, talked about the houses and house parties. She said “On the weekends when you go out and party, people will just be on porches and they’ll let random people into their house and they’ll give them a drink and be like ‘hey come in, relax.’” Matt expressed a similar example and used the words respect and kindness. He said:

Community is respect, and kindness. We share our beer and invite people to our porches/houses. As far as examples, I have hundreds. Follow me around between 12:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. any warm, sunny Saturday. New and old friends invite you on their porches and into their lives for a little while. No other university I have visited has the genuine respect and kindness of UD students.

Sawyer described community as an “open porch policy.” She went on to say it’s: “cheering each other on. Being open to others’ ideas.”

Beyond porch and house parties, a couple of students described the importance of drinking to the community at UD. I will address more about the drinking culture later but Jon and Matt tied drinking specifically with the word “community.” Matt said, “The administration, I think is trying to force community on freshman in ways other than drinking. Which I don’t know if that’s…it can only go so far because what has held the community together is that everybody can do this one thing together.”
While drinking together was important to a couple of students, Jenny expressed the problems with this mentality. She said:

let’s say like student neighborhood. People go out drinking. Upperclassmen handing it to underage. Is that community? It’s not like you are giving it to them and you’re like okay let me take care of you after, like here’s a drink. Now you pass out, I’m walking away.

She mentioned, “trying to change that whole concept of community” in her student employment positions.

A number of students expressed a sense of loyalty and connection to one another by nature of “all being Flyers.” For example, Ronald said, “The vast majority of students celebrate that we are all Flyers and as a result we are all members of the same community.” Ann put it another way. She said, “I think we’re all very loyal to each other. I think we see that with alumni, too. Like you’re a Flyer? Sit down, have a beer with me and let me help you.” A few students identified being willing to help each other out as another important factor in the sense of community they experienced. Susan said, “This is more than just a word they keep saying [community]. It is something that even though you don’t know a person you can go talk to them and they do want to help you out and everyone wants to help each other out and that’s how we continue to build community.”

A couple of students mentioned the size of the student population was a contributing factor to the community feel on UD’s campus. Ben said, “it’s small enough where you always see people you know when you go to classes. But it’s big enough for you to meet someone new every day as well.” Susan discussed the size of UD in this way. She said “the amount of students on campus seems to be growing, but it seems like I am
constantly running into people I know.” She went on to say that there were several students from her high school here. She said “I will see them on occasion and it’s always nice to have a familiar face, but it’s nice to constantly be meeting new people.”

Students expressed some critiques or challenges to the way they experienced community at UD. A couple of students said the feeling of community can be exclusive. Emma put it this way:

that feeling of community can also be very exclusive because like…yes, I feel comfortable but that’s cause I’m a white woman from a middle class family, and that excludes a lot of people. You have to be brave if you are going to be a minority here and you want to be confident. I mean like you shouldn’t have to be but unfortunately that’s how it is.

Jessica said not all students feel comfortable in this community, especially domestic, multicultural students. She expressed the importance of being able to give students a sense of that community through her work with the Office of Multicultural Affairs. She said:

And just being able to give that opportunity to other students with my position—to be there as a friend as a mentor, someone to plan events that domestic multicultural students can relate to—it’s just a blessing because that’s what I experienced through OMA [Office of Multicultural Affairs] my first two years and so now I can help other students to experience the same.

The examples of openness and welcome, saying “hi” and a general spirit of trying to help each other, as well as some of the critiques were some of the most consistent examples that emerged around the word “community.” There were a couple of students
who explained community on a more spiritual level. For example, Thomas described community as “being able to find the light in each other.” He went on to say, “Seeing how through each other we can make that light shine brighter…and how we’re really using our strengths and our talents to be stronger and more committed people, who live out our faith.” In a conversation about her Lay Marianist community, Ann discussed how the community is called to challenge and support each other and community is central to that mission. She said, “our community is very essential in that we need each other. We need each other’s support and we need each other to challenge each other to live out their calling.” Thomas described the importance of diversity to the community at UD. He said: There’s people who hold different jobs or different majors on campus but that’s what makes it strong and that’s what makes it grow, is people of all different backgrounds and that they can all come together as one.

Community was one of the most frequently occurring codes in all of the data and the word that students talked the most about. It was something they identified as distinct to UD and a concept that had some consistent definitions among students. While there were some critiques of the word, or expressions of how it is overused, it was a nevertheless something students primarily identified as an important part of UD’s culture.

Includes Co-Curricular Involvement

The idea that “getting involved” is an important part of the UD experience was repeatedly expressed by students. “Involved,” the way they describe it, means co-curricular activities and programs outside of their regular course work. The types of involvement students discussed include Greek life, rescue squad, retreats and campus ministry, study abroad and immersion experiences, the honors program and Chaminade
scholars, Distance for Dreams, intramurals, service fraternities, the Office of Multicultural Affairs and new student programs. I discuss some of these programs in more detail, as many students talked about them more than once and/or at length.

More generally speaking, taking advantage of the numerous opportunities that UD offers was expressed by several students regardless of what they were involved in. Through students’ voices it was clear that being a student at UD is about taking advantage of these opportunities. For example, Jessica said “I was one of the students who came in just thinking okay let me take my classes, get a high GPA, and then like I’m on the job, you know?” She went on to say how her view changed though:

Getting connected with OMA [Office of Multicultural Affairs] they’re like there’s always other opportunities, you can travel, we will give you a scholarship, you should get involved with this, you should be in leadership with this. I was just like oh wow, there’s other stuff you can do at college. Cool, you know?

When I asked Susan if there was anything else I needed to know about being a student at UD she echoed what Jessica said about the importance of being involved outside of the classroom. She said:

Being a student here is so much more than being a student. It’s being involved and it’s really being a member of the community. It’s not just going to class and joining a club, it’s doing so much more and growing. And that’s how you truly are a student at UD in my opinion.

Students expressed “meeting people” was a primary reason they joined clubs or organizations. Sawyer said a number of times, “I’ve met some of the best people in the world through…” and then would finish with one of the clubs or organizations she was
involved with such as Distance for Dreams, intramural sports and the rock climbing team she helped to found at UD.

Students often chose what they were involved in because of previous experiences with that group in high school or because they met or knew people who were already involved. For example, Emma got involved in studio theatre because she was involved in drama in high school. She joined UD Miracle because she had heard about that organization from her sister who attended UD ten years before her.

Many students talked about what they valued about their involvement in particular programs and especially the leadership positions they held within those programs. For example, Thomas was a River Steward and said “It has provided me with a sense of leadership and purpose, as well as an internship. I have truly embraced the city of Dayton as my home through this program.” Steve was the president of the student organization Red Scare, which is the organized student cheering section at UD’s athletic events. Through his involvement in the program he said, “It has been incredible in terms of just getting to know a little more about the sport industry and working with athletics. It sparked my interest to now pursue a career in college athletics.” Participating in co-curricular activities was “a stress release” and way to meet people for some students. Sawyer said about intramurals, “I love that it got me to meet people and it was just something to get out and to make you stop studying to be just fully immersed in this one thing for 45 minutes.”

One of Dirk’s learning experiences was through his involvement in Christmas on Campus, an annual event that brings students from Dayton Public Schools to campus for a night of Christmas-themed activities. Student clubs and organizations offer a number
of activities and games and other students “adopt a kid.” Children from Dayton are individually paired with UD students for the activities on campus. He described how inspiring that event is this way:

The whole campus comes alive and genuinely cares. People that don’t get along well, organizations that don’t typically function well within themselves or around others all manage to make this one night as special as they can for the little kids. He went on to say that since the experience of Christmas on Campus, “I’ve been much more open to other volunteer and service projects both run through UD and otherwise.”

During her five years as a student, Sawyer was involved in Distance for Dreams. She described Distance for Dreams as a “philanthropy, running Disney organization.” The group trains to run the Walt Disney World Marathon or Half Marathon while fundraising to pay for a child’s wish through the Special Wish Foundation. She said this organization is “where the idea of community values came through” to her. She mentioned the alumni base of the organization is strong and that “it’s great because everyone was in it for good reasons. No one was ‘I’m just gonna go to Disney World.’ You had the kid powering you through the training and stuff and it was good incentive.”

From networking and internships to learning about the city of Dayton, to having an opportunity engage in community service, almost all students I interviewed talked about the value of being involved in co-curricular activities on campus. In many cases students talked about the things they were involved in and what they learned through those organizations more than they talked about their classes.

Empowering of Students and Student Leadership
A number of students expressed how empowering UD is of its students and the number of opportunities they had for learning through organizations and student employment. Ben expressed the freedom advisors give their students in this way:

I think most advisors I’ve heard from other organizations who are like that um kind of let students do their own thing. I think it’s very good that UD kind of trusts their students that much.

Ben went on to say that some of the faculty and staff were a resource but they would not tell him what to do.

Sawyer had a couple of on campus jobs that she found to be great leadership opportunities, and made the statement “Students are really empowered here so that’s good.” She first provided the example of working as an intramural referee her first year:

The student staff were the supervisors and they ran everything. They coordinated everything. They were some of the coolest people ever who were the student supervisors. I looked up to them like they were, like I now look up to CEOs and the director of communications at UD. They just ran the show um and so it was cool to see that maybe by my senior year I can feel that empowered or knowledgeable in my field of work.

Sawyer worked in the communications office her senior year and said “I have the best boss in the world.” She mentioned in communications “They really just let students run with it. They say ‘we’ll be your editors; we’ll be your proofers but beyond that we believe in what you can do. That’s why we hired you.’” She said that job was “empowering” and went on to describe how her supervisors worked. She said they
basically told her, “write these reports and do these proposals and if you want to do something you have to write up a report.” She went on to say:

They’d look at it and be like “hey this is great and do another.” And it was great.

The job I had I got to use a lot more creativity than I did with classes, than I did with like calculus. There’s not a lot of leeway there. So it was fun and it was nice to have a job that I could use as a creative outlet.

She wasn’t the only one to say she experienced a lot of trust and empowerment from the professional staff at UD. Jessica had that experience with the Office of Multicultural Affairs as well. She described her experience this way:

The thing about OMA is they really it’s not really like staff and faculty over us—like this is how it’s going to go. They just kind of throw you in, and they’re like you know the students, you’re a student. And at first I was so scared. I was like you guys are going to tell us what to do? And they’re like “no,” this is all you. But after you get the hang of it it’s actually really fun. And the students have the freedom to come up with something that students will really connect with. We do have staff and faculty there, but they’re just there um as pretty much a chaperone for policy reasons.

These students expressed a freedom to explore and make mistakes that helped them to feel empowered. Even though it could be “scary” at first, as Jessica said, that trust helped students grow and make their work or leadership more fun.

**Culture of UD is a Bubble**

A term that students used frequently to describe their experience of UD was the UD bubble. There were three main ideas students expressed that seem to define the UD
bubble. First the bubble is contained within the boundaries of campus and includes the culture of the student neighborhood. Second it lacks diversity, and third the practice of bursting the UD bubble is important.

**Boundaries of campus.**

Elizabeth and Jenny both described the bubble in terms of the boundaries of campus. Elizabeth said, “You know how UD is a bubble? You can walk across campus without having to cross the, you know, Dayton streets or anything.” Jenna used the term to describe the neighborhood and how it made her feel safe. She said, “it’s its own little community.”

The student neighborhood is part of the UD bubble as students described it, as well as part of the drinking culture I previously reported. The student neighborhood, which some students referred to as “the ghetto,” consists of the blocks of houses owned by UD that are occupied by upperclassmen. The students spoke of the student neighborhood positively. For example, Ann said:

What’s really cool about our student neighborhood is we have that ability to live together in our community blocks and walk around and go over to the neighbor’s house for a cookout before going to the bars or to a basketball game.

Frank described the student neighborhood as a “unique experience to UD and allows students to bond and live in a way where you’re treated as adults.” He addressed the importance of the porches on the houses saying:

I know it’s been great to be out on your porch and one of your friends just happens to stop over and you can start up a whole conversation. It’s something I think can’t, and won’t be replicated in the real world.
The proximity of the houses and the fact that students were living together in houses was an important part of these students’ positive experiences within the UD bubble and something the students said was unique to UD. Matt put it this way “the fact that I can have people that I know within a football field of me all the time, that’s a big deal.” He said he had been to other schools such as UC and Miami and did not experience anything like the student neighborhood at UD and expressed it was part of what made UD safer. Jenna talked about the student neighborhood being a safe place to walk around. While her perception seemed risky to act on, she said “the fact that I can walk around there at night by myself and know I’m gonna get to my destination completely fine is not something I’ve ever found at any other campuses. So I think it’s just a very safe community.”

**Lacking diversity.**

Many students perceived UD to be a demographically homogenous group. Jon described it as, “we’re all upper middle class or middle class, mostly white kids who all have pretty similar backgrounds and upbringings.” Ronald described the average UD student in a similar way. He said “the average Dayton student looks like a middle-class Midwesterner, who works hard and also knows how to play hard.” Ruth described the demographics in the same way, as “white, upper middle class.” Part of the concept of the bubble includes not only what students perceived to be a lack of diversity in their demographic makeup, but in their behavior. Gertrude defined it as:

The UD bubble is mostly a collection of students doing the same things: classes, work, grabbing food at Panera/Chipotle, walking around the neighborhoods and seeing friends on porches or barging into their houses, causing tomfoolery and fun.
She went on to say this about the bubble “I guess what I see is students interacting with only students, studying, drinking, eating, and Netflix binging.” She and others said the bubble consists of students not going outside of the confines of UD’s campus, or participating in activities that are not directly connected to UD. Ruth said students at UD do not care for integrating with students who are different. She was referring specifically to international students. She said:

It’s not that we don’t have enough programs to integrate, but the students at UD don’t care for integrating. They have these biases and these stereotypes that they’re not willing to look past or to understand why these people, whoever from wherever, act the way they do.

**Bursting UD bubble.**

Many students discussed the importance of going outside the UD bubble. Jenna described one of the downsides of the UD Bubble. She said “People often refer to it as a UD bubble. I think they do their best to, you know, get people out there and get them integrated into the community and trying new things. Sometimes it’s still just very closed off.” Ruth echoed Jenna’s thoughts and said she experienced the bubble as being closed off. She explained it this way:

I think a lot of Americans are way too closed-minded and we live in this bubble that many people don’t get out of. And especially at UD there is definitely a UD bubble that a lot of those kids don’t see past and that’s, that’s hard to deal with. Jenny talked about how the concept of bursting the UD bubble is emphasized but it is especially difficult for first year students to get off campus, thus “bursting the bubble”, with the existing rule that they cannot have a car on campus until their second
year. This led her, in her role as a student coordinator working in the office of new student programs, to create a part of Camp Blue where students learned to use RTA, the public transit system in Dayton. Other students talked about the importance of getting away from campus and exploring the city of Dayton or going abroad. Jenny and Gertrude both pointed out that the city of Dayton has a lot to offer UD students, but in order to experience it you have “to break or burst the UD Bubble.” Jenny put it this way:

Dayton really does have a lot to offer. There are museums that specialized in different issues/topics such as the International Peace Museum. There are bike trails and parks where people can go for a walk or a stroll. There are various restaurants and shops that people can grab something to eat and catch up with friends. There are just so much more out there that I don’t think it’s fair to limit our students within Brown Street, Wayne, Stewart Street, and Irving.

Gertrude talked about how much she valued leaving UD’s campus, using the term “real people” to describe those that were not college students. She said:

I like being out where it’s not as busy I guess. Like out in parks where there’s not as many people running around and it’s just all about classes and all that jazz.

And then going beyond just the campus life. Going beyond just college kids and seeing real people, I like a lot. And seeing people like living their lives. Even when I run through like Oakwood and you’ll see families and little kids and stuff playing.

Bursting the UD bubble could mean getting outside the culture altogether and many students talked about their experiences abroad. Jenna said that UD encourages students to take advantage of those opportunities in a number of ways, one of which is
the sheer number of opportunities students have to leave the country whether through the China institute ETHOS program, campus ministry or other formal study abroad opportunities. She said:

I think one of the things I’ve talked about is all the opportunities. All the other universities have them, but they just make it so accessible here. How many times have we been bombarded with ‘go study abroad in China?’ They just really want their students to do things.

The existence of the bubble can be attributed to the environment created by the boundaries of campus and the student neighborhood. Strange and Banning (2001) posit the following factors contribute to human environments: physical condition and layout, characteristics of the people who inhabit them and “inhabitants’ collective perceptions or constructions of the context and culture of the setting” (p. 5). The fact that 18-22 year-old UD students were all living within the confines of campus—creating a perceived lack of diversity in both demographics and behavior within those boundaries was another contributing factor to the perceived bubble or what Strange and Banning (2008) might refer to as the collective perceptions of the culture. As much as there is a bubble, students articulated the importance of getting beyond that bubble during their time at UD.

**Socially Rooted in Drinking**

Whether students were active participants in drinking and parties in the student neighborhood on Friday and Saturday night or whether they were simply aware of it, many commented on they way the house parties influence the culture of UD. Students ranged in their opinions from drinking being an essential part of the UD experience, and a
positive experience in their time as a student, to something that exists but had little meaning to them, to something they had been involved in but regret.

The students talked about drinking as part of the culture of UD and as something that is ubiquitous and part of all students’ consciousness whether they choose to engage in drinking or not. As Jon described it “I think it’s just the nature of going to a school like this. You hang out with business majors and people who want to party, you’re probably gonna party. Honestly. It’s just what happens.” Ruth mentioned drinking is an inherent part of the UD culture. She said, “being a student at UD has these expectations that you’re gonna go out, you’re gonna enjoy the ghetto, you’re gonna go drink.”

A couple of students, like Jon and Matt, talked about how important drinking is to the sense of community at UD. The way Jon put it “no matter what anybody says, drinking brings people together.” He went on to say:

you hang out with somebody at their house or class or working on a project, you become friends. Kind of. But if you go out and you drink with somebody, you…in vino verde, you share your truths. You’re more of yourself.

Jon said drinking was so important to his experience at UD it was the reason he stayed here. He said:

if it wasn’t a fun place and if I didn’t enjoy it, I would have gone to where my other friends were. I came here alone. So I wanted to make friends and I was able to do that because of the drinking.

Dirk did not bring up the drinking in his interview but did mention how important it is to UD’s culture in his follow up questions. In response to the question “is there
anything you have remembered since your interview that you wish to share about your experience as a student at UD, “Dirk said:

I wouldn’t say that I’ve remembered something additional, it was just a topic I tend to avoid when speaking about my experience about UD because it often gives people the wrong impression of me and our school. UD is an excellent university and I am a diligent student and responsible worker. That being said, partying on the weekends in the Ghetto…student neighborhood to the administration…is a huge part of the UD experience.

Dirk described this as an important time to make friends. He said:

Thursday and Friday nights are packed with parties and people really going all out to have a good time and this is when a lot of friendships that are made through mutual experiences or just those incredibly long, random, or surprisingly deep conversations that are had when two people are drunk.

But other students disagreed. Gertrude mentioned while the parties are “fun, they get old after awhile.” She said “yes. (laughing) it’s the same thing every time so I don’t know why people like to do it constantly.” She described her experience of going out on weekends in this way:

You’ll just drink and then go around to different houses and it’s really fun to see different people, and I like it when I’m going out with different groups and stuff but if I’m going out with the same group over and over again and then the next morning I’m waking up and I’m hung over and I’m like well, I’ve just wasted my morning now.
For some students there was a sense of regret after “going out the night before,” like Gertrude’s statement about having “wasted her morning.” Steve said:

> I lived with guys that are very concerned about drinking and partying and hooking up with girls and that’s about it. I found myself getting caught up in that string and I’ve woken up a couple of mornings like I don’t remember everything from last night. That’s not a good thing.

Besides regret, some students found the culture around drinking to be missing something. Thomas put it this way:

> because the neighborhood is so close to campus, that’s where a lot of underclassmen meet people and that’s a lot of the time where they spend their weekends. And it just got to a point where those friends I would be with…it didn’t seem like there was much of a friendship there. We would be around each other but we wouldn’t intentionally spend time with each other and I wasn’t really finding anything enriching about that.

Ruth expressed a similar feeling after returning from her study abroad experience in China. She had spent most of her time there building relationships with people from other countries that she described as “older” and “more professional.” She had difficulty adjusting. She described the drinking culture overseas as casual. When she described casual, she explained it was going to a pub, having one or two drinks and then, in her words “being home by 11 or 12” at night. She said at UD, “college kids, especially at UD, they really do just like to drink. That’s a social thing we do here and that’s totally okay but you know there’s no casual drinking or anything like that here.” Ruth seemed to be using casual to mean having one or two drinks and being home by midnight and “no
casual drinking” meant having more than two drinks and staying out much later than midnight.

Ruth’s use of the word “casual” is an example of a pattern I noticed in many of the interviews, and that was student’s use of euphemisms in regards to the drinking culture. While two students were candid in talking about parties and some of the experiences they had when they were drunk, and that there were a lot of parties in the student neighborhood on Friday and Saturday nights, they rarely used the word “drunk” or described an experience of “drinking too much.” I wrote in my reflexive journal after one of the interviews “it is interesting to me how many euphemisms we use for describing the drinking culture. Students have been saying “having fun” a lot. I wonder if that is because I am still seen as some kind of authority?”

Jon, who spoke the most candidly about the drinking culture and how much he enjoyed “drinking and partying,” said that he drank too much his sophomore year but did not describe what about his drinking behavior, such as how many drinks or how many nights a week he drank, had a negative impact on his grades. Jon was one of three students who mentioned a negative consequence to his drinking behavior. Steve and Gertrude were the other two with the examples I described early about their regrets from “going out the night before.” Instead of saying “drinking too much,” students said “going out.”

A few students mentioned that you do not have to drink. Some of the students who said this did not drink, and some who said this were active participants in the drinking culture. Ann said “Don’t feel the need to drink if you don’t want to. In my experience people are not gonna pressure you to. You know you want to be sober and go
out and have a good time, do it.” Dirk said there is little pressure to drink, despite its
importance to the campus culture. He said “There is no real judgment on you for
choosing to drink…or not to drink…on any given day or weekend. It’s a very live and let
live feeling.” Matt put it this way, “if you go into someone’s house where there’s a bunch
of drunk people, they’re gonna offer you a beer and if you refuse it that’s fine. No one’s
going to kick you out. No one’s going to chastise you.” While students said “there’s no
pressure to drink,” what I heard was that no one would push you to drink at a party. In
other words, a student might offer a party guest a beer but not say anything more if the
guest refused. When they used the word “pressure,” students seemed to mean
encouraging students to drink after those students had refused.

Students expressed frustration with the University attempts to discourage drinking
and the drinking culture. Ruth, despite her questions about the drinking culture at UD,
said, “I would tell the university, try to just calm down. You need to just let kids be kids.”
Ruth, Jon and Matt all mentioned that drinking on UD’s campus, for the most part, is safe.
Ruth said “a lot of times kids aren’t doing any harm to anyone but themselves. And
sometimes you just have to let them make mistakes and be stupid for them to learn.”

Matt talked a little bit about St. Patrick’s Day and the way the university responds.
He said “people are gonna drink from four in the morning to nine o’clock or so. And
they’re not gonna tear stuff up. It’s just not worth all the fight that the university goes
through every year to control a situation like that.” Matt talked about how the police try
to disperse large crowds in situations like St. Patrick’s day, or after NCAA basketball
games, and said “if you just waited another hour everyone would have done that on their
own.”
Ruth felt the university had generally increased the rules and security unnecessarily. She was particularly frustrated that she had to create a risk management plan for her sorority’s initiation. She said, “it’s very special. It’s like going to be baptized or something. And you have to create a risk management plan. I’m like what’s the risk?” In Ruth’s view, Greek organizations are scrutinized more closely for alcohol violations. She said “I feel like everyone puts the blame on the Greek organizations when it’s really the individuals themselves.”

Matt said that the administration would fail in trying to “force community on freshmen in ways other than drinking.” In his words “what has held the community together is that everyone can do this one thing [drinking] together.” Jon said “everything that makes UD unique is what UD is trying to silence. They’re unique because of the drinking community.”

When students talked about the drinking culture at UD they included the idea that the drinking culture preceded them and will continue long after they are gone, despite efforts from administration to suppress it. Some students expressed assumptions that this is “what everyone does,” whether they were an active part of it or not. Drinking was bound up in the experience of the student neighborhood and community, which I have already discussed.

Culture in the United States

UD’s culture is situated within culture in the United States. Several students revealed their perceptions of culture in the United States from primarily two different perspectives. The two international students and one Puerto Rican student I interviewed discussed what makes the United States different. The other perspective was from the
students who spent time studying abroad and their perceptions of American culture upon returning from their travels.

Ben, a student from Puerto Rico, identified some distinctive characteristics of United States culture. He listed the country music genre, the independent nature of students here, and the emphasis on following rules versus considering context, all three different from Puerto Rico. Ben told a story to illustrate his point about American’s being more focused on the rules and the word he used was “cold.” He was careful to say he didn’t mean to say Americans are cold, they are just not as emotional when it comes to rules. His story was this:

Let’s say I’m driving over the speed limit. Um and a cop stops me so I’m in United States, and cop stops me. If I’m going 10 miles over the limit I’m getting a ticket no questions asked… cause those are the rules. Those are the laws. They don’t get emotional about it. Puerto Rico it’s a little bit more you have a higher probability of being like “oh I’m just going home, I’m so hungry…my day was pretty bad stuff like that. You have a higher chance of them being like a little bit more emotional about it and being like okay I’ll let you off this time.

Ben observed the emphasis on rules versus context applied to the family structure. He said parents in Puerto Rico are more likely to “cover for you” if you make a mistake as opposed to in the states where, in his words “you know they love you and all that but you hit 18 and you’re on your own. You have to start paying your bills and you have to start paying rent.”

Cameron, an international student from France, talked about travel and the environmental waste created by Americans. She said students drive everywhere and she
and her boyfriend are more inclined to walk or ride their bikes. She said, “I felt like I was the only one doing it.” She said her teammates would “make fun of her” for walking everywhere. These students talked about the culture in America through the lens of their experience at UD coming from outside the U.S.

Even American students, in particular those who had studied abroad, spoke about American culture. Ruth said after her experiences studying abroad in Spain and China it was difficult to re-acclimate to American freedom and the attitudes of Americans. She said, “We’re so free. We’re the best. I’m just kind of sick and tired of that ‘cause personally I don’t think America is the best. I think I’ve seen things in Spain and in China that I think they do much better.” Ben talked about reawakening to American culture after returning from Nicaragua. He said in America:

> Things that we take for granted just like switching the switch and we have cold water right there. They didn’t have it yet, I’m pretty sure a lot of the people that I met there were a lot more generally happy than a lot more people than I met in the US.

He went on to say that they “they have to kind of fight every day to have enough money to eat, they seemed happy about their lives, they seemed like relaxed.” He added that experience prompted him to ask some questions about his own life and learn to relax a little more. He described the values in America as making more money and being the best, but as he put it this experience “showed me the importance of enjoying nonmaterial things in life such as family, friendships and relaxing.”

Justice and Jessica both went to Cameroon as part of Campus Ministry’s immersion trips and talked about learning that Americans have a lot of stereotypes about
west Africa and that their experiences helped them see both themselves and America differently. For example, Justice said it was in Africa that:

I was first told that I was an American cause you know in my whole life here I would always call myself an African American, but in Africa I’m actually American so in that situation I’m just like I actually am an American. Why can’t I just call myself actually an American back in America. Because I’m black?

Jessica talked about learning about United States culture and African culture through her time in Cameroon. She said “And it’s like their view of America is we’re rich and powerful and that everybody is living great, and America’s view of Africa is so everybody’s poor. And it was just like, wow, we all got it so wrong.”

Besides the general experience of American culture, current events in the United States played a role in students’ experience. A few students mentioned the race riots that happened in Ferguson, MO, as well as the legalization of same sex marriage by the Supreme Court. Jenna mentioned the importance of dialogue because, in her words “we’re in such a big change in history.” When I asked her what she meant by that she responded “I mean just everything that’s going on with marriage equality and all the things with Caitlyn Jenner and the transgender community and with Black Lives Matter.”

Justice was impacted by the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, MO. She was part of protests with Black Lives Matter. She said in the midst of that people around her were:

5 During the month before I began interviewing, on June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that same sex marriage is a constitutional right, meaning that all existing state bans on same sex marriage were invalid. (Liptak, 2015)

6 Black Lives Matter is an activist movement to protest against violence towards black people. (Liubrand, 2015). According to Liubrand the shooting of Michael Brown by officer Darren Wilson in 2014 sparked the movement.
talking about taking their grandparents KKK clothes out, people were talking about wearing cleats the next day so they could step on us. People were talking about if black lives matter, squirrel lives matter.

Justice mentioned she did not understand why people said “stupid, insensitive, completely ignorant stuff like that.” She went on to say that she felt like this experience was really disrespectful. In her words “This is something very serious and very personal to your peer who’s in your class…it’s just common decency not to go ahead and say stuff about the KKK and stuff like that.” The Michael Brown shooting was a national news event in the United States, but it had implications for Justice’s experience on campus.

Culture and current events in the United States were part of the student’s experience at UD, whether their perspective was one of someone who grew up in the United States or someone who grew up elsewhere. The way students talked about American culture was intertwined with their experience as UD students.

**Research Question Three: What values and ideals of the Catholic and Marianist mission do students’ experiences reflect?**

The final group of themes that I constructed from my data relate to the students’ understanding of themselves and their identity. These themes include growth, respect for differences, vocation and career, faith, and Marianist ideals and principles. In each of these areas students expressed something about what they learned about these values from their experiences at UD and what these values mean to them, answering my third research question: What values and ideals of the Catholic and Marianist mission do students’ experiences reflect? In this section I present the values and ideals that students
identified from their experience at UD. The themes I constructed are subheadings for research question three.

**Growth**

I define growth as a positive change or shift in students’ awareness of themselves, their values and their relationships with others. The process of growth, in other words the time the change or shift occurs, may be uncomfortable or even painful. When growth was described by students retrospectively, the meaning students made was that those growing experiences were positive, and important. Many students talked specifically about growth they experienced while at UD. They attributed that growth to their decision to attend UD as well as to people they met and to experiences they had while at UD. Areas of growth included students’ awareness of themselves and their values. I have already addressed in the sections on challenge and shift in awareness some of the experiences that helped students grow in their understanding of previously held beliefs, values and assumptions and the way they made sense and meaning of those experiences. Those were *specific growth experiences* that challenged a particular area of their life, such as their faith, moral values and identity. Those experiences reflected both a particular experience and a particular time.

This section differs in that it focuses on how students reflected on their *overall growth* during their time at UD. I felt it was important to address under this research question because growth was not only a specific part of students’ lived experience, growth was a value they held. In this section I describe more of the meaning students made from their experiences of growth, rather than just the experiences themselves as I described in the earlier sections.
Students spoke generally about how UD was instrumental in helping them grow into the person they were presently. For example, Dirk talked about the importance of having his beliefs and values questioned. He said:

I have had my beliefs questioned in a way that’s challenged me to think critically. To look at things, to look at my life, who I wanna be, where I’m going, what I believe politically, religiously, ethically, morally. Unless you’re challenged to question those things, not many people do question on their own. And I think that’s helped me grow a lot.

Understanding themselves in a deeper way than they had known before was one of the values of their UD experience and a part of the personal growth of many of the students I talked to. Autumn said:

I’ve always been a strong willed person I think being at UD helped me to embrace my voice and to remember to stay true to the person that I am no matter what happens. I grew a stronger sense of self and embrace my weirdness. I have different likes and interests than many people. UD showed me not only to embrace that, but to show that so the world can see it and be an example for others.

Elizabeth learned more about herself and how focused she can be. She said UD has helped her to relax and “mellow” a lot and have a better sense of the bigger picture, especially when it comes to grades. In her words, “I’m definitely not a math major, so if I get a B in statistics, it’s okay. It’s not the be all, end all.” Ben discussed learning to allow room for errors. He said, “when you try completely new experiences for example being a leader? You know you have to give yourself some you know a good amount of wiggle
room for that.” He said everything isn’t always going to fit into a plan so one has to allow
some space for issues to come up and to make mistakes. Jessica summed it up saying,
that college is more than getting a degree it’s, “really about discovering who you are and
what you’re passionate about.”

In addition to growing in self-awareness, students talked about valuing high
standards of UD and how their involvement helped them to be more prepared for careers
and relationships after college. Susan, Frank and Ruth talked about holding themselves to
a higher standard of behavior and character as a result of their participation in Greek life.
Susan said, “I got involved with my work and my sorority and my major and made life
long friends and connections. I grew up without realizing I grew up because I was just
raising myself to the standards of the university.” Both Ruth and Frank described learning
about being part of something that’s bigger than oneself through Greek life. Frank put it
this way:

That’s been big, just to be more aware of oneself to everything. And then I think
Greek life has also kind of reinforced those ideals—it’s bigger than oneself. You
know one of our sayings is you’re always wearing your letters, so if I say or do
something inappropriate it reflects poorly on the organization.”

Ruth added, “you are part of something much bigger than yourself and you have to
realize it. You can’t be selfish.” Their participation in Greek life helped them to examine
their role as part of a larger organization with its own mission.

Dirk discussed the way being pushed and challenged in his classes translates to
the way he thinks about everything. He said:
I think learning to critically analyze things in a classroom comes from constantly being pushed on my responses. Whenever I volunteer information I’m challenged on it. How did I get there? What evidence do I have to support that? What if this was different or how could a different perspective change what I’m seeing. That constant state of challenge just naturally makes its way into the way you think about everything.

Ronald had a similar experience in his classes with the Chaminade scholars. He said students were engaged in the discussion. He described it as, “when I’m speaking in class, people are listening and it makes you more on your game about what you’re gonna say. You can’t just raise your hand and give some run of the mill response because you know everyone is listening to you and they want to engage you.” Ronald talked about how well prepared he feels as a result of his time at UD. He emphasized this in his last follow up question when he wrote that he wanted to “affirm how lucky I am to have attended UD and how well I think it has prepared me professionally, spiritually, and socially for the next stages of my life.” Being pushed to think critically was another aspect of growth students seemed to value.

Many students described some of the life lessons and skills they learned through leadership opportunities, student organizations and campus employment. For example, Ben said about his job as an admissions tour guide, “This has been a tremendous growing experience since I had to step out of my comfort zone. I am typically timid and introverted so I was challenged in both this aspect of my personality and my English communication skills.” Ruth had a job with Flyer Enterprises, a student-run business on campus, and said “I am now a general manager and this position has taught me so much
about myself and about the leadership qualities I have as well as how our individual contributions and commitment can make or break a business. I love it.” Students were able to translate their specific involvement into lessons and meaning that they can apply in other areas. They were able to see their own growth and express that as a something they valued that they were taking from their time at UD to their future lives.

**Respect for Differences**

Respect was another theme that emerged throughout the interviews. For many students time at UD taught them that people hold different points of view and learning to respect and appreciate those diverse opinions, attitudes, behavior and values. Through experiences such as living with other students, being challenged in the classroom and being in relationships with other students helped them to understand their own way of viewing the world and how important it is to respect others’ views. Students articulated learning to respect differences in a number of different ways.

Matt spoke specifically about the concept of “respect” and said many times that UD is a place that holds this as a value. He described respect in this way:

People treat you with respect in a million ways. They respect your things. People don’t break or steal things from your house. They respect you. When you go anywhere, even people you don’t know generally greet you with a smile. When people come into my house they introduce themselves and shake my hand. People are respectful in the little things. Stand up straight, look them in the eye, smile, shake their hand. People pay attention to that at UD and it goes a long way.
While Matt talked about respect in terms of “the little things” in his words and every day interactions, Ruth talked about the patience and time it takes to build trust and respect, especially in leadership positions. She said:

You have to respect your peers. Especially, that’s the hardest thing to do is respecting them and earning their respect, especially when you’re younger, than the people you’re trying to lead. That’s sometimes frustrating. But a lot of patience too is so important in these kinds of situations and being open to different perspectives and just kind of hearing people out and seeing the other side of the story is very important. Just in life. These are all applicable to life now. Other students talked more about learning to respect and appreciate others’ perspectives, and their story. Ann said:

I think one of the most important things I’ve learned at UD is you have to meet people where they’re at because they come from different places and you don’t know what they’ve been through, and you don’t know where they are at a certain point of their life. Like they could be struggling with something and you just don’t know.

Susan said living with people helped her to realize who she is and how she handles situations. It helped her understand her roommates, and understand when to confront situations and in her words “step back and say ‘you know what?’ This is who they are as a person.”

Understanding that people hold different sets of values and beliefs was important to the growth of many of the students with whom I spoke. I mentioned earlier that many students felt the makeup of the student population at UD was demographically uniform.
A number of them expressed that they learned a lot about how different people are within, what at first seemed to be, a fairly similar group. Jon put it this way’ “we’re all so different. So that’s a bit of an eye opener. If I experience this many personalities here I can only imagine going somewhere else and how different it’s gonna be.” He went on to say how prepared he felt to work with different personalities and that even if he does not like the people he encounters, he expects it will be easier now to work with them.

Susan expressed the importance of understanding people’s differences. She said, “In high school…we were always taught that you’re not supposed to see that people are different. But now, I’ve noticed it’s okay to say I’m different and this person is different.” She offered that the differences she encountered are a good thing that was helpful to her growth. She said, “I’m learning from them and growing because I’m interacting with people that are different. It’s accepting and empowering those differences to do something better and grow as a person.”

Kristina addressed “difference” as well, specifically accepting the diverse membership of her fraternity and what she learned from meeting people who are gay. She explained she knew no gay people in high school and was raised with what she called the “traditional thought or process.” She said, “I didn’t know anybody who was gay and now I know quite a few people who are and it just taught me everybody just wants to be happy and accepted and this is their place for them to do it.”

Learning to understand people’s similarities and differences was an important part of the learning students expressed. Through experiences at UD they came to understand that people from diverse backgrounds, with different values, opinions and identities were striving for many of the same things, such as happiness. Being able to respect and value
other people’s differences played a role in students learning moral values. The teachings of their parents or the church they grew up in may not be as simple as right and wrong.

I wrote earlier that many students voiced experiences that demonstrated they were not treated with respect because they were different, but most of them still mentioned holding respect for difference as a value, and a value they learned from their encounters with difference at UD. It seemed whether students felt they were treated with respect or not, they expressed the importance of treating others with respect and valuing diverse viewpoints. Though the students I interviewed expressed holding respect for diversity as a value, their experiences of being marginalized on the basis of difference indicate the diversity climate at UD is not completely welcoming or inclusive. I discuss more about the diversity climate in chapter five. The students in this study clearly hold respect as a value and expressed they learned this value at UD, but from their experiences it is clear that there is still more work to be done in the area of creating a welcoming climate for diversity at UD.

**Vocation and Career**

The concept of vocation was discussed specifically by those students who were involved in the Chaminade scholars program, and I will say more about what those students mean by that “vocation.” A substantial number of students talked about their careers, what they want to do after graduating from UD, and how those plans shifted or were affirmed by their experiences at UD. I am including that in this section because the way most students talked about UD helping them to identify a career path was linked more with the students’ identity and values than it was with technical, or job-specific, training.
Two students spoke explicitly about “vocation” and those were the students involved in the Chaminade scholars program. Elizabeth and Ronald both talked about what “vocation” meant to them and how it impacted their lives. Ronald defined “vocation” and what it means to him this way:

Based on my understanding of vocation, it is a way to unify all of your interests, passions, and aspirations in a meaningful way that is meant to fulfill a need that is greater than yourself. This has resonated with me because since I started my time at UD, I have had a strong desire to keep up on my faith. Taking the time to deliberately filter my choices through the lens of vocation has allowed me to make decisions with a greater awareness for their consequences, and has allowed me to grow not just in my major, but also as a person of faith who views their daily work as the living out of God’s call to a higher purpose.

He also said:

I now understand vocation to be all encompassing. When I started UD, my notion of vocation was limited to my career and my profession. Now, as I complete the Chaminade Scholars program, I understand that vocation includes each component of my life- my profession, my family, my friends, my interests, my hobbies, my aspirations. Additionally, I understand vocation to be the synergy by which each of these parts of my life work together to make me who I am, in the image of God. Vocation has become a way for me to contemplate who I am as a person, and how it is that I am being the best person that I can be.

Elizabeth said she learned about the concept of vocation through the Chaminade scholars program, and specifically through the class Vocation and the Arts. She said the first day
her professor said, “we’re all artists. Regardless of what your profession it is, it’s an art.” She continued, “I, for one, have never thought about my career or life even in that light, but I think it’s just so cool.” She described vocation as “looking at the big picture.” She said, “looking at the whole masterpiece, rather that just, you know, senior year, is important.”

Ronald was able to apply the concept of vocation to his student employment experience with the honors program. He had a job doing some accounting work and said: It was developing professional skills but it was also for the benefit of the honors program, which was a very cool level for me. Talk about vocation, you know what I mean? So I’m doing this work in accounting, which I’m good at, and I like, but then I see it as a support function for the honors program which is something that’s important to me, and selfishly, for personal reasons but it’s also benefitting all the other students in the honors program, which I thought was great.

A couple of students changed their career paths during their time as UD students as a result of what they were learning and conversations with mentors. Jenny and Susan were both planning to go to graduate school in higher education as a result of their involvement at UD. Jenny, an international student, had been involved with the office of new student programs throughout her time at UD. She told a story about how her mentor, Sarah (pseudonym) helped her identify what she wanted to do through some challenging questions. She said: I was like I want to help people. And Sarah is like that word help. It’s a big word. What do you mean by help? You could be at Kroger bagging people’s stuff and you’re helping them. So what do you mean by help? And I’m like I don’t know. I
just want to help people. I’m good at listening, kind of good at thinking from
different perspectives. I can give them like how they could deal with it. But then
she was like you know you’ve been doing this for 3 years, you’d be really good at
it and you’re an international student so if you want to pursue, explore grad
school, like explore more in the international student population you can totally
do that because you have that perspective coming in.

This conversation led Jenny to explore graduate schools with successful new student and
summer orientation programs. Because of conversations like this and her experience
through her role as a Student Coordinator in the Office of New Student Programs she was
able to narrow down the types of schools to large state institutions, in order to experience
an education different than UD.

Susan came to UD planning to be a teacher. As a senior, however, because of her
experience working in Kennedy Union as well as her leadership experience within her
sorority, she planned to pursue graduate school in higher education. During the summer
between her sophomore and junior years she solidified changing careers. She said:

I was on the selection committee for our new Assistant Director of Greek Life, so
I got to read the resumes, and the applications and go through the interviewing
process. I was the student representative on the committee, so I was involved in
the entire process. And it was the one experience that truly opened my eyes to
what I could do with my future in the program for this and that’s how the people
got the jobs in my office but I also didn’t really think much of it. It was like well I
could do that. I don’t know. I didn’t really understand it I guess. But after reading
the experiences these people have, it was like “no,” that’s what I want to do. I
want to work with these people. I want to do stuff like this and I don’t want to go on and be a teacher.

Susan said it was interesting to hear about the candidates’ experiences and classes but she was not aware that these programs existed at other schools. She said, “I had no clue that students all over the country had this and this is a real possibility.”

Their academic majors affirmed the career choice for some students. They discussed their experiences as valuable to helping them along those paths. Others struggled in their majors, leading them to change their idea of what they would pursue as a career. Autumn, for example, said she was doing poorly in biology so she changed her major to chemistry. She said she did poorly in Chemistry. Her academic advisors talked to her about her strengths in psychology, and suggested she consider careers in that discipline. Autumn said:

my aunt’s going to be upset, they want me to be a doctor and this and that and she’s [academic advisor] like honestly that’s on them. You need to make yourself happy…that’s what it was. It’s like yeah you take care of all of these people but you have to take care of yourself here too.

Autumn said she learned from this experience that she needed to take care of herself more than she had been, and the care of self included in her career choices.

Where Autumn struggled with changing her major because she did not have her parent’s support, Ann’s parents helped her make the change from biology to political science. Ann said:

I was very thankful when I made the switch from biology to political science and human rights and my parents were like you know you need to do what makes you
happy. Think about it realistically. Like you want a job that’s gonna provide an income for you, but they’re like it’s no, there’s no point to you being stuck in a major you’re unhappy with.

She went on to say she was glad she made the change. She said, “with political science and human rights I feel like I’m learning more about the world and what’s out there and um just more modern issues and things I care about.” Students’ majors, in many cases, were not only about studying subjects in which they excelled, but about studying what they cared about and what fit their personalities. Ann said this, “I feel like I’m more where I need to be for my major and my personality and the lens which I look through to see the world.”

A couple of students commented that while they never needed to change majors, the experiences UD provided helped them gain professional experience and learn more about the degrees they were seeking. Both Ruth and Jenna, as education majors, said it was valuable to spend time in classrooms beginning in freshman year. Ruth said she had at least 300 to 400 hours in classrooms. Jenna said “sometimes they [UD] force you into opportunities.” Ruth explained that there is a “big push” for students getting real world experience in their majors. She said “UD does a really good job at making sure people get real world experience in their careers. I think there’s a lot of push for doing co-ops and Flyer Enterprises in general and there’s so many business majors. I mean how awesome is that?” Ruth went on to talk about her own experience in education. She said, “I’ve seen a lot of teachers. I’ve seen a lot of methods. I’ve seen a lot of schools and different populations and that’s been really rewarding.”
Between learning about new career options, meaningful conversations with mentors, and experiential learning, students’ expressed growth in their understanding of career options. The students who were in the Chaminade scholars program were able integrate their understanding of career with their faith and the “big picture” of their lives. All students I interviewed who spoke about vocation and career talked about learning that happened both in the classroom and beyond—whether it was a professor helping them, an experience with a club or organization or some of the experiential learning that was part of their major or program. Ruth said, “even if you don’t do so well in your classes you’re gonna have a great real world experience that could be possibly more meaningful, more educational than you’ll ever get sitting in a classroom.” She went on to say, “it’s something they [UD] push for. For you to go out and experience in the real world and take on and be responsible.” From what the students said, it seemed their understanding of a career path was, at the very least, somewhat integrated into their strengths, values and experience, and for some students, especially those that were part of the Chaminade scholars program, all three were intertwined.

**Faith**

Several students talked about their faith and how they were able to explore and grow in their faith during their time at UD. In some cases, growing in their faith meant asking more questions about the beliefs they had previously held and whether or not they still agreed with their religious tradition’s teachings. I have already discussed the students who experienced challenges to their faith in the “encounter with challenge” section. This section addresses students who expressed experiences of growing in their faith and seeing it as a personal value and a value that UD helped them to explore through their
Some students found new ways of practicing and engaging in their faith while at UD. In other cases, faith was mentioned as a value that carried the students through challenging times.

Autumn talked specifically about experiencing God’s love through her time at UD. She spoke about relying on her faith when times were “tough” and having an experience of prayer in the chapel as a turning point in her time at UD. She said, “I went in there [the chapel] and just sat down and just cried and then things started to change a little bit after that. So it was me being like ‘look God, I don’t know what I’m doing so either you’re gonna show me something or…something’s gonna happen.” She held on to her faith and said prayer was important to her throughout her time at UD. She described her faith in God this way:

I knew God was on my side and would guide me through the rough and good times so I knew I was never alone. As someone who deosn’t like to ask for help, knowing that God knew what I was going through and would help me along the way was comforting and gave me the strength I needed to keep going when times were hard.

Gertrude discussed the importance of going to daily Mass at UD for her faith life and how that become a place of comfort for her. She said:

I originally started going to daily mass because I was confused about my faith life and thought it could be a good way to spend time and try and figure out where I stand with God and the church. After my first or second time, it became a time of comfort, peace, and bliss during stressful days and frantic classes.
For Gertrude and Autumn faith was a way for them to be comforted with different struggles in their lives. Gertrude mentioned the importance of her freedom in choosing to go to Mass. She said “Having the choice to go to Mass has helped me truly begin to say ‘yes’ to God and let Him into my life in ways I hadn’t before.”

Many students talked about the role that campus ministry played in their growth while at UD through retreats and immersion trips, in addition to Mass and prayer. Steve said he found his home in campus ministry and particularly loved leading retreats. He said:

I can’t describe the feeling that I get when I see someone experience the face of God, the loving and tender nature of the good Lord and feel the strength to carry on and thrive in the world because of it. That feeling makes all the pains and hardships of leading so worth it.

Emma talked about her experience leading the New Beginnings retreat for first year students. She gave a witness talk and said she felt like she “was able to send a message” and that it was a “very authentic way of getting to know everybody.”

Thomas learned about leadership through leading the first year retreats. He said “Beforehand I would have never really considered myself a leader, per se.” He went on to say about leading the retreats, “I really enjoyed a position like that, and through my own growth and my faith, trying to enrich others people’s faith.”

Both Steve and Thomas participated in immersion trips through campus ministry and described God as part of that experience. Thomas told a story about his time in Zambia. He said:
My trip to Zambia. That for sure was like a big God moment and seeing Him in like a completely different world and like a completely different area, and in these people, and being able to celebrate a faith with people halfway around the world.

Steve talked about how the UDSAP program spring-boarded his own faith life. He said prior to that he had the mindset that he can “become faithful when I’m 40. I can get my faith when I get out of college or when I get a family or when I get all settled down.” He said everything changed for him when his UDSAP community drove 4.5 hours to attend the funeral of his “grandpa” less than two weeks into the nine-week program. He said, “in that moment it clicked for me.” What clicked, he said, was “you’re exactly where you’re supposed to be right now, Steve, don’t ever doubt that you’re not.” He went on to say these “absolutely incredible people…. they’ve put their whole hearts out there for you already.” He said in that moment, “My eyes sort of opened up to be down there and present in Kentucky.” He described those nine weeks as a “faith filled, growing experience.”

Ruth and Steve both mentioned faith in terms of relationships with other people. Ruth talked about the importance of praying in community. She did this in her Marianist student community and mentioned they prayed in a lot of different ways. She said:

We do some meditation, we do art prayer, we do lots of reflecting on videos and doing journals and talking openly and a lot of times we just talk about highs and lows for the week so it was just kind of prayer in being together in community.

Steve mentioned how important his faith was to his relationships. He said “I hate it when I’m not able to talk about my faith with people. I’ve suddenly realized some of the most important relationships in my life are ones I can talk about my faith with.”
The theme of faith came up for a number of students in a number of different ways. For some of them it was questioning their faith, as I discussed earlier. For others, faith was experiences of practicing and growing in their faith in a variety of different ways while at UD.

**Marianist Principles and Ideals**

Many students mentioned their direct experiences with the Marianist Charism or what they understood were Marianist principles and ideals of UD. Marianist values and principles are discussed throughout this chapter and include themes such as community, respect for difference, and a culture where education happens both in and outside the classroom. I discuss how students’ experiences are consistent with Marianist values and principles in chapter five. In this section I address where students themselves made explicit connections to what they understood to be Marianist principles and ideals. Students encountered these principles in a few primary areas including Lay Marianist formation, Marianist Student Communities, and from being around the Marianists themselves.

Ann talked explicitly about what she has learned about the Marianists while at UD. She talked especially about her experience in lay Marianist formation in which her lay formation community spent time with different Marianist readings, speaking with some of the Marianist vowed religious. Ann identified some of what she learned about Mary from the Marianists. She said:

What I’ve learned from my time here and from lay Marianists is that we look to her [Mary] because she always points to God. So by following her example of
constantly saying yes to what God has, or what God has for her then we can constantly say yes to what God has planned for our lives

Thomas said, “one of the biggest things I will take from UD is a devotion to Mary.”

Some of the students identified other values they link to the Catholic and Marianist identity. Those values include hospitality, inclusivity and vocation. Both Thomas and Elizabeth talked about “inclusivity” as something they experienced in conjunction with the Marianists. Elizabeth described it as “being able to be yourself.” She went on to say “I think the cool thing with inclusivity…you can practice your faith however you want on this campus.” Ben said that UD is a place where you “can practice your faith but it’s not forced upon you.” While Elizabeth described Marianist values as being able to be yourself and both Ben and Elizabeth mentioned the freedom to practice your faith however you want, Emma described it as a “value on the person” and the “relationship with the person.” She said, “faith should support and encourage—Marianists model that.”

Ruth and Thomas described inclusivity through the way they lived in Marianist student communities. Thomas said it was being “inclusive to our neighbors and friends and just being very inviting of them.” He specifically described inviting neighbors to the house for Mass on Monday nights and how they would have 10 or 15 friends celebrate Mass with their community. Ruth said the whole point of Marianist student communities was to spread the lifestyle of getting to know one another through eating and praying together throughout campus. She said her community tried to be “welcoming of all of our neighbors.”
A couple of students described what they learned from the vowed religious living on the UD campus. Frank has a relationship with one of the Marianists though his fraternity. One of the Marianist brothers is also a fraternity brother. Frank described the Marianists he’s interacted with as “wonderful” and offered the example of one of the Marianist brothers “watching out for his car for a week” while he was in Daytona, Florida. Thomas gave several examples of the friendliness of the vowed religious on campus and participated in a Marianist live-in, where he spent a week living with the brothers in one of the Marianist communities on campus. He said:

This experience stands out as a moment when I looked to the Marianist Brothers as mentors and friends. They formed me by their humble example of faith and prayer. Yet they also showed me how to be active and involved in the community

A few students talked about the Marianist identity explicitly, and those students who did had encounters with ideas, experiences and people they identified as distinctly Marianist. These students had some consistent things to say about what those Marianist principles were, whether it was inclusivity or the importance of Mary to the Catholic Faith. Frank and Thomas mentioned that they valued the Marianists living in the student neighborhood. The other themes, I constructed, however, illustrate that even when students did not connect the words “Catholic” and “Marianist” to their experience, the themes I constructed from the data highlight explicitly Catholic and Marianist values. I discuss the connections between the themes and the Catholic and Marianist mission of UD more in chapter five.
Summary

Throughout this chapter I have discussed the themes I constructed through my data analysis process to make sense of the phenomena of the lived experience of the Catholic and Marianist culture from the students’ perspectives. I have provided general overviews of the themes related to each research question, as well as quotes from students’ transcripts to support those themes. Every theme I constructed is supported by data from more than one of the students.

Figure 5 illustrates the findings that relate to research question one: what is the lived experience of students within the Catholic and Marianist Culture of UD? Students’ experience begins with how they understand themselves and the culture at UD. Students either experienced a positive transition to UD or a difficult transition that involved a lot of struggle. If students did not encounter challenges immediately, they did so later, either later in their first year or their sophomore or junior year. The students encounter with struggle led them to an important shift in their awareness and understanding of themselves. This shift was followed by students’ attempts to find a sense of belonging and fit at UD with other students who shared their values. Finally, students’ understanding of their experience and the lessons they learned through their advice to future students at UD.

The themes within the phenomenon of students’ perception of culture addressed my second research question: How do students understand the Catholic and Marianist culture and what experiences most shape their understanding? To students, UD is built on the phenomenon of community, it is based in co-curricular involvement, it is empowering
of students, the culture is a bubble that must be burst, it is socially rooted in drinking and bound within the culture of the United States.

The deepest level of meaning students expressed was the meaning around their understanding of themselves and their identity. The themes in this section address my third research question: What values and ideals of the Catholic and Marianist mission do students’ experiences reflect? Those values are embodied in growth, respect for difference, vocation and career, faith and Marianist ideals and principles.

In the next chapter I discuss the conclusions based on these findings, the implications of this research for the University of Dayton, discussion of the findings and their connection to the existing literature, as well as suggestions for further areas of study. Through these findings I am able to conclude that students have a need for belonging and fitting in while at UD that shapes their experience. They grow in multiple dimensions of their lives while they are at UD and the Marianist mission is a vibrant influence on students’ experience. I discuss more about these conclusions and the meaning I made from all of the findings in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The University of Dayton is a mission driven institution and described in its own mission as “a comprehensive Catholic university, a diverse community committed, in the Marianist tradition, to educating the whole person and to linking learning and scholarship with leadership and service” (University of Dayton, 2011). This study offers insight into the collective students’ experience of that mission. In this chapter I present the conclusions, implications and discussion of this study. My findings reveal the meaning one group of 23 students (in the summer of 2015) made of their experience of the Catholic and Marianist culture at UD. This study offers insight into the complexity of students’ experience, the need for students to “fit in” and find a community within UD that shares their values, and the pain students endure when they feel marginalized and isolated. My findings reveal both how and where Catholic and Marianist values are present in students’ experience, and where students’ experiences are inconsistent with the values of UD’s mission. This study, therefore, offers University of Dayton administrators, faculty, and staff an understanding of the students’ experiences of the culture at UD, and insight into the behaviors and practices that most impact students’ experiences.

This is my own interpretation of the data and my perspective is that of an insider to the culture at UD an outsider to the lives of UD students. Other researchers may come
to different conclusions from the data. The findings, the themes I present and the questions are all affected by my positionality as a researcher. I discuss some of the conclusions based on the all of findings of this study expressed in chapter four, as well as potential implications for practice.

In the discussion section of this chapter I discuss the ways in which the students’ experience at UD is consistent with the literature, including student development theory, theories of organizational and campus culture, and the ways in which culture is learned and experienced. I discuss two areas from the findings, the drinking culture at UD and the perceived lack of diversity, as important challenges students face and areas of cultural tension. Finally, I share my own experience of conducting this research including what surprised me and what I would do differently in future studies. I identify some areas for further research at the end of this chapter. The next section is dedicated to conclusions I was able to draw from the findings in Chapter Four.

Conclusions

Institutional Mission Influences the Culture at UD

The first conclusion is Catholic and Marianist Mission of UD is alive and vibrant in the culture at UD. I constructed the following themes: development of the whole person, importance of community, an awareness of vocation, growth in their faith, and an awareness of Marianist ideals. Several students commented on the importance of each of these ideals in their education, and did so with rich descriptions and stories that illustrated their importance. While the mission is alive and vibrant, there are also some areas of UD’s mission that are not manifested in ways consistent with how the mission is described. I discuss those more in the sections describing the challenges of the lack of
diversity and the drinking culture. Here I briefly address where those challenges are inconsistent with the literature about the Marianist mission at UD. I also discuss how service and justice may not be fully realized in the experiences of the students’ I interviewed.

The values expressed in the themes: development of the whole person, importance of community, an awareness of vocation, growth in their faith, and an awareness of Marianist ideals are all consistent with the literature about the Marianist mission at UD. Giardino (2011) emphasizes the importance of sustaining Marianist communities. He writes Marianist communities should be attractive. He articulates “communities must be desirable or well run; they must be able to attract, to draw in” (p. 42). The findings from my study support that UD is an attractive community. Students’ discussion of their campus visits leading them to want to attend UD, and the good experiences they have had in the context of community through their experience of hospitality and warmth of welcome are evidence that the community at UD both “attracts and draws in” and is “desirable or well run” (p. 42). Community is the value mentioned under educate in a family spirit, in the Characteristics of Marianist Universities (Chaminade University of Honolulu, St. Mary's University, University of Dayton, 2014) and one of the five manifestations of the charism of the Society of Mary (Giardino, 2011).

The Characteristics of Marianist Universities outlines five distinct elements of Marianist educational philosophy mentioned earlier: education for formation in faith, excellent education, education in the family spirit, education for service, justice and peace, and education for adaptation and change (Chaminade University of Honolulu, St. Mary's University, University of Dayton, 2014). The findings show that all of these five
characteristics were evident in the student experience. Both education for service, justice, and peace, and formation in faith were identified explicitly in students’ comments. For example, two themes revealed students’ formation in faith. The first theme identifies challenges to students’ beliefs about their religion and the way a classmate’s death prompted many students to question their faith. The second theme about faith, under research question three, describes the importance of faith and its role in students’ experiences at UD through communal prayer, living in Marianist Student Communities and their participation in Campus Ministry programs such as retreats and cultural immersions. Education for formation in faith was a clearly articulated part of the students’ experience at UD.

Service and justice were identified as important elements of student experience however this was addressed by students from the perspective of how encounters with service shaped their understanding of themselves, and their viewpoints on issues that impact social justice, but was not necessarily expressed as important work to continue outside of UD. Students described their experiences of service in Dayton City Schools, through the UD Summer Appalachia program, through immersion trips and through clubs and organizations. Students mentioned participating in service as something they both enjoyed and valued during their time at UD.

In addition to service, a couple of students talked about the importance of advocating for justice. Those students mentioned the importance of advocating for racial equality through activism whether in their own communities, or through their career but they also expressed that they were not quite sure how to advocate for justice, or to speak out against racism despite the fact they were witnessing it. In fact, those students
mentioned they did not feel safe to talk about those justice issues with fellow classmates. It was evident that service and justice were part of the experiences of UD students, but they described the value of service activities in terms of what they learned about themselves through engaging in service, particularly in other cultures. The data did not show that students held engaging in service, justice and peace as a lifelong value or that students were equipped to engage in community service, and activism for justice beyond UD.

An integral quality education and education for adaptation and change were evident in the data. Students repeatedly mentioned how prepared they felt for their careers and how much they learned in their classes mentioning both skills, such as computer programming or accounting or teaching methods, as well as the ability to think critically. The Core program helped students make connections between history, philosophy, religion and English. Students also expressed learning beyond the classroom, through their clubs and organizations, living in student housing and among their classmates and through student employment experiences. These are evidence of an “integral quality education.”

“Education for adaptation and change” in the Characteristics of Marianist Universities document emphasizes, “If the world of the future is to be more peaceful than the 20th century was, we must learn how to appreciate cultural differences and work with people very unlike ourselves” (Chaminade University of Honolulu, St. Mary's University, University of Dayton, 2014, p. 27). One of the key themes I constructed was “respect for one another.” Students discussed learning to work and live with different people, and encounters with other cultures that taught them how to appreciate and respect difference.
One of the learnings students mentioned as a result of their experience at UD is to be more open to people from different backgrounds because as they said “everyone is just trying to be happy.” While many students did express an expanded understanding of diversity, and an appreciation for different cultural backgrounds, the racial climate at UD does not reflect a fully integrated appreciation of difference in students’ experience. Microagressions and feelings of being marginalized on the basis of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, even willingness to participate in the drinking culture, are all evidence of a need for more appreciation of cultural differences from students, faculty and staff.

I have chosen the Characteristics of Marianist Universities (Chaminade University of Honolulu, St. Mary's University, University of Dayton, 2014) as the document that provides framework for what is distinct about a Marianist education. It is written in the introduction that the “purpose of the document is to articulate the common elements of Marainist educational philosophy and spirit” (Chaminade University of Honolulu, St. Mary's University, University of Dayton, 2014, p. 5). The values and meaning students expressed reflect the Marianist spirit and philosophy that is articulated in these characteristics, but not always to the extent that this document and others describe them.

**Student’s Need to “Fit In” is a Driving Force in their Experience**

In chapter four I illustrated the pattern of students’ experience through Figure 5. Figure 5 represents the trajectory of experience of the 23 students I interviewed. The driving force behind that trajectory, and the motivation that shaped their experience is the students’ desire to “fit in.” Students came to UD looking for people that seem like them, that shared their values and that were looking for the same things from their college
experience. When the students I interviewed made the decision to attend UD they did so, most of the time, based on whether or not they felt they would “fit in” in UD’s environment. There were only a few students who made the decision to attend UD for other reasons, and those cases were related to scholarships, both academic and athletic.

From their campus visit through graduation, students expressed the importance of finding other students who shared their values. They found like-minded friends through Greek life, study abroad, clubs and organizations, in their classes, and in their residence halls. When the students I interviewed struggled the most it was when they felt isolated from other groups. The few students who chose to attend UD for reasons other than their perceived sense of fit, encountered these struggles beginning in their first year. Most of the other students I interviewed felt a sense of belonging and fit, right away in their time at UD. Even when faced with a painful and difficult time in their first year, such as the loss of their classmate, those students expressed how important it was to have a community of support made up of both other students and faculty and staff and expressed they had found that community. To this group of students with whom I spoke, it seemed that challenges and difficulties were surmountable when there was a group of people to support them through it.

Whether students felt they fit in from the moment they began their first year, or felt isolated during their first year, all of the students I interviewed faced a time when they felt isolated or different from the community at some point in their experience. I identified these times as a source of struggle. Every student I interviewed encountered some experience that forced them to reexamine their values, their identity, or their relationships. Most often, students faced these challenges in their sophomore or junior
year and they expressed these times of evaluation in a variety of ways that included being challenged to think critically in a class, learning about another culture through study abroad, waking up with regret after a night of drinking, feeling empty or lonely and falling behind in their courses.

These struggles were times where students I interviewed expressed they felt isolated from the communities they had formed early on, because the values they held and that they shared with those communities had changed. For these students, this was a critical juncture in their growth. In many cases, they had to make sense of what had changed in themselves and make decisions about the people with whom they needed to be involved to support their new understanding of their identities. This often meant not “fitting in” for awhile, and the students I interviewed referred to these times as hard and difficult, and times when they did not feel understood or supported.

Though this time of not “fitting in” in students’ experience was difficult, they also expressed it as a time when they learned a lot about themselves and others. The students in this study learned how to manage priorities, what values were important to them and how to make decisions that were in line with who they viewed themselves to me. Eventually, through the influence of friends, mentors, professors and supervisors the students in this study were able to make meaning of their challenges and find new groups, or niches, where they felt like they belonged. I conclude that students’ understanding of themselves and their values changed while they were at UD. As the students grew and changed they needed to find a group of people, a niche, or small community, that supported that growth and change. In other words, students’ need to fit in was the motivation for coming to UD, and a source of struggle when they were unable to achieve.
The students’ perception of what “fitting in” meant, changed through their trajectory of experience but was nevertheless a value they held their entire time at UD.

**UD’s Culture is Perceived as a Bubble**

Students see UD’s culture as a bubble, or a culture apart from other cultures. UD’s “bubble” consisted of several cultural elements. The bubble was defined by the boundaries of campus. The bubble surrounded homogenous demographics and by cultural attitudes and beliefs of students in the community who had not yet “burst” the bubble.

It seemed this bubble served a purpose for some students I interviewed. The boundaries of campus and the fact that students perceived they were surrounded by only other UD students made them feel safe and protected. They commented on the proximity of neighbors creating a friendly atmosphere, and a culture of “Flyers looking out for other Flyers.” This protection happened within the confines of the “bubble.” And yet they mentioned how important it was to get outside this bubble, whether through study abroad, going to events in the city of Dayton, or using the city of Dayton bus system to get off campus. From what they said, I concluded important learning happened outside of UD’s bubble. The students indicated they saw the bubble differently after spending time outside of it and they valued those new perspectives.

While students talked about the importance of “bursting the bubble” and that campus life was, perhaps, sheltered from the rest of the world, they discussed the influence of events outside the bubble including the supreme court ruling on same sex marriage and the race riots in Ferguson, Missouri. Those events shaped the behavior and perspectives of other students. For example, the supreme court ruling on same sex
marriage led students to have conversations with other students about LGBT issues and learn different perspectives from those discussions. The racial disturbance in Ferguson, Missouri exposed points different points of view in courses, and on social media, some that marginalized the African American students I spoke to.

Despite students’ repeated use of the word “bubble,” the metaphor is fragile, much like a real bubble. From the way students described the bubble, and the emphasis they placed on bursting the bubble, it seems to me that students have a need to put boundaries around the culture and physical environment of UD. The students I spoke with seemed to have a desire to set it apart from both other campuses and the “real world.” However, given the influence of national events on UD’s culture and the ease with with the “bubble” can be burst (for example, just walking through the neighboring suburb of Oakwood) it seems the boundaries are permeable. Perhaps the “bubble” of UD is as transparent and delicate as the walls of a real bubble.

From the way students described the culture at UD, I can conclude that the metaphor of a bubble is a fitting one, in that there are some distinct elements of that culture that distinguish it from neighboring communities and other campuses including the student neighborhood, the demographics of the student population and some of the hospitality students expressed occurs in the student neighborhood. However, from the evidence, I can also conclude that the boundaries are not quite as firm as students may have initially expressed. The bubble seems to be easily burst by students traveling abroad, doing service within the city and exploring the city of Dayton. It is also susceptible to outside influences such as the economy, and the racial and political climate in the United
States. The bubble metaphor fits the evidence in that it expressed boundaries that are easily permeated.

**Implications**

The purpose of this study was to offer understanding and insight into the meaning 23 students make of their lived history within the UD culture. This insight is needed because in an increasingly competitive market for higher education it is becoming more and more important that universities be able to articulate what makes them distinct—not only to recruit a sufficient number of students to maintain financial viability, but to fulfill their mission and attract students who can benefit from the unique offerings of a particular institution. This increased insight to students’ experience at UD offers understanding that could potentially help faculty, staff and administrators accomplish three things. First, this study offers insight that might help faculty, staff and administrators shape educational practices to better meet the goals the University of Dayton set for itself. Second, is to communicate the learning and growth that UD students experience to external accrediting bodies. The third is communicating the distinct value of a UD education to prospective students and their families as well as alumni and donors.

**Shaping Educational Practice**

Heft (1997) writes “practices engaged in by faculty and students leave lasting effects” (p. 30). Later he remarks that the old adage “practice what you preach,” becomes reversed because we “end up preaching what we practice” (p. 30). If UD’s mission is the central philosophy guiding our practice, then it is critical to evaluate if that practice is actually being lived out, as well as understand that practices can shape the philosophy,
especially if left unchecked. Heft argues that practices become habits and those habits have great potential to shape learning. The more faculty, staff and students are aware of the distinct mission of UD and how it is understood by students, the better the values of the mission can be applied to practice. This can be achieved by building on the programs that are already successful, identifying best practices and integrating the successful practices into new events and programs, or programs that do not yet fully integrate the values of the mission.

In chapter four I illustrated some of the ways in which students understand UD’s mission and culture and the ways that they learn. By the examples they gave, it was clear their understanding was shaped not by what they were told, but what they saw and experienced. For example, students mentioned over and over that they were sick of hearing the word “community.” They used phrases like “community was shoved down our throats,” especially during their first year. Yet, community was a word they embraced and used themselves because they found their own meaning from their experience of it with other students on campus. The meaning of community to students was not shaped by the institution’s message, but by the experiences they had of it in their residence halls, in clubs and organizations and by the welcoming culture of the student neighborhood.

Heft (1997) argues educators “need to be attentive not just to what their students think but how they act” (p. 30). He goes on to write this means paying attention to rituals, examples and practices. If we want to educate the whole person of a student then we must pay equal attention to the whole person of the faculty. UD has many resources describing its educational mission and philosophy including the Common Themes in the Mission and Identity of the University of Dayton (University of Dayton, 2013), Commitment to
Community (University of Dayton, 2011), and The Habits of Inquiry and Reflection: A Report on Education in the Catholic and Marianist Traditions at the University of Dayton (Marianist Education Working Group, 2006). Heft (1997) asserts that the theological vision or mission should determine the mission, but the practices are what make the mission visible. This study provides insight into what practices are guiding the message students receive about the culture at UD and the meaning they make at this message. For example, student’s experiences with diversity through study abroad, immersion trips, service opportunities or classes had a profound and lasting impact on their appreciation for diversity, as well as shaped their commitment to advocating for service, justice and an inclusive campus culture. This knowledge could help shape the way we design learning, and what emphasis we place on those experiences for UD students. Another example is empowering students who are leaders in clubs or organizations to make decisions and learn from their leadership experience. Students expressed lessons they learned about balance, managing conflict and communicating policies to members of their organizations from their leadership experience.

Wilcox (2013) writes that part of the purpose of mission in Catholic Higher education is maintaining the integrity of the Catholic identity and the “religious heritage of the founding congregation” (p. 20), in UD’s case, the Marianists. According to Wilcox, in order to preserve the institutional mission, the university needs a commitment from a significant number of faculty, staff and administrators as well as the mission to be embedded within the institutional structure. This information offers University of Dayton leadership feedback that will be helpful in shaping practices, and perhaps organizational structure, in the future to ensure the actions and example of faculty and staff are in line
with the institutional values and mission. From the data, it is clear that designed experiential learning and the behavior modeled by faculty, staff and other students, communicates UD’s mission more than words either written or spoken.

**Communicating Students’ Learning and Growth Externally**

Higher education in the United States is becoming increasingly more competitive and costly. Understanding how an institution’s mission impacts the student experience is critical to the University of Dayton distinguishing itself among other schools. Catholic Higher Education does have something distinct to offer. As Heft (2010) writes “Absent a vibrant Catholic intellectual tradition, the forces of the market economy may well overwhelm our colleges and universities, reducing them to training grounds that produce students who fit seamlessly into seriously flawed corporate or government institutions” (p. 13). It is clear from UD’s own documents that UD’s mission is to develop students beyond career training. One of the primary goals of UD, in addition to research, teaching and service, is critical evaluation of society. Students articulated that they learned to think more critically about our society; in their trajectory they experienced shifts in understanding that led them to question their previously held assumptions and beliefs about everything from faith, to politics, to other cultures. Students I interviewed also expressed learning to question what they were told about other people and other cultures, and learning what ways they might best serve society through their careers. The critical thinking and evaluation of society is one example of how the experience of a University of Dayton education, for the students I interviewed, elevates UD beyond what Heft calls “training grounds” (p. 13).
In chapter one, I noted that the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (2003) asks universities to identify what students are learning, if it is the right kind of learning and what difference the institution is making in their lives. This study answers some of those questions in that it identifies the difference the University of Dayton is making in the lives of one group of students in 2015 and what kind of learning is taking place. Students articulated learning about themselves, their values and how to treat others and identified specific ways in which they learned and grew. The themes around this learning included the ways in which they expressed preparedness for careers and finding the right careers for their passions and interests, growth in their awareness to think critically, an increased respect for others through appreciation of diversity, and growth in understanding of their faith. This study offers empirical evidence of learning that is taking place at the University of Dayton and might be useful to administrators and faculty in articulating the learning that happens at UD to external accrediting bodies.

Communicating the Value of Education at UD

Wilcox, Lindholm and Wilcox (2013) write that beliefs and assumptions in a Catholic university are not necessarily articulated and can be taken for granted. The authors compare the culture to wallpaper, “creating an environment but unseen to the eye” (p. 108). In order to communicate what is valuable and distinct about a culture it needs to be articulated.

I mentioned earlier that the landscape of higher education is becoming increasingly costly and more competitive, and I described the Catholic and Marianist tradition is visible in students’ experiences. The education UD provides is distinct and the Catholic and Marianist spirit shapes the culture. Students expressed their encounters with
it on their campus visits, but do prospective students, parents and even alumni understand what is unique and valuable about a UD education without visiting? This study provides stories, themes and evidence that offer a way of articulating the culture and what is distinct about a Marianist education. This information could be used in communication with prospective students and families as they search for school in this increasingly competitive market. It can be used with potential donors to demonstrate the impact of the programs, and experiences students are having. Beyond recruiting students and donations, clearly articulating the culture and what makes UD distinct has the potential to help attract the faculty, staff and students who will thrive in this environment and contribute to the mission.

Discussion

Consistencies with Literature

Several categories that emerged in the findings were consistent with the literature. My findings reinforce ecology and stage models of student development, as well as the literature on student culture and how it is perpetuated. The theories about student development and culture are useful in describing some of the experience of UD students.

Student development theory.

In chapter two, I discussed Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) model of the influences on student development and Renn and Arnold’s (2003) illustration of that model represented in Figure 1. The model places the student at the center of concentric circles of influence. Those closest to the student include classes, friendship groups and jobs. The next ring of influence moving outward includes parents, faculty, federal policy and institutional
policy makers. Finally, the last ring includes social forces, historical trends and events, and cultural expectations.

The findings revealed that UD students are affected by each of those rings, though it seems that outer ring, of social forces and cultural expectations has more influence in today’s student than it might have when Bronfenbrenner (1993) developed the model. For example, many students mentioned the current events related to the racial climate in the United States and the changing policies in regards to same sex marriage. These events influenced the conversations the students had at UD, their perception of UD’s culture, and their own values and beliefs. In my observation, technology has changed in the last twenty years or so since the model was developed and part of that change is making national news more accessible to college students through social media, on-line news sources, television, and smart phones.

Though current events may be closer to students’ experience and development than Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) model indicates, what is consistent with my own findings from his model is that all of the areas he identified do influence students’ development and they do so in the way that Renn and Reason (2013) described when they applied Bronfenbrenner’s model to a post secondary environment. Renn and Reason posit peer culture is one of the most influential systems in students’ learning and development. Microsystems, in other words students friend groups, roommates, classes, and jobs, are all embedded within the mesosystem of peer culture. Renn and Reason write that within a mesosystem, these microsystems might contradict or reinforce one another. In this study students’ discussed roommates, jobs, co-curriculars, and friend groups as having the most direct influence on their experience. Students ran into struggles when some of these
groups came into conflict with one another. For example, a student studied abroad, an experience which would fall into the category of microsystem, and upon returning home felt a sense of isolation from friends or roommates, a microsystem, when they did not understand that student’s experience.

Renn and Reason (2013) argue Bronfenbrenner’s ecology model of development is useful because it describes how development occurs within a particular culture and does not focus on outcomes. Without using the language of mesosystem and microsystem, etc., students clearly articulated the influences of the different systems in this model, even using some of the examples that Renn and Arnold (2003) illustrated such as institutional policy (AVIATE, policies around drinking at UD), classes, friendship groups, parents, cultural expectations and historical trends and events.

Bronfenbrenner (1993), Renn and Reason (2013) and Renn and Arnold (2003) present an ecology model of development consistent with the experience of the students I interviewed. The other model of development that I discovered lines up well with the findings of this study are the stage models of development that Baxter Magolda and Kegan discuss.

First of all, students did indicate that their development was holistic as authors like Bowen (1996), Kegan (1994) and Renn and Reason (2013) claim. Students’ cognitive and moral development impacted inter and intrapersonal development and vice versa. For example, students mentioned a number of times that their encounter with people who were different than they were, whether it was Kristina and her experience in her service fraternity, or Emma when she studied abroad, forced them to rethink their own values and beliefs. Values and beliefs fall under the category of intrapersonal
development. Another example is Dirk, who mentioned learning to think critically in class helped him to think more critically about how he understood some of his relationships.

The students I interviewed indicated that their development at UD was not only holistic, it seemed to occur in stages. Baxter Magolda (2001) claims there are four stages of development that most students experience in college. I reference these four stages in chapter two and they are absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing. The stage of absolute knowing, Baxter Magolda argues, is the stage most first year students are in and the stage in which students believe knowledge and truth are certain and knowledge and truth are held by figures in authority such as teachers or parents. The students I interviewed talked about this phase retrospectively. They said things like “the beliefs I was raised with” or “I grew up thinking…” to refer to a time when they believed in only one truth or point of view. Students only referenced this point when they understood truth and meaning in a more complex way.

The next phase in Baxter Magolda’s (2001) model is transitional knowing. She describes that phase as one where assumptions are that some knowledge is certain and some is uncertain. For some students, subject matter knowledge such as in mathematics, or hard sciences may be assumed to be certain while religious beliefs may not. Several students indicated they questioned some knowledge especially after important events including the death of their classmate, study abroad, service experiences and challenging courses. Dirk, for example, questioned his religious beliefs after the death of his classmate and after talking with a roommate who was also questioning the truth of his religion. Eighty percent of seniors in Baxter Magolda’s study were in this phase of
knowing. I interviewed mostly rising seniors. I found their questions and their ideas to be largely consistent with this phase of knowing.

The third phase in development that Baxter Magolda (2001) describes is independent knowing, where truth and knowledge are largely uncertain. There was only one student I interviewed who expressed questions and ideas that correspond with this phase of knowing and that was Emma. She identified her questioning of all truth. She said “it’s better to just know that you don’t know.”

The students I interviewed experienced stages of development and aligned with the models and the experiences presented in the literature, specifically the shift from absolute knowing to transitional knowing that Baxter Magolda (2001) describes. The students’ description of their own growth over time was holistic and seemed to occur in phases or stages. My findings reinforce the existing research on college student development, as well as underscore the usefulness of student development theory for understanding the experience of UD students.

**Campus ecology.**

Strange and Banning (2001) write about the importance of a campus environment shaping the culture and assert campus design should have four major goals, safety, involvement, inclusion and community building. Students discussed the landscape and boundaries of UD’s campus making them feel safe.

The most influential component of UD’s campus design in students’ experience of the culture, though, was the student neighborhood. Students mentioned many times the importance of the student neighborhood or “ghetto” as they referred to it, to their experience of community on campus. They referenced the importance of the proximity of
other students, and the fact that the houses have porches. The porches were important for casual encounters. Students indicated the porches communicated a sense freedom in visiting their neighbors, and a student could sit on his or her porch and other students would just stop by and strike up a conversation. Strange and Banning (2001) argue spaces that promote involvement are spaces where students can easily gather. The porches on the houses in the student neighborhood, as well as the fact that houses on each block in the student neighborhood are all occupied by UD students, creates an environment where students can easily gather.

The student neighborhood and porches seem to play a role in the drinking culture. Two students, Jon and Matt, were explicit about what that looks like in the neighborhood: groups of students walking around on Friday and Saturday nights, or in some cases during the day time on the weekends and being invited into one another’s houses and freely offered beer. Matt alluded to the fact that much drinking takes place outside on warm days. Students mentioned how many times they felt safe within the confines of the student neighborhood and I wonder if that is a reason the drinking and parties are so prevalent. Matt mentioned it is more dangerous to walk back from a bar or house parties at other universities because you have to go through unsafe neighborhoods that do not all consist of that university’s students. Everyone living in such close proximity to one another, the number of parties and the fact that drinking happens so publicly (outside of houses and on porches) may contribute students’ perceptions that everyone participates in the drinking culture and that it is much safer to drink and party at UD than it is at other schools.

How culture is perpetuated.
In chapter two I discussed how culture is perpetuated in a university setting. Kuh and Hall (1993) write that students play a key role in socializing new students to the culture in a college environment. Kuh and Hall go on to write that students learn from other students how to get an education and what education means.

The findings from this study not only reinforce Kuh and Hall’s (1993) arguments about how culture is perpetuated, they provide examples of how this happens early in students’ first years at UD. The students I interviewed mentioned, for example, how important it was to get outside of your dorm room in the first three weeks of school, emphasizing this is the time where people are most open to making new friends. They talked about the importance of getting involved right away. Several students discussed the parties in the student neighborhood in the first three weeks of school and described those parties as being hosted by upper class students and first year students are encouraged to attend. The students described learning UD’s culture from other students the first few weeks of their first year, whether that was by getting involved in clubs and campus activities or going to parties. This is consistent with Kuh and Hall’s claim, that the current student culture has a chance to impact new students early on. Kuh and Hall assert student culture teaches students how to get an education and what education means. At UD, a large part of student culture is getting involved in co-curriculars, and forming friendships through parities and activities UD offers. Much of the education at UD, according to the students I spoke with, happens outside of the classroom through the many opportunities UD offers for students to learn experientially. The students in this study indicated both sending and receiving this message about UD’s culture.
Students play a key role in perpetuating UD’s campus cultures. Leaders have a role in transmitting culture, according to Schein (1992). Schein goes on to write that leaders’ behavior communicates an institution’s values. Schein continues, the behaviors and decisions communicate assumptions. The students I interviewed drew many conclusions about UD’s culture from their interactions with faculty, staff and administration. For example, Jon indicated he felt UD did not care about academics because no one talked to him when he was failing his classes. Sawyer, who discussed “coming out” at UD, left the job she had because of her experience with her supervisor making an inappropriate comment about her sexual orientation.

Conversely, Ronald and Ann’s experience with professors led them to believe that UD is a place that values their academics and students finding a career path that aligns with their passion and interests. I wrote earlier that Heft (1997) argues the importance of paying attention to behavior, rituals and practices in Catholic Higher Education is to support the development of the “whole person.” Schein’s claims about how culture is perpetuated by leaders support this. The students I interviewed gave specific examples of the conclusions they drew about UD’s values and from their experiences with the faculty, staff and administration.

**Lack of Diversity and Drinking Culture Pose Significant Challenges**

Two key areas of cultural tension for UD emerged in this study. The first was the challenge of diversity and the second was the prevalence of the drinking culture. Both the drinking culture and the issues with the diversity climate on UD’s campus were experiences students mentioned that seem counter to UD’s mission. I explain the challenges here and suggest these as areas for further research later. The drinking culture
is one where the value of community has been misappropriated. The issues students faced with regard to the diversity climate not only negatively impact students, they are not in line with the values of respecting the dignity of every person and the importance of a diverse community that are part of the Marianist mission of UD.

The challenge from the prevalence of the drinking culture is one I have been aware of from my position in campus ministry and my collaboration with student development. From my role in working with students, I have heard many stories about the consequences of the drinking culture including the increased instances of sexual assault, vandalism, and transports to the hospital. Students, however, did not reveal an awareness of these consequences. Jon and Ruth both expressed their frustration with the administration at UD trying to change the drinking culture and indicated no one is getting hurt. Their statements indicated to me that they were largely unaware of the consequences I have heard about through my work.

I mentioned earlier that students used a lot of euphemisms to discuss the drinking culture. They talked about “going out” or “having a good time” rather than going to parties, and talked about sleeping in the next morning without mentioning a hangover. Some of them mentioned some regrets but most students talked about their experience as “work hard, play hard.” The use of euphemism was almost a contradiction to the candor with which the students talked about the drinking culture. They could have been using euphemisms with me as an employee of the University of Dayton, or it could be the way they commonly talk with other students about their behavior.

In addition to the use of euphemisms and the lack of awareness of consequences for excessive drinking, students’ indicated there was no pressure to drink. I found the
statements about a lack of pressure to drink to contradict the statements they made about drinking being a ubiquitous part of the culture that makes UD special and contributes to the sense of community. There may be no verbal pressure for students to drink, but the perception that participating in the drinking culture is “something that everyone does” creates its own kind of pressure. I mentioned that students need to “fit in” is a driving force in their experience. If the perception of drinking and going to house parties is that everyone participates, and at the same time one of the deepest desires of students, especially in their first years, is to feel like they fit in and belong, then it seems there is a lot of pressure to drink. To decide not to participate is to go against the predominante culture. There were certainly some students who made those decisions and found like-minded friends, namely Bernice who found friends on her floor her first year who did not want to, in her words “go out and party.” But Kristina did not participate in drinking and partying, and it resulted in being ostracized from her tennis teammates. For other students who decided that going to parties was not a good fit for them, it was only after experiencing what they referred to as emptiness or regret after going to parties and drinking.

The prevalence of drinking and house parties, and the way students describe the drinking culture poses an important challenge for UD. Students expressed drinking as an essential component of the feel of “community” at UD. While community is an important value and distinct part of UD’s culture, as I mentioned earlier, community as it is described in every document connected with UD’s mission does not include a culture of drinking. In fact, the Commitment to Community (2011) document that outlines the principles and habits for developing community at UD specifically says “Follow the law.
Don’t abuse alcohol or controlled substances.” It says “Pay attention to the safety, comfort and health of others.” These statements suggest building community does not include a robust drinking culture. UD faces a significant challenge in addressing the drinking culture, and what messages students receive about the role drinking and parties should play in their education.

The other important challenge for UD that emerged in this study is the diversity climate. I address this as an area for further research later, but it is a current problem. According to the Office of Institutional Reporting in 2015 the ethnic and racial identity of the full-time undergraduates enrolled at the University of Dayton was 78% White, 11% Non-resident/Alien, 3.3% Hispanic, 2.9% Black or African American, 1.2% Asian, 1% Unidentified and 1.8% two or more races. The remaining less than 1 percent includes both Native American or Alaska Native and the Bangalore India program (Office of Institutional Reporting, 2015, p. 2). Students who were part of underrepresented populations expressed experiences of microaggressions and harassment through both their face to face contact with other students and through social media. The two African American students I interviewed mentioned a reluctance to recommend that other African American students attend UD. Both of them mentioned there are not enough resources and support for domestic multicultural students on this campus.

The problems with diversity and the campus climate are inconsistent with several aspects of UD’s mission. Both the Characteristics of Marianist Universities (2014) and the Commitment to Community (2011) document mention in several ways the importance of recognizing the dignity of every person, and treating members of the community with respect and openness. Students mentioned an important value they learned at UD was
treating one another with respect and recognizing that everyone does not come from the same socioeconomic, racial or cultural background. The examples of microaggressions and harassment experienced by some students indicate that while treating one another with respect and dignity may be an articulated value, there is work to be done in realizing that ideal.

What Surprised Me

This study was surprising for me on many levels. The first major area of surprise was the willingness of students to participate and what seemed to be their candor in the interviews. The second surprise was the relationships I generated with many of the students through the process of interviewing them. The third surprise was some of themes that emerged in my analysis of the data.

The willingness of students to participate in this study was not what I expected. I anticipated identifying participants who were willing to participate in this study would take a lot longer than it did. From my first email to faculty and staff asking for help identifying students to the time the last interview was completed lasted a total of eight weeks. Both faculty and staff and students were quick to respond to my initial email requests. After I conducted my second interview and asked the participant if she knew anyone else that might like to participate, she pulled out her phone and went through her contact list, naming eight friends that she thought would be helpful. She even made sure I had their names spelled correctly so I could look them up and contact them through the UD email system. My experience was people, whether faculty and staff or students, seemed eager to participate.
Not only were the participants quick to respond to emails and helpful with providing further contacts, they were forthcoming and candid in their interviews. In many cases, when I asked students the first question about what their experiences were at UD, most of them responded as if they had already given a lot of thought to the question. I cannot recall ever asking a question that a student did not respond to with the exception of going into details about the rituals of Greek Life, which are not shared outside of those who join the sorority or fraternity. Students gave detailed and clear explanations to their answers, spoke about both positive and negative experiences, offered critiques and struggles and shared stories of their own growth. While I was careful not to ask “yes, or no” questions, students offered thorough explanations and responses to the questions I asked. I found the process of interviewing to be comfortable and the hour I spent with them seemed to go quickly. Some students even mentioned they thought the hour had gone fast at the end. I anticipated having to work harder to get the kinds of answers students freely offered.

Secondly, I was surprised by the relationships I developed with students through the process of interviewing them. From what students said, it seemed the interview process was helpful to them. For example, one student mentioned how helpful it was to talk about her challenges at UD at the end of the interview and that she had not been able to discuss the things she shared with me with many people. Several students asked me more about the study and if they would be able to read the results when it was completed. Others came up to me on campus throughout the year and asked how the study was going, or were just generally friendly and engaged with me as they would if I met them through my role in Campus Ministry. Of course there were a few students I interviewed who did
not respond to the follow up questions or have any further contact after the interview, but there were only three of those students. I expected that number to be more like ten to twelve at the least. In general, the level of connection and vulnerability that the students demonstrated was much higher than I anticipated it would be when I began this study.

Finally, some of themes that emerged were surprising to me. I have worked at UD for close to 10 years and most of that time was in direct contact with students, thus I was expecting some of the themes that emerged. For example, I expected “community” to be mentioned by many students. I expected that most of them would express their experience as generally positive and that they might mention the student neighborhood and the drinking culture. I anticipated if a student participated in an immersion trip or study abroad that might have an important impact on their experience. I have heard many students express similar ideas throughout my years of working with them.

There were a lot of themes I did not expect. First, I did not anticipate so many students would talk about the death of their classmate their first year. That tragedy shaped the experience of those students in such an important way, they mentioned it three years later, and unprompted by me. Secondly, I did not anticipate the effect current events, especially those around the racial climate in the United States, would be so intertwined with their experience. Both students who identified as white, and those that identified as African American, articulated how those events, the racial unrest in Ferguson, MO and the Black Lives Matter movement, had a role in shaping their awareness of some of the problems from a lack of diversity at UD. Finally, there were aspects of UD’s culture that I did not realize were so important, such as “holding doors” for people. I always associated behaviors like holding doors and saying “hi” with Midwestern culture, not
necessarily UD’s culture. Students see those behaviors as distinct to UD. Through these interviews I learned a lot about aspects of student life I knew nothing about prior to this study. Greek life, study abroad programs, the honors program and Core were all areas I knew about in name only. Students’ explanations and the meaning they made around their participation in these programs helped me understand the value of those experiences.

Most of the students I interviewed are students I would never have encountered or heard from if it were not for this study. My knowledge of UD and the diversity of programs with which students are involved is so much deeper as a result of this study. The things that surprised me were not only the themes and areas I learned about, but how willing such a diverse group of students, faculty and staff were to help me learn.

**What I Would Do Differently**

Initially, I was concerned about finding a diverse group of students to interview for this study. I had some worries about whether or not I would be able to find a sufficient group of students who fit the criteria of seniors, or recently graduated students, willing to participate in this study. I was concerned about finding students with different experiences and from diverse viewpoints. In these areas I felt the study was extremely successful. Overall the faculty and staff with whom I spoke about finding students seemed happy to help me identify students who would like to participate and most of the students I contacted about participating responded right away. More students responded to the follow up questions than I imagined would, as well. Despite the fact that most of the areas I was worried about went fairly smoothly and turned out better than expected, there are still some things I learned through the process that I would change if I were to conduct this study again.
First, I am a much better interviewer now than in my first interview. I learned to ask clarifying questions and have students explain more about what they meant when they used vague phrases or expressed a general idea. I mentioned students used euphemisms for the drinking culture specifically, and I wish I had followed up with some students more by having them explain what they meant by “going out” or “enjoying the ghetto.” Perhaps having asked them to clarify some of what they meant would offer more insight to this theme that emerged as such an important aspect of culture. More generally, I know there are some interviews, especially in the beginning, in which I might have been able to elicit deeper and clearer responses in some areas had I been more skilled.

The follow up questions were challenging to generate. If I carried out this study again, I would have captured some ideas for follow up questions in my handwritten notes or reflexive journal, immediately following the interviews. I began to do this only after the 18th or 19th interview, and that practice made writing the follow up questions and emailing them to the participants much faster and easier. For most of the interviews, I had to combine listening through the recorded interviews again, and going through my handwritten notes to identify follow up questions that had the potential to elicit responses that did not cover what I already had from the interviews. It was time consuming, difficult and a much slower process than it could have been had I captured those thoughts immediately following the interviews.

I did not anticipate how long the transcribing, coding and data analysis would take and while I would have loved to find a more efficient way of doing this, I am not sure that I could have. With each of those steps I had to fumble through the first few interviews and then I learned more efficient ways of moving through the data. For
example, it took me four hours to transcribe the first interview and after transcribing a
couple of interviews I was able to type them in two and a half or three hours. If I were to
conduct this study again, I would be much more skilled at each of these steps, but I
believe I had to learn through the experience of doing them and reflecting on what
worked and what did not to develop better skills.

The nature of qualitative research is such that I had to learn through the process.
As Marshall and Rossman (2016) write, qualitative research moves between deduction
and induction, is fundamentally interpretive and is emergent rather than tightly prefigured.
In other words, I had to adjust as I continued through the process, and I made my
decisions about how to adjust through interpretation of the data. Krathwohl (2009) writes,
“as the glimmer of an idea emerges, the researcher works at developing it” (p. 246). I
found Krathwohl’s (2009) statement to be representative of my process. The more I
immersed myself in the data, the more ideas emerged and the more I worked to develop
them.

In the process of coding and data analysis in particular, I found what Marshall and
Rossman (2016) write to be true, that the researcher is “guided by initial concepts and
developing understandings” (p. 215) and those understandings shift as the researcher
collects and analyzes the data. My understandings of the codes and themes shifted as I
analyzed the data and I was open to how those themes shifted. Of course, I wish I had
been a better interviewer at the start and that I had been more mindful of capturing ideas
for follow up questions immediately following the interviews. For the rest of it, I believe
I simply had to learn from the process of engaging with each of the phases of this study.
Suggestions for Further Research

The data from this study and the meaning I was able to construct leaves several questions and suggestions for further research. First the students surfaced some questions about the role technology and social media play in student development and shaping culture. The second key area for further research would be specifically focusing on some of the aspects of students’ lives and the culture at UD that emerged from this study, including UD’s diversity climate, the impact of the drinking culture, the perception of the culture as a bubble, and the role of faith in students’ identity.

Higher education would benefit from further exploration around the role technology plays in communicating the mission as well as influencing the culture of a university. Of course much research has already been done in this area, however, social media and smart phones and the access students, faculty and staff have to technology is changing faster than research can keep up with. For example, one student mentioned the comments she found on Yik Yak, a smart phone application that allows users to post comments in a local area without revealing their identity. This is application or “app” was developed in late 2013 and was playing a role in the diversity climate at UD in spring of 2015. Higher education could benefit from more exploration into the role that technology and social media play in higher education and specifically linking those areas to university mission.

Several questions still remain about students’ experiences at UD. From my study I learned the life of a student and their interpretation of culture and values is complex and layered. The University of Dayton might be able to benefit from further exploration into specific themes that emerged from this study including the themes of the culture being
perceived as a bubble, the drinking culture, the role of faith in shaping students sense of their identity and deeper exploration into the racial climate at UD.

I discussed earlier the drinking culture as a challenge at UD. Further research is needed to why the drinking culture so integral to the UD culture. I mentioned some possible contributing factors including the makeup of the student neighborhood, the legacy carried on by upper class students and passed on to first year students, perhaps the role of alumni, the national media about which schools are “party schools” and the value of hospitality that students expressed. I suspect the cognitive development of 18-22 year olds, as well as their perceived lack of consequences as contributing factors. More research is needed to determine the specific contributing factors and the level of their impact.

UD’s culture was described as a bubble multiple times by multiple students. It was part of the language students used to describe the campus environment and the perceived homogenous demographic makeup of UD students. It was used to describe the behavior and perspectives associated with staying on UD’s campus, such as simply going to class and going to parties and not trying anything new or off campus. A walk in the the Oakwood neighborhood, which borders UD’s campus, was described as “breaking the bubble.” “Breaking” or “bursting” the bubble was described by many students as important to their experience and a value other students should have. Further exploration into the nature of the bubble might offer insight into the benefits and drawbacks of this perception of UD’s culture as well as how students can be encouraged to “burst” the bubble as part of their education, if that is, indeed, valuable.
The role of faith emerged in a couple of different ways in this study. Students mentioned questioning their faith after the death of a classmate in their first year, or their experiences of studying abroad. Many of them mentioned their commitment to their faith and the role their faith played in their experience as students through living in Marianas student communities, their involvement with campus ministry and their experiences of prayer. Faith was one of many themes I constructed from my data and it is an integral part of UD’s mission. “Education for formation in faith” is one of the characteristics of a Marianist education. Understanding students’ faith development and the way it shapes their understanding of themselves and their values may be helpful in shaping university practices that contribute to students’ formation in faith.

Finally, the diversity climate at UD is a place for further study. Students I interviewed mentioned challenges with microaggressions related to race, and ethnicity whether they were African American students or international students. The student who identified as lesbian experienced harassment based on her sexual orientation. Many white students mentioned the lack of diversity as a problem. Specifically, Emma, said she saw the problems with the racial climate on campus and did not know what to do about it. Diversity and the experience of underrepresented populations is an area for further study. Students mentioned the challenges they have encountered in this area with more questions than answers. Giardino (2011) describes diversity as part of inclusivity. He writes, Chaminade “sought to reproduce within the Marianist Family the variety and wealth of experience that exists within the church as a whole.” There is room for exploration about what factors contribute to the racial climate at UD and what can be
done to make UD a more inclusive campus consistent with the manifestation of the Marianist charism of inclusivity (Giardino, 2011).

**Summary**

Wilcox (2013) writes that the distinctive culture of a Catholic university and its founding congregation (at UD, the Marianists) “is like a fine mist. If you stand in it long enough, you will get soaked” (p. 20). This metaphor is appropriate in describing the students’ experience of UD’s Catholic and Marianist culture. At the time they spoke with me, they all expressed an awareness of the Catholic and Marianist culture at UD. Their experiences at UD, in the context of this culture shaped their growth, their identity and their sense of values.

One of the key aspects of culture students mentioned was “community.” Community is not without its challenges or its misunderstandings—offering an underage student a beer is not what the Marainist founders and the leadership of UD seemed to mean when they spoke of hospitality and warmth of welcome. Fleming (2014) writes Marianist education emphasizes community. He goes on to say “Marianist educators are convinced that all personal and social transformation requires an environment of collaboration and interpersonal communication” (Fleming, 2014, p. 144). From the way students expressed their personal transformation and the broader awareness of diverse points of view, to the value they placed on finding a sense of belonging within a community that could support their growth, to learning how to work and live with one another, students expressed the understanding of community that Fleming articulates.

As an employee of the University of Dayton, who works with students, but an outsider to student life on the University of Dayton campus, I wondered if the Catholic
and Marianist Mission I heard so much about was actually realized in student experiences. I suspected it was in some places and it was missing in others. The themes and meaning I have constructed from my study are influenced by my position as a researcher. I am committed to the Catholic and Marianist mission of UD and in my own work, strive to model the distinct values and practices that are part of that mission. Even with my inside knowledge of the culture, what I learned and the depth of what I learned surprised me. I did not expect such a diverse group of students to articulate their growth in a way that was so consistent with the mission, including values of community and formation in faith and advocating for justice. I did not expect to hear the acute pain and suffering that occurs when students are ostracized from community. From my position and from my experience of being immersed in the data, I can write with confidence UD’s Catholic and Marianist mission is distinct, it shapes the culture and students’ learning, and it remains an ideal which has not yet been fully realized.


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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

1. **TITLE**: Students’ Experience of the Catholic and Marianist Culture

2. **PROJECT DIRECTORS**: Allison P. Leigh, 937-229-4813 or 937-417-2007, Dr. Carolyn Ridenour, 937-229-3308

3. **PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**: To understand undergraduate students’ experience of the Catholic and Marianist culture at the University of Dayton.

4. **PROCEDURES FOR THIS RESEARCH**: Your participation will include being interviewed one time for approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded. You will also be asked to submit written responses to four or five reflection questions one week after the interview. The length of your written responses will be determined by you.

5. **POTENTIAL RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS**: The interview will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you and will be recorded. You may conclude the interview at any time without penalty from the researcher. If you wish to discuss these or any other discomforts you may experience, you may call the Project Directors listed in number #2 on this form.

6. **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU OR OTHERS**: You may benefit from the data collected through the dissertation in which the culture of the University of Dayton will be described. Others who read reports and articles from this research project may benefit from your experience as a participant.

7. **ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES**: Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence. I will give you a hard copy of the transcript of your interview and you will be able to make any changes you want.

8. **PROTECTION OF CONFIDENTIALITY**: A pseudonym will be assigned to you and any other students in any written report of this research. All noncritical features of you will be omitted from public reports of this study. Your name will not be used in any reports or presentations based on this research. All field notes, observation records, and audiotapes and their transcriptions will be kept in a locked cabinet in UD offices or locked in my home in Dayton. Recordings and materials will be stored using pseudonyms or codes. Discussions among the dissertation committee will be conducted in confidence.

9. **SIGNATURES**: I have been fully informed of the above-described procedures with their possible benefits and risks and I agree to participate in this study.
Signature of participant: _________________________________________________
Name of participant: (please print): _______________________________________
Date: __________________________________________________________________

Signature of person obtaining consent: _____________________________________
Name of person obtaining consent: _________________________________________
Date: ___________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

The Catholic and Marianist Culture at the University of Dayton as Revealed through Students’ Voices
Allison P. Leigh
June 18, 2015

This interview guide is a resource I will use if needed. I plan, as much as possible, to have an unstructured interview. I will begin each interview with some rapport building and the first question will be “You have been at UD for three to four years; tell me about your UD experiences.”

Interview Guide

1) Why did you choose to attend the University of Dayton?
2) In what ways has it been what you expected?
3) What are the most significant experiences you had here?
4) What are the major highlights of your time here? Low points? High points?
5) How are you different now than when you started college?
6) We say the University of Dayton is a special kind of university, what makes it special?

Other possible questions or possible follow up questions

1) Explain some of the activities and rituals that are important to your experience of _________? What does a typical day/meeting/event look like?
a. How did you discover this activity or get involved with this program?
2) What is it like to be a student at UD?
3) What do you have to know to be successful as a UD student?
4) What have been struggles you have had? What advice would you give an incoming student about challenges he/she might face?
5) How have your ideas about yourself/others/UD changed based on your experience?
6) What are some of the places you spend most of your time?
a. Describe those places. What appeals to you about those places?
7) What would you say are the most important values UD represents? What values have you seen, learned or experienced during your time at UD?
### APPENDIX C

**Categories of Data constructed from Transcribed Interviews, Codes and Key Codes**

| 1) Community                      | 24) Marianists/MSCs (Marianist Student Communities) |
| 2) Faith, Ministry, Retreats      | 25) Study Abroad/Immersion Trips                  |
| 3) Drinking Culture               | 26) Advice to Future Students                    |
| 4) Diversity/Experience as a Minority | 27) Roommates                                  |
| 5) UD Visit/Decision              | 28) UD Criticism                                 |
| 6) “Fitting In”                   | 29) Jobs/Experiential Learning                   |
| 7) Greek Life                     | 30) Chaminade Scholars/Honors                    |
| 8) Classes/Studying               |                                                |
| 9) Major and Professors           | 31) Important Relationship                       |
| 10) “Love UD”                     | 32) Service Fraternity                          |
| 11) Identity                      | 33) Christmas on Campus                         |
| 12) Difficult Times               | 34) Clubs/”Getting Involved”/Intramurals         |
| 13) Description of Growth/Learning| 35) UD/American Culture                         |
| 14) Bubble/UD Bubble              | 36) Camp Blue/Orientation                        |
| 15) OMA (Office of Multicultural Affairs) | 37) Graduating/ “After I Graduate”          |
| 16) Values                        | 38) Money                                       |
| 17) What it Means to be a UD Student | 39) Family at UD                      |
| 18) Student Neighborhood           | 40) Residence Halls                             |
| 19) First Three Weeks             | 41) International Student                       |
| 20) Friends/Relationships         | 42) Commuting                                   |
| 21) UDSAP (UD Summer Appalachia Program) | 43) High School  |
| 22) Big Questions                 | 44) Travel in the United States                  |
| 23) Rescue Squad                  |                                                |
APPENDIX D

University of Dayton Glossary of Terms

AVIATE (A Vision for Applied, Integrated and Transformative Education): AVIATE is the integrated system between the residential curriculum and housing assignments introduced by Housing and Residence Life in 2014. Students can attend programs that are part of the residential curriculum to accumulate points towards their housing selection. A student with more points will have a higher priority in housing selection. (Herndon, 2016)

Christmas on Campus: An annual event celebrating Christmas with the University of Dayton community. Each year around 1000 Dayton City School children are paired with a University of Dayton Undergraduate student to participate in Christmas themed games and activities on UD’s campus. The event is free and open to the general public. (Christmas on Campus, n.d.)

Core: The Core program is an interdisciplinary program that integrates religious studies, English, history and philosophy. 150 students from different disciplines take these courses together over the course of two and a half years. During their first year students enrolled in the Core program also live on the same floor in their residence hall in an integrated learning and living community. (Core Program, n.d.)

Distance for Dreams: Students involved with this organization train to run the Disney World Marathon or Half Marathon and hold fundraising events throughout the year to benefit a child they are sponsoring through the Special Wish Foundation. (Distance for Dreams, n.d.)

Learning and Living Community (LLC): A group of students that live in the same residence hall and take classes together. Learning Living Communities include the Core program, programs organized by major and LLCs for writing and the arts. (Integrated Learning Living Communities, n.d.)

McGinnis Mass: Weekly Sunday Mass for students offered in the McGinnis Center in the Student Neighborhood. (Liturgy and Sacraments, n.d.)

New Student Convocation: the formal academic beginning to the new year with faculty, staff and students. A faculty member and a student each give a speech to inspire and motivate the new first year students the day before classes begins. (New Student Programs, n.d.)

Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA): OMA provides resources to support the academic, social and cultural needs of all students and also provides an additional area of
connection to the University of Dayton for domestic multicultural students and their families. (Office of Multicultural Affairs, n.d.)

**RecPlex**: Short for the University of Dayton Fitness and Recreation Complex. The RecPlex is a recreation facility featuring exercise equipment, a pool, a track, gymnasiums and a variety of health and wellness programs for students. (Campus Recreation, n.d.)

**Rescue Squad**: now called UD EMS, a volunteer student run organization Emergency Medical Services organization. Provides pre-hospital care and transport for medical emergencies on the University of Dayton campus. (University of Dayton Emergency Medical Services, n.d.)

**Reunion Weekend**: Annual weekend for alumni who have graduated in previous classes from the University of Dayton. Each year’s reunion weekend invites the alumni who are celebrating graduation anniversaries in five or ten year increments. (University Events, n.d.)

**Studio Theatre**: Student theatre organization that aims to provide experimental and exploratory productions. Studio theatre produces several shows a year including UD Monologues and UD students write, act and direct in these productions. (Chamberlin, 2014)

**Student Neighborhood**: A group of 400 University of Dayton owned houses and apartment buildings spanning several city blocks that provides housing for upper-class University of Dayton students. (Housing and Residence Life, n.d.)

**UD Miracle**: Student service organization that aims to raise funds for Dayton Children’s Hospital while bringing together the campus and community. UD Miracle’s biggest event each year is called Dance Marathon, a 13.1 hour dancing event and fundraiser. (UD Miracle, n.d.)

**University of Dayton Summer Appalachia Program (UDSAP)**: UDSAP is a cultural immersion program sponsored by Campus Ministry. Fourteen UD students spend 9 weeks in Saylersville, Kentucky in the heart of Appalachia each summer. The students live in community, run a day camp for children, a teen center and visit a local nursing home. (University of Dayton Summer Appalachia Program, n.d.)