DISSERTATION

VISUAL EXPRESSION OF LIBERAL EDUCATION MISSION

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

VISUAL EXPRESSION OF THE LIBERAL EDUCATION MISSION

The purpose of this photo elicitation study was to explore the experience of undergraduate students in the Midwest attending liberal arts campuses. Using the American Association of Colleges and Universities' four liberal education outcomes, the study asked student participants at four different liberal arts campuses to take photographs of the visual expression of these outcomes on their campuses over a 4-week time period. Additionally, participants took part in a focus group on their respective campus to discuss the photographs and begin to assign meaning to the photographs. The 19 participants in this study shared insights into their experiences at college and the ways they saw the liberal education outcomes expressed. The emergent themes reflected the following observations: (a) Relationships comprised community, and the nature of campus, support, and friendship was student focused; (b) Environment and physical space played a role in the student experience; (c) Campuses provided a well-rounded, integrative, and interdisciplinary student experience; (d) Students viewed themselves as partners, not consumers in the fabric of campus; and (e) An uncapturable component, which included residential campus and classroom experiences, was also present and created an important student experience.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education frequently struggle with their identity, mission, values, and learning outcomes. These constructs are then communicated through formal and informal means to members of the campus population; identity, mission, values, and outcomes intersect to form students' experiences on campus. Although institutional leaders have been in conversation with other liberal arts leaders since the new millennium about what constitutes a liberal arts education, students' understanding of liberal education has focused on specific outcomes (Blaich, n.d.) and has not incorporated the institutional environment, which may or may not reflect the mission of the institution.

Throughout the past decade, the liberal arts campus has faced increased scrutiny, leaving campus administrators working to justify their existence and place within higher education. Organizations such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) have sought to research the outcomes of a liberal arts education through initiatives such as the Liberal Education and America's Promise initiative (2002). To understand the larger experience of students on liberal arts campuses, campus administrators, educators, and other involved professionals must be cognizant of all the components, including the campus environment.

Institutional Identity and Mission

Institutional identity is often formed as the organizational saga evolves over the historical life of the college, and this identity further evolves with the retelling of the story (Clark, 1972). Just as relics and symbols share the story of the institution, narrative research provides a way for organizational members to understand the story being told and determine the influences that make the institution what it is. Kearney (2002) suggested that this narrative acts as a "creative

redescription of the world such that hidden patterns and hitherto unexplored meanings can unfold" (p.12). The outcome of Kearney's research suggests that the environment plays a key role in reflecting the mission of a liberal arts institution. One can identify what values hold true for the institution. Additionally, the mission statement, as a symbolic expression of organizational, and thereby institutional, values (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Steiner, 1979), identifies what is core to the institution, and often, what distinguishes this institution from another.

Scott (2006) shared that the mission of today's university continues to be that of teaching, research, and public service. However, within this broad definition, we must also acknowledge that each institution is unique in how it aims to accomplish these three foci. To further complicate matters, the focus in the liberal arts institution is distributed over a variety of disciplines, based on the premise that students who have studied in diverse subject areas are prepared for lifelong learning. Because liberal arts colleges are more broadly focused than other institutions, identifying what defines their campuses may be even more difficult.

Current Status of Liberal Arts Education

In 2012, a total of 254 baccalaureate liberal arts campuses existed in the United States (*The Carnegie Classification. . ., 2000 Edition*, 2004). The most recent editions of the Carnegie classifications of colleges and universities have eliminated the previously used "baccalaureate liberal arts college." Despite this change in categorization, liberal arts colleges continue to be at the forefront of the higher education discussion. Almost daily, publications such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed* share articles that focus on topics connected to liberal arts education. In September 2015, headlines about the liberal arts moved beyond higher-education publications and into the mainstream media. These headlines included

"Farewell to America's Small Colleges" in *The Atlantic* (Wong, 2015), "The Liberal Arts Colleges Whose Graduates Earn the Most" in *Forbes* (Adams, 2015), and opinion pieces headlined by "Liberal arts colleges must jettison antiquated lectures to stay relevant" from think tank *The Hechinger Report* (Casteen & Singer, 2015). Local newspapers outlined how college presidents make the case for liberal arts. The *Orlando Sentinel* noted that "Rollins College president defends liberal arts education" (Russon, 2015), and other campuses questioned the majors that fit within the liberal arts, as in the Luther College blog that asked, "Does the nursing major belong at a liberal arts college?" (McGohan, 2015).

Campus Environment

College campuses reflect the messages of the respective institutions, including their mission. The students, faculty, staff, and visitors to a campus obtain an understanding of what is essential to the campus through their experience of the campus. Strange (2003) notes,

> A thirty-minute tour of any campus can reveal much about its essential environmental characteristics and dynamics. From the size, layout, condition, and design of its buildings, facilities, spaces, and landscapes; the collective appearance and style of its students, faculty, and staff; the structure and organization of its administrative systems and practices; and from the nature of its principal academic and social presses, traditions, customs, and symbols, immediate and powerful impressions emerge of whether "this is a good place to be." (p. 298)

Later, Strange goes on to note that participants in the campus environment also view many of these components as elements of mission effectiveness. In a later edition of the same text, Renn and Patton (2011) discuss campus ecology in the larger context of student development and suggest that "Developmental ecology does not speak to *what* aspect of the individual is being developed, but it provides a way to understand *how* and *in what contexts* that development occurs" (pp. 243—244).

Research Problem

This study builds on the concepts of campus ecology, in which I seek to understand "the student's consciousness or basic awareness of the spaces or environments [inhabited]" (Kaiser, 1978, p. 27); in this context, Kaiser further defines space as "the set of stimuli occupying consciousness at any given moment. The stimuli may be physical, mental, social, chemical, biological, etc." (p. 27). This idea that space is multifaceted helps administrators to explore the campus environment through the integration of these different constructs of space and one's experience with them. Through this research study, I seek to understand how colleges currently integrate visual and physical expressions of the liberal arts into their campuses. Two pilot studies preceded the primary research for the study: The first pilot study focused on ways students expressed ethical behavior and citizenship on a specific campus; the second enabled a broader range of exploration of how students expressed mission across various college campuses. These combined studies supported my efforts to move from photo elicitation to increased understanding in terms of how the mission of liberal education was expressed on the campuses involved.

Liberal Arts Education

Several aspects of the liberal arts experience allow an institution to be further defined as a liberal arts campus. The Carnegie Classification of Baccalaureate Colleges—Liberal Arts defines these institutions as "primarily undergraduate colleges with major emphasis on baccalaureate programs. During the period studied, [these institutions] awarded at least half of their baccalaureate degrees in liberal arts fields." In 2010, the Carnegie classification redefined a number of liberal arts institutions within its definition "Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts and Sciences" and expanded the definition to include that "at least 80 percent of the bachelor's

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degree majors were in the arts and sciences" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011). The Wabash study on liberal arts defined liberal arts education as dependent on the coexistence of the following three factors or definitions:

1. An institutional ethos and tradition that place a greater value on developing a set of intellectual arts than on developing professional or vocational skills.
2. Curricular and environmental structures that work in combination to create coherence and integrity in students' intellectual experiences.
3. An institutional ethos and tradition that place a strong value on student-student and student-faculty interactions both in and out of the classroom. (Blaich, Bost, Chan, & Lynch, 2004, p. 12)

Liberal arts campuses are frequently smaller institutions than their larger counterparts. Small campuses suggest that there is a pressure on students who might be considered marginalized to participate in campus experiences in a way that is meaningful and impacts the environment of the institution (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Walsh, 1973). Nancy Thomas (2002) described liberal education as

> A quality liberal education leads students to reflect on their place in the world and locate themselves historically and socially. . . . Graduates of a liberal education need to be people of integrity possessed of a sense of responsibility to society. These qualities require a sense of humanity as well as commitment to the common good with a conviction that there is something more important that oneself. (p. 30)

Further, several studies reported that the experience of those students at small institutions is often more group-oriented, friendly, and cohesive (Astin, 1968; Hurtado, 1992; Pace, 1967). Blocher (1978) suggested a model with seven crucial conditions for growth that facilitate personal and cognitive development. These conditions are involvement, challenge, support, structure, feedback, application, and integration, and they create the learning environment on campus that encourages change and growth to occur.

Liberal Arts Outcomes

In addition to the definitions of a liberal education, there are several liberal-education fundamental outcomes. For example, The AAC&U defines Essential Learning Outcomes in the following four categories: knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative and applied learning (AAC&U, n.d./b). Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world is further defined as happening "through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts." Intellectual and practical skills include "inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, and teamwork and problem solving." Personal and social responsibility is understood through "civic knowledge and engagement, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning." Finally, integrative and applied learning includes "synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies" (AAC&U, n.d./b, para. 2).

Learning Environments

One must further explore the aspect of learning environments and learning communities as a physical component of the experience of students on campus to understand the value of the liberal arts institution. Using aspects of visual ethnography, I sought to understand all of how the experience of being on campus creates an expression of the liberal arts mission there. Collier (2004) talks about the role of visual records as that of "allow[ing] the participants in an activity or process to look at and discuss those circumstances themselves, providing an inside viewpoint" (p. 45). He later discusses the indirect role that photographs can have in interviews, in which the photographs may mimic the role of the visual in expressing the goals of the liberal arts

education. He states, "the richest returns from photo elicitation often have little connection to the details of the images, which may serve only to release vivid memories, feelings, insight, thoughts, and memories" (p. 46). A similar argument can be made that the image in front of an individual walking around a campus may connect to the expectations that individual has of a liberal arts education, and likewise, that the memories, feelings, insight, thoughts, and memories are evoked in others when the environment reminds them of the goals of the liberal arts.

Research Questions

The central question that guided this research is "How do undergraduate students see the liberal arts mission expressed on their campus?" Within this overarching question a number of additional research questions exist:

(a) How do students see knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world expressed on campus?

(b) How do students see intellectual and practical skills expressed on campus?

(c) How do students see personal and social responsibility expressed on campus?

(d) How do students see integrative and applied learning expressed on campus?

Definition of Terms

Various individuals can read and interpret differently a number of terms related to higher education, liberal arts, and learning outcomes. The Essential Learning Outcomes, as defined by the AAC&U as a part of the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, provide specific definitions that one should understand as context for this study. These definitions and others follow in an effort to provide an understanding of the language used throughout the literature review and analysis.

Disciplines: Areas of study that cover various aspects of education. On a liberal arts campus, these disciplines often include classics, languages, humanities, history, fine arts, mathematics, and sciences. Carnegie has historically used the following areas of study to reflect liberal arts: English language and literature, foreign languages, letters, liberal and general studies, life sciences, mathematics, physical sciences, psychology, social sciences, visual and performing arts, area and ethnic studies, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary studies, and philosophy and religion.

Integrative and applied learning: "synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies **demonstrated** through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems" (emphasis in original, AAC&U, n.d./b; emphasis in original)

Intellectual and practical skills: Skills that include "inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork and problem solving **practiced extensively**, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance" (emphasis in original, AAC&U, n.d./b; emphasis in original).

Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world: Knowledge gained "through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts **focused** by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring" (AAC&U, n.d./b; emphasis in original).

Learning environment: "refers to the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn" (Great Schools Partnership, 2013).

Learning outcomes: "identify what students should be able to demonstrate or represent or produce because of what and how they have learned at the institution or in a program" (Maki, 2012, p. 89).

Liberal arts: "Specific disciplines (e.g., the humanities, sciences, and social sciences)" (AAC&U, 2002, p. 25).

Liberal arts college: "A particular type of institution—often small, often residential— that facilitates close interaction between faculty and students, while grounding its curriculum in the liberal arts disciplines" (AAC&U, 2002, p. 25).

Personal and social responsibility: Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, foundations and skills for lifelong learning **anchored** through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges (AAC&U, n.d./b; emphasis in original).

Photo elicitation: A request that participants in a study submit photographs as one component of "text" for the researcher.

Photovoice: A form of visual study that uses photographs to assist in one's understanding of the environment in which participants are living. Further, it is a form of action research that moves the understanding of an environment into a place where opportunities for change are created to improve the situation. Photovoice has been used to improve the understanding of living environments in third-world countries and to increase healthcare access. These studies have then helped participants to articulate their needs. In its most authentic form, photovoice then shares research findings with key decision-makers to incite change.

Visual cues: The various elements that create an environment based on what one can physically see, as opposed to the feeling evoked, for example.

Visual studies: A way of studying something using photographs, video, and other imagery as the primary "text" for studying. This form of study ranges from photo elicitation to photo ethnography.

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study relate to the physical proximity of the campuses and how participants were identified for the study. This study focused on four residential liberal arts campuses in the Midwest. Participants were identified through snowball sample. Initial outreach began by my seeking assistance from senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) and provosts at these institutions. An electronic information sheet was provided to potential participants, on which demographic information was collected. For participation, students needed to have an Apple or Android smart phone or tablet on which they could download an application (or app) to use to collect data.

Assumptions

Several assumptions guided this research. First and foremost, I as the researcher have assumed that liberal arts colleges provide a different experience for students, and consequently a different type of opportunity, than other types of campuses offer. For example, as Cohen and Kisker (2010) reported the characteristics of a liberal arts college,

> enrollments range from a few hundred to less than 3,000; their student-faculty ratio is rarely higher than 15 to 1, hence their average class size tends to be small; they are single-purpose institutions, educating undergraduate students in the main; their faculty reward structure centers on teaching; and they exercise selective admissions and on-campus residence. (p. 319)

Participants were obtained in part, by selection from the SSAO and the provost of each of the institutions. Because of their knowledge of students who would be likely participants and the resulting selectivity, the participants might be from a cohort of student leaders and may not be

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representative of the campus as a whole. Because student leaders are most likely to be defined as maximizers (Hu & McCormick, 2012), the students with whom the SSAO and provost were most likely to have ongoing interactions would probably score above average in relation to their participation and success in the areas of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environments. Their engagement level would be at least one standard deviation above the mean and they would make up about 10% of the sample. Further, several studies suggest that student engagement levels are higher at liberal arts colleges (Pike & Kuh, 2004). Potential student leaders would perhaps be engaged with how decisions are made at their institution, or would be more in line with the intentions of their institution, thereby seeing environmental components more strongly than their less-engaged peers. Therefore, I was aware the study may not enable me to understand at what point participants would likely understand the messages portrayed to them during their time on a campus. If they were engaged with the marketing of their institution, they may be more inclined to recognize the subtle artifacts and environmental factors of their institution. Yet, I would remain open to these messages if they should arise through the research.

Further, I had assumptions that the spaces and places surrounding us communicate messages on an ongoing basis. Strange and Banning (2001) noted two kinds of messages that exist on college campuses: functional and symbolic. Whereas functional messages, such as directional signage, are those that help individuals to navigate spaces and find their way, symbolic messages share messages about institutional values and priorities. Strange and Banning noted that symbolic messages frequently are "seen as more truthful than verbal or written messages" (p. 17). Similarly, Agnew (1987) noted that humans react to places by developing an emotional attachment to those places and thereby ascribe meaning to the

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environment. I recognized that not every one of these messages is an intentional message, but that students understand their experience of a campus through the messages shared through architecture, individuals, and their individual perspectives. In this regard, I assumed that the campuses included in this study conveyed some functional and symbolic messages, in addition to intentional and unintentional messages that were communicated throughout the campus.

Limitations

This study focused on the experiences of 19 students across four residential liberal arts campuses in the Midwest who were self-motivated to participate in a photo-elicitation project. The results of the study are limited to their own observations, focus-group discussions, and photo submissions of the participants. The use of the AAC&U liberal education outcomes guided the research and the focus-group conversations, including my perceptions. Had the study occurred during a different time of year, on different campuses, or with a different group of participants, the experiences and findings could vary. Therefore, the study does not seek to generalize the findings to all residential liberal arts campuses, nor all residential liberal arts campuses in the Midwest. Instead, the study reflects the photographs taken and comments shared by these specific individuals in spring 2015, on their specific campuses.

After seeking assistance in identifying participants selected by SSAOs and provosts at the campuses, I held informational meetings with participants to explain the project and to begin building rapport with them. These initial meetings were held over Google Hangout, and during primary data collection, interaction between participants and myself occurred through technology-mediated methods. For the focus groups, I visited each of the participating campuses and interacted with the participants. My visiting the campuses for an extended period of time

could have assisted me in further analyzing the data with the participants in an individual or group interaction.

Participation levels varied by participant, ranging from submission of more than 10 photographs to submission of the four required photographs. Had there been greater photograph submission from participants, it is possible that different conversations may have occurred during the focus groups.

In addition to the images the participants submitted, the participant demographics also are a limitation of the study. I imagine that discussion of several of the concepts may have been different if there had been more students of color, first-year students, commuter students, or students with varying levels of ability. Some of the contrasts I would have expected to find began to emerge, but they were not discussed widely or in-depth across the campuses.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this research is to add to the literature to help administrators understand how their intentional or unintentional creation of environment supports the liberal education mission that is core to the institution. The results of this study will help inform administrators about the perception from undergraduate students about the intended and unintended messages that the campus environment sends to students about the liberal arts.

At this time, much of the work that has focused on campus ecology has been about specific environments or messages related to individual aspects of campus environment, including commuter students (Banning & Hughes, 1986), mixed-race students (Renn, 2012), and artifacts, including messages about multiculturalism (Banning & Bartels, 1997). Little has focused on liberal arts outcomes and the messages communicated within this context. Similarly, much of the research focusing on mission has explored mission from the perspective of the

method of rhetoric exploration, rather than moving into the communication of this mission (Mazza, 1999; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Rowley, Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2002). This study aims to increase our understanding of how this communication of mission moves from the rhetoric to the lived experience. This topic has yet to be explored within higher education or education as a whole and with liberal arts campuses in higher education currently approaching a crisis stage, research into this experience needs to be occurring. I believe this dissertation will help administrators and other decision makers to make connections between environment and higher education. In addition, this study addresses a method by which research can occur through focusing on visual components in higher education.

Researcher's Perspective

Through my experiences attending and working at liberal arts institutions, I have found educational environments that support students in a variety of ways. These environments create opportunities for the institutions to communicate their missions and the goals of the educational environment. To reinforce this perspective, I would like to share two vignettes about my experience at liberal arts campuses.

As an undergraduate student at the institution now known as St. Catherine University, I had the fortunate experience in my first-year seminar course of being asked to look at the aesthetics of the university. Therefore, I quickly began to look at the messages being signaled to other students and me about the university's setting. Whether I was taking pride in the story behind the speed at which a building was built, or looking into the messages focused on justice that the sculpture on campus demonstrated, I recognized that things were done intentionally throughout the campus environment.

Later that year, I began to see the ways in which the campus administrators were further acting with intention through the remodel of the campus student center. The core concepts of the mission statement of the campus—Catholic, women, and liberal arts—were demonstrated through the connection of the library, chapel, and spaces for students in the renovation. This focus on the student experience and purposeful design of space helped me to think about what I would take away from my undergraduate experience.

A few years later, I began taking courses in my master's program at Colorado State University, where one faculty member, Dr. James Banning, introduced us to the concept of campus ecology. Dr. Banning's approach used my experience as an undergraduate student and helped me to understand it through the lens of seeing behavior as the function of environment and person (Lewin, 1935). While this approach to analyzing experience became increasingly helpful to me in understanding how to use some of the information to create change, I continued to wonder whether there was a more purposeful way of looking at the topic in a big-picture, mission-focused way. Identifying where a sidewalk should be put, or how sexism or racism was being portrayed was one thing; but what about how messages were being communicated to students about the type of environment in which they were studying?

To explore the liberal arts mission, I found it challenging to create a single, unified definition for liberal arts. Although, as noted earlier, there is a general understanding of what is meant by *liberal arts*, there is not a clear definition of what is meant when a campus is described as a *liberal arts campus*. A general sense exists that one knows a liberal arts campus when one sees or visits this type of campus; but as institutions seek to attract students, they continue to diversify their course offerings. The threshold for when a liberal arts campus moves beyond the liberal arts continues to fluctuate, with some campuses holding firm to the original definitions,

while others ascribe to maintaining the larger goals of a liberal arts campus experience while

offering more technical or vocational majors. Taking all of this into consideration, I sought to

understand what undergraduate students perceive when they experience a liberal arts campus.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutional mission, values, learning outcomes, and other rhetoric frame an institution's

identity (Dill, 1997; Holland, 1999; Lang & Lopers-Sweetman, 1991). As institutions of higher

education seek to tell their story to current students, alumni and alumnae, prospective students

and families, and donors, they look to share the institutional identity. As noted in chapter 1,

institutional identity is often created through the development of the organizational saga that has

been established through the historical life of the college; this identity is furthered by the

retelling of the story (Clark, 1972). Other literature discusses the story of the organizational saga

as a master narrative. This study seeks to understand the master narrative of the liberal-

education learning outcomes on liberal arts campuses. Tannen (2008) describes the concept of

master narratives as understandings that drive the discourse about a particular subject. The

liberal-education mission, individual campus mission statements, learning outcomes, and campus

ecology all drive the master narratives about the liberal arts campus experience.

The Mission of Higher Education

The mission of an organization has come to be understood as important in a variety of

different ways, especially in the context of strategic planning and decision making; but it is also

a way for institutions to understand their identities. Resneck Pierce (2004) also suggested that

institutions must begin to understand their identity through mission. In understanding

institutional identity, a clear sense of mission allows the institution to drive the "quality of both

the student body and the faculty, and enhancing campus life for students" (Resneck Pierce,2004,

p. 17). Many scholars have recognized the role and importance of clearly defined institutional

mission in the long-term planning process (Dill, 1997; Holland, 1999; Lang & Lopers-Sweetman, 1991).

Specifically, in the realm of small, liberal arts institutions, defining liberal arts and the liberal arts mission have become increasingly challenging. Whereas large public institutions focus on the education of all, private liberal arts institutions are able to explore other ways to create a meaningful experience for the students, staff, and faculty at the institution. Astin and Associates (2001) suggested an overall mission of all higher education: "the education of the student and service to the community and to society are fundamental to the purpose and mission of all institutions of higher education" (p. 9). Allen (1988) defined *mission* as the broadest way possible to describe the university's mission statement. However, *mission* does more than describe purpose. According to Morphew & Hartley, 2006, "clear mission helps organizational members distinguish between activities that conform to institutional imperative and those that do not" (p. 457).

Since the importance of mission statements became significant to the corporate sector in the 1970s, colleges and other nonprofits have begun to identify their own need for a focused mission to help with strategic planning. In the case of community colleges, "missions orient . . . officials as they react to changing conditions and decide whether and how to pursue new opportunities" (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006, p. 6). Mission should drive how institutions understand themselves, make decisions, and move forward. Just as the leaders of many institutions use institutional values, learning outcomes, or other means as the foundation for understanding their mission, other leaders also use the needs of the market to identify how they will continue to grow and change (Noyes & Gustafson, 2004). This variation in approaches is reflected in how many

institutions have begun to explore the addition of more professional programs, and how others continue to hold strong to their liberal arts base (J. Brown, 2012).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities *Greater Expectations* report published in 2002 defined *liberal education* as

> a philosophy of education that empowers individuals, liberates the mind from ignorance, and cultivates social responsibility. Characterized by challenging encounters with important issues, and more a way of studying than specific content, liberal education can occur at all types of colleges and universities. "General education" and an expectation of in-depth study in at least one field normally comprise liberal education. (p. 25)

In one of the briefing papers related to the *Greater Expectations* report, Boyer (2001) declared that the first measure of a quality education was "a clear mission" (Sec. 1, para 1). In his expansion of this definition, Boyer suggests that anyone who is seeking a college campus "need[s] to determine if a college's stated mission matches your own goals and values" (Sec. 1, para. 2). This concept conveys the expectations that students who are narrowing down their college choice must explore mission as one component of this decision. Related to mission as reflected through environment, admissions directors have noted that campus environments and the physical layout of the campus can have significant impact on prospective students. For instance, Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney (2005) observed that "prospective students form an opinion of a campus in the first ten minutes of their visit, and in the next thirty minutes they make a decision whether to rule the college out or continue the application process" (p. 76).

Although the larger understanding of mission is articulated, expressed, and lived in a number of ways across campuses, campus administrators frequently articulate what the mission of an institution through a mission statement. This statement is then promoted through college web sites, publications, strategic plans, and other locations to help the greater campus community affirm the institution's purpose.

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Mission Statements in Higher Education

For the Student Affairs professional, much of the overarching work with mission statements on campus is done with students to help them gain an understanding of aspects of their identities, whether these characteristics are related to race, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, religion, or identities shaped by specific student-leader roles. This effort helps students to know who they are and to understand the aspects of their identity and how each impacts who they are in the world.

Institutional types. Different types of institutions of higher education have differentiated themselves through their individual mission statements. As an example, an increasing number of institutions in the early twentieth century focused on women's education (Horowitz, 1985). In the mid nineteenth century, the idea that states should support institutions of higher education became more prevalent, and public higher education was born with the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862 (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Between 1837 and 1964, institutions were created to serve black students (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Later, institutions serving Native American populations (Cohen & Kisker, 2010) and deaf populations (Gallaudet, Fischer, & De Lorenzo, 1983) were created to serve specific groups of students. At other points in history, institutions have also been created with the goal of skill development, and those institutions developed trades to further credential the apprenticeship model (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). As these different institutional types continued to develop, so did the role of the mission statement in helping to distinguish experiences their students would have. However, Hallinger and Heck (2002) have suggested that "mission fulfills a human need for meaning and purpose that transcends institutional type" (p. 9), and they have gone on to suggest that, through a

community buy-in to the institutional mission, employees recognize their part in creating something that cannot be found at other institutions.

Liberal arts focus. As mentioned earlier, Scott (2006) shared that current university missions focus on teaching, research, and public service. However, this broad definition of university focus must also include an acknowledgement that each institution is unique in how it aims to accomplish these foci. For the liberal arts institution, the focus on teaching exists within the realm of a variety of disciplines, based on the belief that the student who has studied multifaceted areas is prepared for lifelong learning.

Over the past 50 years, the number of institutions that fit within the definition of liberal arts has continued to drop. In its early classification work, the Carnegie Commission (1973) included a broad definition of liberal arts, and it also incorporated public institutions with enrollments lower than 1,000 students and private institutions lower than 1,500 students. In 1970, the number of institutions that fit this definition was 719, although that number had dropped to 583 in 1976 (The Carnegie Foundation, 1994). In 2000, 228 baccalaureate liberal arts programs existed in the United States (*The Carnegie Classification, 2000 Edition*, 2004). And the *Washington Monthly* (2015) included 247 institutions in its liberal arts rankings in 2015.

With liberal arts colleges being differently focused than other institutions, the role of their mission statements is of particular importance. In the field of higher education, the ongoing challenges to the value and scope of the liberal arts suggest that helping prospective students and families understand what a campus defined as liberal arts means may be more critical than addressing such issues for other institution types.

In addition, college costs are increasingly expensive (Davidson, 2015), and in a market-based economy, each cost must be justified. Accreditation boards have taken note of this and

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have begun to change how they are asking institutions to complete their accreditation. As administrators of liberal arts institutions delve further into their understanding of the term *liberal arts*, they must name liberal arts as their purpose, define its reason for being (Newsom & Hayes, 1991), and, ultimately, provide justification for a liberal education.

To help define the purpose of an institution, Drucker (1973) suggested that we ask the following questions: What is our business? Who is the customer? What is the value to the customer? What will our business be? What should our business be? In this list, we would replace *business* with *institution* or *college*, but the general principle remains. What is the liberal arts institution? Who is the student? What is the value to the students? What will our campus be? What should our campus be? We can further define this purpose by exploring the role of the mission statement of institutions of higher education. As Meacham and Gaff (2006) shared, "The mission statement is an institution's formal, public declaration of its purposes and its vision of excellence" (p. 6). However, they went on to distinguish between mission statements and the mission of the institution, "The campus's mission statement . . . is not the same as a mission of an institution, a living sense among individuals in diverse roles of what an institution is and why it is important" (p. 8).

As a finer point of clarification regarding a liberal arts education, Cronon (1999) made an important distinction between *liberal education* and the more frequently used *political liberalism*. As previously noted by the definition that the AAC&U's *Greater Expectations* (2002) provided, *liberal education* refers to an educational tradition that "celebrates and nurtures human freedom" (p. 73), whereas *political liberalism* would suggest a teaching agenda that aimed to encourage students to adopt a politically liberal ideology.

Mission-statement symbolism. I have discussed the manifestation of culture primarily in terms of the physical environment thus far; however, culture is also evident through the values and basic assumptions an institution shares. As outlined previously, the mission statement represents both an artifact and the guiding document that create the basic assumptions of the institution. Morphew and Hartley (2006) noted that campus mission statements are also "steeped in symbolism" (p. 457). Words such as *critical thinking*, *inclusion*, and *leadership* are scattered across mission statements, yet these symbolic terms, overarching themes, and created assumptions are often difficult to measure objectively and so must be clearly defined by each campus. Otherwise, a sense of shared understanding of their meaning for the campus community is lacking. Addressing this need to create the common understanding of these terms and their meanings can later help to create a community that understands why specific terms are used and the implications they have for the campus (Swales & Rogers, 1995). Campuses must find ways to clearly express this symbolism. They also must find ways to interpret the responses of students and the general public to the symbolic expression, to understand how the symbolism, themes, and assumptions are perceived, and so determine whether they are meeting their goals. As a specific example, Patton (1987) suggested that photographs can have value for the institution as it grapples with these terminology disputes because photographs can be "systematically collected and analyzed to learn about program implementation and outcomes" (p. 171).

Mission-driven purpose. As the institutional mission is reflected in this conception of mission statements, that mission affects the experience of students, staff, and faculty at the institution. Although students are the most transient participants in the college experience, they

are also the primary audience and largest recipients of that experience. When students attend institutions that are driven by mission, their experiences have a greater purpose.

Institutions that define themselves as *mission driven* have a strong sense of their mission and use this mission for their strategic planning and other processes. Although nonprofit organizations have long been driven by mission to demonstrate responsibility to their boards, make decisions, and integrate employee happiness (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003), institutions have not often had a history of being mission-driven. Campbell (1989) suggested that to be mission driven, the following two tasks are involved: defining purpose and communicating the mission. Through these two actions the mission becomes a living document with which individuals across an organization can engage. Yet, with institutions of higher education, connecting the talk (mission) and walk (actions) can lead to measurable and observable results. This has become especially evident in terms of the creation of more diverse faculties (Adelman, 1997; Milem & Astin, 1993). For an institution to be further mission driven, its decision making should reflect the values and purposes outlined in the mission. The reality of this ideal is often reliant on a number of organizational processes and priorities (Perrow, 1986; Weick, 1976).

Liberal Arts Campus Attributes

To understand how liberal arts education is positioned, it is also important to understand that liberal education has been something that is challenging for high school and college students to define in a broader context. Humphreys and Davenport (2005) shared focus group findings in which groups connected the concept of liberal education with "well-rounded," foundational, or having a "breadth of focus." The AAC&U definition is presented in chapter 1. Liberal arts campuses provide an opportunity to cultivate an environment that intentionally encourages undergraduate students, rather than one that focuses on research and graduate students (Hersh,

1999). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) cited several components of the educational experience that enhance both cognitive and socioemotional development, and also retention and satisfaction. These attributes are the following: high expectations and standards, emphasis on high academic engaged time, frequent assessment and prompt feedback, active student engagement, frequent faculty contact, collaborative learning, a residential campus, individualized learning, and an emphasis on active learning and connection to the institution during the first 2 years of college.

The increase in focus in higher education on serving the marketplace has led many to question the goals and purposes behind the liberal arts campus in today's economically driven environment (Carlyle Aitchison, 2015). Pascarella and Blaich (2013) found evidence that the "learning environment for liberal arts college students was significantly different from that of their counterparts at research universities or regional institutions" (p. 10). The Wabash Study data Pascarella and Blaich were analyzing controlled for precollege characteristics and majors, and yet the study still reported greater cognitive gains for student participants at liberal arts campuses than for participants at other types of institutions. Other studies have found that liberal arts campuses seek to address the concerns about vocational preparation by connecting liberal arts education and career-oriented outcomes (Taylor & Morphew, 2010).

<h3 style="text-align:center">Learning Outcomes</h3>

Learning outcomes have gained increasing importance across college campuses as governmental regulations and expectations have become the new norm for campuses. Maki (2012) discussed the ways in which institutions increasingly are looking at assessment of the college experience, both across the curriculum and within specific coursework, student-affairs work, and other experiences for students. As the neoliberal landscape has evolved in the college environment, so has the notion of assessment and accountability (Maki, 2012). Further,

organizations whose purpose is assessment have developed within the last decade, as they seek to enhance how learning outcomes are assessed on college campuses.

A 2014 study from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie) identified that 84% of all colleges and universities have adopted specific learning outcomes for their undergraduates. Learning outcomes have become a way for campuses to share how learning occurs on their campuses. The Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006) recommended that "postsecondary education institutions should measure and report meaningful student learning outcomes" (U.S. Dept. of Ed., p. 28). This increased external pressure on campuses has resulted in more campuses identifying learning outcomes and needing to find ways to assess the related learning.

The Pathways to College initiative (2012) defined a student learning outcome as representing

> what students know, do, and can demonstrate as a result of having completed or participated in an educational program, activity, course, and/or project. Effective student learning outcomes specify actions by the student that are observable, measurable, and demonstrable. When student learning outcomes are designed and measured effectively, related assessments can help decision makers determine how to better facilitate student learning. (p. 2)

Although much of the recent work has been done around the assessment of these learning outcomes on a campus (Kuh et al., 2014; Pascarella & Blaich, 2013; Pathways to College Network, 2012), other research has focused on the larger outcomes, which go beyond a singular program, course, activity, or campus. Two such entities have provided the most significant approaches to learning outcomes for campuses that are invested in the liberal arts. The Wabash Study (Blaich, n.d.) provides liberal arts learning outcomes, whereas the AAC&U has identified liberal education outcomes, which often connect to the liberal arts but are not specified to connect solely to the disciplines identified as being part of the liberal arts.

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Wabash Study

The Wabash Study (Blaich, n.d.) was designed by the Center of Inquiry at Wabash

College and was designed as a longitudinal study across 49 institutions. The study gathered

qualitative and quantitative data from more than 17,000 student participants and utilized a

number of different instruments to measure how students on the campuses exhibited the liberal

arts outcomes, which are outlined in Pascarella and Blaich (2013). The participants were

measured on 12 outcomes "associated with undergraduate liberal arts education" in an effort to

understand how these outcomes developed in students. The measured outcomes included critical

thinking, moral reasoning, socially responsible leadership, interest in engaging intellectually

challenging work, interest in political and social involvement, well-being, positive attitude

toward literacy, interest in contributing to the arts, interest in contributing to the sciences,

openness to engaging new ideas and diverse people, orientation toward interacting with diverse

people, and academic motivation. Research teams from a number of institutions have been

continuing to analyze the data provided in the Wabash Study.

A second study done at the University of Michigan in connection with the Wabash Study

identified the following liberal arts outcomes: integration of learning, moral character, effective

reasoning and problem solving, well-being, inclination to inquire and lifelong learning,

intercultural effectiveness, and leadership (King, 2007). This study focused less on course

content and more on the broader concepts of the "liberally educated person."

Association of American Colleges and Universities

The AAC&U provides a complementary view of liberal education outcomes. In 2005,

the association began the Liberal Education and America's Promise: Excellence for Everyone As

a Nation Goes to College (LEAP) campaign. This campaign took the premise begun in the

Greater Expectations report (Greater Expectations, 2002) and sought to explore how campuses discussed the experiences and outcomes for liberal education. The campaign was careful not to limit itself to the liberal arts, but to focus more broadly on the goals of liberal education. Engaging in focus groups across the country, the researchers sought to "understand their attitudes about and perceptions of liberal education, as well as the degree to which they recognize the value to their own futures of a liberal education and its key outcomes" (Humphreys & Davenport, 2005). In addition to the focus groups already highlighted, the research occurred over a number of years in conjunction with numerous colleges and universities. Further, the research analyzed reports from businesses and accreditation reports to determine the AAC&U outcomes.

Ultimately, the study identified four primary learning outcomes, as defined in chapter 1. These outcomes, which coincide closely with the Wabash Study outcomes, are knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative and applied learning.

Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world. This learning outcome focuses on understanding the larger world and related education within the various disciplines, as defined in chapter 1. However, studies indicated that, as of the end of the past millennium, fewer people continued to believe in "learning for learning's sake" (Hersh, 1997, p. 18). Increasingly, career skills and personal values had risen to the top of what people outside of liberal arts institutions were seeing as the goal of a college education. Further, Hersh found that members of the general public believed liberal arts education to be attainable at any institution of higher education. Hersh's study, which queried various stakeholders, including parents, high-school students, business executives, faculty and administrators, university and specialty-school

graduates, and liberal arts college graduates, to rank various expectations of the liberal arts curriculum and skills, found that only higher-education goals were seen as unique to liberal education. These goals were "developing an appreciation for culture" and "developing basic skills in the sciences, arts, humanities, and social sciences" (p. 19).

Other research pertaining to knowledge of the physical and natural world has explored cognitive learning and how such learning has historically happened. For instance, Bang (2015) discusses *anthropocentrism,* the view that "knowledge of the natural world is biologically based and driven by perceptual systems that require minimal experience or triggering conditions" (p. 223).

Hodge, Pasquesi, Hirsch, and LePore (2007) explored a liberal-education model that focused on a "student as scholar" framework, calling for a shift from "teacher as scholar" perspective. This model calls for a transformation of learning from an instructional paradigm to a learning paradigm, which in turn leads to a discovery paradigm. The model utilizes Kegan's (1994) goal of supporting students through these paradigms from a place of consuming information to transforming and articulating information. Grounded in critical thinking and reasoning, the authors noted that these concepts were core to the student-as-scholar model. Working across the different learning outcomes from the AAC&U, the authors noted that the goal of the student-as-scholar model was "to integrate personal and intellectual development with student learning in one seamless educational experience through immersion in a developmentally appropriate, research-based curriculum that leads students across Kegan's evolutionary bridge" (Hodge et al., 2008, p. 12). This model supports student learning across the curriculum and connects to the broader goals of liberal education.

Intellectual and practical skills. Intellectual and practical skills are widely outlined through the AAC&U definitions of the topic. Yet they also include items ranging from critical thinking to teamwork. Research in these two areas is dense.

Campuses have numerous data points to use to acknowledge that teamwork is an important skill for students to gain while in college. Hart (2009) noted that nearly three-quarters of employers were seeking increased "teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings" (p. 2). Others have identified teamwork as "a set of skills that individuals use to foster the success of groups or teams" (Hughes & Jones, 2011, p. 57).

Robinson (2013) studied employers to learn about the types of skills they sought from new political-science graduates and found that five skills were most desirable: initiative/ability to work independently, ability to work with a team, interpersonal skills, written communication, ability to work with the unknown, and oral communications and public speaking. These five skills also reflect the definition of intellectual and practical skills from the AAC&U. Robinson's team sought to identify "how faculty can respond to legitimate pressures for workplace relevance without abandoning liberal education" (p. 152), but they found that many students felt their cocurricular experiences better helped them to build these skills than classroom work did.

Recently, the AAC&U (2013) studied 318 employers in terms of the skills they looked for from graduates. This study found that skills of critical thinking, clear communications, and the ability to solve complex problems rated higher with these employers than a required college major. Barrett (2014) completed a qualitative study of 14 hiring professionals and found that they mentioned motivation, resiliency, dedication, independence, and passion at a greater frequency than those characteristics are mentioned in the AAC&U study.

Personal and social responsibility. Personal and social responsibility are often

connected to concepts of ethical behavior, citizenship, and intercultural competency. AAC&U's

Greater Expectations (Greater Expectations, 2002) document stated that

> Empowered and informed learners are also responsible. Through discussion, critical
> analysis, and introspection, they come to understand their roles in society and accept
> active participation. Open-minded and empathetic, responsible learners understand how
> abstract values relate to decisions in their lives. Responsible learners appreciate others,
> while also assuming accountability for themselves, their complex identities, and their
> conduct ... they help society shape its ethical values, and then live by those values. (p. 23)

In addition to the AAC&U's LEAP initiative, the Core Commitments initiative outlines five

goals connected to the larger concept of personal and social responsibility. These five key

dimensions are (a) striving for excellence, (b) cultivating personal and academic integrity, (c)

contributing to a larger community, (d) 5aking seriously the perspectives of others, and (e)

developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning (AAC&U, n.d./a). Similarly, Colby and

Sullivan (2009) outlined three dimensions that form the foundation of personal and social

responsibility: "identity formation, cultivation of purpose, and learning to put knowledge to

responsible use in practical reasoning" (p. 24).

Other areas of higher education have for a long time considered personal and social

responsibility to have an important role. Yet Reason, Ryder, and Kee (2013) reviewed literature

about personal and social responsibility and noted that the emphasis on these concepts had

cycled through times of high and low emphasis, with a recent refocus on them as having an

important role in the educational process. Additionally, the emphasis on higher education has

often been connected to civic mission (Hamrick, 1998; Hurtado, 2007; Reason, 2011).

Integrative and applied learning. Various literature has reemphasized integrative

learning as an outcome of liberal-education efforts. With the AAC&U and other groups

developing research projects and scholarship about integrative learning, scholars have noted the

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challenges associated with the development of integrative learning opportunities in colleges. For instance, Graff (1991) pointed out that

> one of the oddest things about the university is that it calls itself a "community of scholars," yet it organizes itself in a way that conceals the intellectual links of that community from those who don't already see them. I trace this oddity to . . . the assumption that the natural unit of instruction is the autonomous course, one not in direct dialogue with other courses. The classes being taught at any moment on a campus represent rich potential conversations between scholars across disciplines. But since these conversations are experienced as a series of monologues, the possible links are apparent only to the minority of students who can connect disparate ideas on their own. (pp. 1–2)

Others have challenged the ways in which current students approach college. Concerns have been raised about whether integrative and applied learning can happen in the current college environment, in which many undergraduates take courses across various institutions, thereby undermining the potential for success in colleges with an intentional integrative component (Huber & Hutchings, 2004).

Despite these challenges, there are also calls for a new understanding of integrative learning, connected to intentional learning, as identified by the *Greater Expectations* report (Greater Expectations, 2002). The suggestion here was that students find a way to approach learning with a sense of purpose, in which they are creating and developing the connections across the curriculum, which in turn results in learning as the goal, as opposed to the historic uses of tests or specific educational benchmarks to determine success (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989). In a similar vein, Huber and Hutchings (2004) suggested a need for campuses to create opportunities for students to connect their learning "within and among courses and contexts" (p. 9).

Following up on a more detailed discussion of these categories in his initial (2012) work, Barber (2014) noted that integration of learning occurs in a three ways: (a) connection, (b)

application, and (c) synthesis. Using data from the Wabash study, including longitudinal interviews, he utilized grounded theory to identify the "*ways* in which students integrate learning ... and *how they make meaning* of that process" (p. 9 [emphasis in original]). These developmental components, which move from fleeting connections to complex synthesis, assist students in enhancing their understanding.

Campus Ecology

In exploring campus environments, Strange and Banning (2001) discussed the role of design and space. Earlier, Miller and Banning (1992) suggested that the physical environment of a campus contributes to the following four innate human needs: community, territory, landscape, and way finding. Citing Jackson (1984), Miller and Banning highlight community as the "moment when we begin to suffer, psychologically and even physically, for the companionship and presence of others" (1992, p. 11). They further discussed this idea through an evolutionary perspective that suggests the value of providing spaces where people can find companionship and spaces where they can be together. When discussing territory, Miller and Banning cited Ardy (1966) and the view that, as an evolutionary practice, humans need to "have a place to call our own." In connecting this concept to a college campus, they highlighted, "We see students selecting 'their' favorite areas of campus, 'their' private places in the union, and often seemingly by habit they gravitate to 'their chair' in the classroom."

Miller and Banning further define landscape in their discussion of the landscape of campus. Citing Kaplan and Kaplan (1978), they refer to the concepts of mystery and legibility:

> Legible environments are those with open and distinctive landmarks; a landscape that one could wander through and feel safe and not become lost. Mysterious landscapes are those that appear as if we could acquire new information if we were to pursue our travels into them. (Miller & Banning, 1992, para. 14)

Additionally, Banning (1994) mentioned students' success in way finding as an indicator of whether the campus environment is providing adequate cues for directing people around campus to find the resources, offices, and directions they need to get from point A to point B. Much of Miller and Banning's research focused on how behavior is impacted by the environment in which one exists. To understand how the physical environment is a component of the experience of individuals, Strange and Banning (2001) cited Boyer's (1987) observation for prospective students that, although the people they met while visiting campus were influential, the physical environment is what "won out" (p. 17). As Strange and Banning stated, "On a typical college campus, most students spend a good deal of time in implicitly or explicitly purposeful environments" (p. 82). The authors understood these environments to include residence-hall rooms, libraries, classrooms, or other campus-designed environments. This conclusion leads to the question of whether or not the purposeful environment is reflective of the outcomes of the institution.

Place and Environment

The physical environment in which one is situated reflects those things that are important to the organization or the individual. Over the past half century, the literature increasingly has suggested that space helps to inform the interactions that occur between individuals (Cresswell, 2013; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2006, 2013). As Cresswell (2013) has stated, "In any given place we encounter a combination of materiality, meaning, and practice" (p. 1). It is this intersection of materiality, meaning, and practice that reflects the culture of the place in question. As Bruner (1986) noted, "Lived experience, then, as thought and desire, as word and image, is the primary reality," (p. 5). Whereas the rhetoric of mission is of importance in setting the tone for the

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institution, development of the lived experience of individuals on a campus and how they come to know the institution has a greater influence on the realization of that mission.

Similarly, classrooms have begun to integrate different learning environments as pedagogy has recognized the role that space and place have in developing those environments. One text that has helped to transform the learning environment is Palmer's *To Know As We Are Known* (1983), which states, "a learning space has three major characteristics, three essential dimensions: openness, boundaries, and an air of hospitality. How do we create a learning space with these qualities? The most obvious approach is the physical arrangement of the classroom" (p. 71). Yet, on a university campus, we need to regard all spaces, whether formal or informal, as part of the learning environment.

Physical Environment

Institutional fit is often discussed in organizational-behavior literature. In research that has addressed institutional myth, researchers have indicated that formal structures that match the myths of their institutional environments demonstrate the shared values of the institution (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Meyer & Rowan, 1975; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). As previously suggested, the visual cues at an institution can help to provide a context for institutional values. For example, in conversations at other institutions, representatives of one institution may highlight the fact that their library, student union, and dining hall are all connected, thus providing access for elements that are important to the student experience. Or religiously affiliated institutions may highlight their tie to the church through crosses hung in each academic area and meeting room throughout campus (Estrada, 2004). As a counter case in point, Penn State, following the scandal surrounding its football coaches, found it necessary to remove a

statue of Coach Joe Paterno that had long symbolized pride for the football team and campus (Van Natta Jr., 2012). Such visual aspects give cues to the institution's pride and culture.

In studies at primary schools, researchers have found that the surroundings greatly influence how and what students can learn. In elementary classrooms, bright colors, alphabets, numbers, and other visual artifacts frequently provide insight into what is being learned in the classroom. In junior-high and high schools, such nonverbal cues are often replaced with more topical information or concentrated bulletin boards that provide more in-depth information from which students can gain knowledge. This is a reflection of the work of Horne-Martin (2002), which suggested that surroundings can act as a catalyst for learning.

In a study of British secondary schools, Woolner et al. (2010) discussed the physical environment as holding a "complex network of organizational and behavioral factors," which they further argued are significant to the development of students and their success (p. 2). Yet, if we understand that these factors influence students when they are younger, it is likely they also impact students who are beginning their college experiences, creating a rich environment that influences student success. And in contrast to the impact of rich environment, Strange and Banning (2015) have noted that rural, residential campuses often provide an environment in which "motivation for engagement may emerge from physical isolation and the need to create a whole, meaningful life as full-time students" (p. 195).

Artifacts and Symbols

Schein (1985) began to develop ways in which to interpret culture, which he later defined as *categories*. Through his research, Schein developed a three-level typology. The first level, labeled Artifacts and Creations, most specifically pertains to photography because it "is the most visible level of the culture" (p. 14). Beyond the photographs and physical spaces, this category

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also acknowledges written and spoken language, artistic creations, and group member behavior. The next level, Values, includes the vision or thoughts about what members of the group should be or how they should aspire to behave. Similar to the mission statement and how it is used in strategic planning, values help group members to react in specific situations. Many institutions include a values statement in conjunction with their mission statement to help people recognize how decisions can be made, should the need arise. The final level, Basic Assumptions, defines how to perceive, think about, and feel about situations. The content of this level may be seen as the goal of the mission statement, which defines how one is to perceive, and to think, and to feel about the institution.

Communication

Campuses often use a visual medium to introduce who they are to their constituents. This approach is increasingly evident through the continued use of photographs and videos on college websites, social-media sites, and the ongoing reliance on college viewbooks as a way to communicate campus culture. Hartley and Morphew (2008) found in a study of college viewbooks that many campuses utilize the viewbook as a way to "begin forming a relationship" (p. 673). This finding mirrors some strategies based on media-richness theory, which suggests that some types of media provide better formats than other methods for communicating complex messages (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Lengel & Daft, 1988), including the values of institutions of higher education. Through the use of photographs, Harper (2002) suggests that subjects, in this case institutions, can realize "a new awareness of their social existence" (p. 21). Other research would consider the use of viewbooks as a means to reflect organizational socialization for prospective students. This research describes "the process by which an individual acquires the

social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211), in this case, the role of a student.

Using photographs as a means to gain an understanding of students' experience of the campus culture provides a new way to identify what messages various intentional and unintentional physical representations on campus. Wheeless (1975) suggests that when the intended message and what is seen do not match, there is a fear of misinterpretation. Thus, campus decision makers must pay careful attention to what they are presenting visually to the campus community.

Photovoice

Through analysis of the visual cultures that have been created in schools, we can gain a larger understanding of the messages communicated through signs, symbols, and other visual expressions. Various studies that highlight visual research have taken place within educational settings (Coles & Nixon, 1998; Diamond, Patrick, & Mullen, 1999; Grosvenor, Lawn, & Rousmaniere, 2000; Margolis, 2000; Thomson, 2008; Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009; Wall, 2008; Woolner et al., 2010).

Not only are images used as a way to understand settings, as I will be exploring, but as noted previously, institutions also frequently use photographs on their websites and in their viewbooks to depict college life and what is important to the institutions (Kittle, 2000). Hartley and Morphew (2008) described brochures such as viewbooks as promotional materials to help students define the institutions they are considering, and to shape the potential student's expectations for their college experience. In fact, O'Connor (2000) interviewed a series of school counselors, and one of them stated, "View books work best if they have lots of pictures, lists, and not so much text" (p. 166). With so much focus on the visual to tell the story, one must

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wonder what visuals exist on campus to share the institutional mission and articulate what is important to the institution.

In using photographs as a way to understand messaging, we must think about this consideration as especially important for researchers because this information will undoubtedly affect their methodology, given that research as "a tool is also a mode of language, for it says something to those that understand it, about the operations of use and their consequences" (Dewey, 1938/1991, p. 52). At the same time, interviews, which, like mission statements, have been defined as "conversational encounters to a purpose" (Powney & Watts, 1987, p. vii) can take place to further the researchers' understanding of photographs. Using photographs as primary documents, researchers not only have physical images to ponder, but also will be able to gather and confirm information through verbal interaction (Cohen & Manion, 1997). Furthering this concept, Harper (2002) suggested that photographs may merge the perspectives of the researcher and the subject because their perspectives are "anchored in an image that is understood, at least in part, by both parties" (p. 20). Further, in a study with younger students, Schratz and Steiner-Loffler (1998) found that "we suffered from the fact that the power relationship proved to be too much in favor of the adults when confronted by verbal arguments" (p. 236), but when photographs were the method of interaction, there was less confrontation because there was no longer the perception that one interpretation was "correct or incorrect" (p. 246).

Visual Ethnography

Culture is understood through a variety of different lenses. Smircich (1985) encouraged the study of symbols of a culture for one to better define and understand that culture. She suggested that "to study culture means to study social significance—how things, events, and

interactions come to be meaningful . . . studying culture means studying 'world making'" (p. 63).

Schein (1990) furthered this perspective to the use of artifacts as the most noted "layer" for

studying the culture of organizations. The mission statement and learning outcomes, which are

meant to be purpose defining for institutions, and thus help to create an institutional culture, have

a role in defining culture, as well. To understand culture, however, one must interpret the

different aspects one sees and recognizes in these things, events, and interactions.

Visual Studies

Organizations frequently seek to help others understand who they are through verbal and

nonverbal ways. Yet, while much research has been done about the verbal communication and

language choices organizations make, little research has explored the visual communication of

these environments. Spencer (2011) noted, "we are not only an 'interview society' (Atkinson &

Silverman, 1997) but also an obsessively visual one verging, at times, on the voyeuristic" (p. 1).

As visual research has evolved, it has integrated photographs, videos, and other visual

components into the research discussion. Visual methods overall continue to offer some

challenges in terms of researchers defining how the environment should be studied. Guba and

Lincoln (1994) suggested three questions to connect the depth of research with the underlying

philosophy of the research:

> *The ontological question*: What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is
> there that can be known about it?
>
> *The epistemological question*: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower
> or the would-be knower and what can be known?
>
> *The methodological question*: How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever he or
> she believes can be known? (p. 108)

Modifying these questions for the college campus, one might ask, "What are the limits of the

institution relative to what can be known about it? What is the relationship between the students

and what can be known about the campus? How can the researcher go about finding out about the campus?" To date, little has been done in institutions of higher education to further this understanding and identify what about an environment creates an atmosphere in which students engage.

Photo elicitation. Photographs were first used as a research method in 1957 as John Collier began to understand that, when he introduced photographs into an interview, "the pictures elicited longer and more comprehensive interviews but at the same time helped subjects overcome the fatigue and repetition of conventional interviews" (1957, pp. 857–858). This method, which has become increasingly identified as *photo elicitation,* integrates photographs into interviews for the purpose of understanding a participant's experience. Often, the participant is asked to take the photograph, and the researcher then understands the photograph through the participant's lens and also adds her own understanding to the visual image.

Photovoice. Driven by participatory action research, *photovoice* was introduced in 1999 by Wang and has existed primarily within the world of healthcare. Based on five primary concepts, photovoice seeks to engage participants in creating social-action and policy initiatives through the use of the visual. The five concepts framing photovoice are that (a) images teach, (b) pictures can influence policy, (c) community people ought to participate in creating and defining the images that shape healthful public policy, (d) the process requires that planners bring to the table from the outset policymakers and other influential people to serve as an audience for community people's perspectives, and (e) photovoice emphasizes individual and community action. Since its introduction, photovoice has been largely used throughout healthcare, in primary and secondary education, and for environmental issues; but it has not been greatly adopted by higher education as a methodology (Wang, 1999).

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Photo ethnography. Another visual participatory research method that has gained

significance is the use of *photo ethnography.* Pink (2007) observed the increase in literature and

studies that were using visual observational approaches to anthropology and sociology. This

increase in research has become apparent over the past 20 years (Harper, 2002; MacDougall,

1997; Pink, 2007; Rose, 2014; Spencer, 2011). Using participant-obtained photographs to

understand the environment creates a powerful way for one to understand the experience of an

organization. Consider the potential benefits of photo ethnograpy in the context of the

traditional verbal approach to ethnography, and the observation by Geertz (1973) that

> Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a
> manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and
> tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in
> transient examples of shaped behavior. (p. 10)

Photo ethnography has been used within the range of a method in which the researcher

takes photos and draws meaning from the photographs (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998) and the

participants help to make meaning of this experience. Ideally, ethnography occurs within a

framework of reflexive practice (Spencer, 2011). The goal of the reflexive process is to explore

a subject from the viewpoint of the participant. Further, Jenkins (2008) has contended that in

ethnography this exploration must be "from the vantage point of everyday life" (p. 5). Further,

as Pink (2007) stated, reflexivity is

> not simply a mechanism that neutralizes ethnographers' subjectivity as collectors of data
> through an engagement with how their presence may have affected the reality observed
> and data collected. . . . subjectivity should be engaged with a central aspect of
> ethnographic knowledge, interpretation and representation. (p. 23)

Framed most certainly within the context of qualitative research, photo ethnographies intend to

"empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power

relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40).

      Visual anthropology. Banning and Kaiser (1974) introduced the concept of *campus ecology* to higher education. Campus ecology is further defined as engaging in *visual anthropology*. Banning has defined visual anthropology as when "a photograph captures an observation and becomes a document for analysis . . . the intent of visual anthropology is to study human behavior through a variety of photographic methods including the use of still cameras" (1997, p. 99). Kaiser (1978) defined the two primary dimensions of analysis in campus ecology as "the student's consciousness or basic awareness and the spaces or environments he inhabits" (p. 27). He further defined space as "the set of stimuli occupying consciousness at any given moment. The stimuli may be physical, mental, social, chemical, biological, etc." (p. 99). This idea that space is multifaceted creates a basis for further understanding of the campus environment through the process of integrating these different constructs of space and one's experience with them. Studying these physical environments may reveal, through photographs, new understandings of what is being communicated. And as English (1988) noted, the photograph may be revisited, while taking notes about observations alone does not afford that opportunity.

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Summary of Chapter

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      Noting the multiple ways the larger mission of liberal arts campuses have been built upon learning outcomes, the mission of higher education seeks to prepare individuals to be critical thinkers, prepared for the workplace or to engage with societies larger issues. Individual campuses note other purposes for their campus, whether due to institutional type or focus for the institution, leading to the specific outcomes for students on these campuses. To denote these

different purposes, campus administrators and faculty have engaged with learning outcomes specific to their campus, but also in connection to the learning outcomes connected to liberal arts and liberal education, as noted through both the Wabash Study and the AAC&U's creation of liberal education outcomes.

Finally, campus ecology demands that educators take into account the physical environment and messages relayed to understand the learning environment that is created on each campus. With various visual methodologies expanding the ways researchers can explore physical environments, I began to explore the intersection of these different concepts to understand how students saw the liberal arts mission expressed on their campuses.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this photo-elicitation study was to discover how the liberal arts mission is communicated to undergraduate students at liberal arts colleges. Through photo elicitation and photovoice methods, I developed an understanding of how undergraduate students see aspects of the liberal arts institution reflected in their campus environments. The central research question was "How do undergraduate students see the liberal arts mission expressed on their campus?" Within this overarching question, a number of additional research questions existed:

(a) How do students see knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world expressed on campus?

(b) How do students see intellectual and practical skills expressed on campus?

(c) How do students see personal and social responsibility expressed on campus?

(d) How do students see integrative and applied learning expressed on campus?

Theoretical Framework

With an increasingly visual culture (Jay, 1994; Jenks, 1995; Mirzeoff, 1999; Spencer, 2011), and closely associated with the introduction of the sound-byte culture in the early part of this century, we must better understand the impact of the visual as a way of interpreting one's experience. As Spencer (2011) has discussed, "There have been changes in the form and fluidity of new media technologies permitting a succession of new forms of visual experience" (p. 11). Spencer goes on to share, "Images operate at the most basic level of human perception, and yet there is still a great deal we do not understand about the complex process of recognition and attribution of meaning" (p. 13). Therefore, in this study, I relied on aspects of visual research to

better understand how visual culture impacts the experience of the students with whom we work, specifically within the liberal arts environment of higher education.

Environments are understood through a variety of means. By exploring campus environments within the context of a culture, I began to utilize ethnography as an initial framework. In integrating the physical with the experiential, I utilized the work of Pink (2007), Spencer (2011), and Stimson (1986) to inform my understanding of visual ethnography. The research of Strange and Banning (2001) also provided guidance in helping me understand how campus cultures develop. Highlighting both physical campus attributes and the overarching messages shared on college campuses, these researchers have gone beyond the use of observation to incorporating the visual, and specifically photography, into their work. This evolution has led to increased attention from scholars to the visual as a way of understanding culture (Crawford, 19982; Harper, 2002; Liebenberg, 2009; Pink, 2007). The integration of visual culture into this environmental research resulted in an expectation for both the study participants and me to go beyond the linguistic and additionally define culture through the visual (Mirzoeff, 1998).

As the visual became recognized as a viable approach for understanding culture, Pink (2007) reminded researchers that visual research methods are not limited to the visual components of the research, but are driven by the *focus* on the visual elements. Pink maintained that the relationship between the researcher and the participants is ongoing and that "it is not solely the subjectivity of the researcher that may shade his or her understanding of reality, but the relationship between the subjectivities of researcher and informants that produces a negotiated version of this reality" (p. 24). For this study, I applied Pink's suggestion to use the visual to inform one's larger understanding of the culture and drive the conversations with

participants to the concept of liberal education outcomes and how they are understood on college campuses. By then engaging in interviews and dialogue with the participants through focus groups, I gained a better understanding of the participants' negotiated versions and experiences of liberal education outcomes.

Similar to Pink, Spencer (2011) remained concerned about and attuned to the reflexivity of the ethnographic project. For instance, Spencer discussed the home environment as a difficult environment in which to do ethnography "because the everyday, taken-for-granted aspects of our culture are particularly difficult to recognize and observe" (p. 47). With campuses serving as home to participants both figuratively and sometimes literally, how participants in this study were attuned to messages varied. In applying the concept of everyday, taken-for-granted cultural aspects to the college and university campus, both the participants and I were open to the possibility of the outcomes being articulated in the everyday components of the institution.

Stimson (1986) encouraged the engagement of environment and space. In doing so, he asked that researchers spend as much time looking at their surroundings and the environment as they do listening to participant experiences. Through such engagement with this environment, another dimension is added to the functionality of the space and the discussion. The discourse between this functionality and formality of the space, in combination with the uses of the space, reflect increasingly important considerations for researchers. For higher education, then, the architectural setting may play an important role in communicating what liberal arts is and what is important to the institution.

The use of photographs in research is often viewed as reflecting a largely cross-discipline study, and visual ethnography frequently combines elements from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and the arts. Organizational-studies and business-studies literature has

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emphasized mission (Michaelson et al., 2014). Together, these frameworks provided an interconnected theoretical foundation to help guide the current research. By asking the participants to engage with me in developing the meaning of photographs, and using photographs in tandem with surveys, I was able to gain a broader insight into the role of the liberal arts mission at the various institutions. While looking at sense of place and how this was communicated, I understood how the liberal arts mission was expressed on the college campus.

In addition to mission, institutional environment has been studied through the Cooperative Institutional Research Program. This ongoing program, which uses Astin's (1977) Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model to study the perceptions of students during their first and senior years, tests college impact on students based on the input characteristics, environmental characteristics, and outcomes. This research sought to focus on students' involvement in their education. Yet it was Schuh and Kuh (1991; Kuh, 1993) who used mission, philosophy, and culture to define a college's character. These researchers identified several institutional environmental factors that contribute to the character of the institution, three of which contributed to the focus of the present study: (a) a clear mission that states reasonable challenges, a degree of care, and community membership; (b) a physical environment that does not dwarf the individual and provides extracurricular involvement; and (c) a cultural history that is symbolized by traditions and rituals that define the institution.

Rationale

To begin to understand how place creates an environment focused on learning, I applied qualitative methods to the research. I then sought to obtain a baseline understanding about how elements of the liberal arts mission are expressed on campus. Research on learning outcomes has suggested that while, for some items, quantitative measures exist, qualitative measures can

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assist in "making sense of some of the learning outcomes associated with various educational experiences" (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007, p. 71). The authors also suggested that some concepts are more challenging to quantify. They went on to note that these outcomes have an increased significance because they "serve as the hallmark of a liberal arts education" (p. 71). Based on my initial pilot research, it became evident that some aspects of this expression would be demonstrated through the physical makeup of the campus buildings and structures, while other elements of the liberal arts mission would be expressed through the interactions students observed on campus, with the combination thus reflecting their learning environments.

Pilot Studies

I conducted two initial pilot studies in an effort to test components of the study and help me identify the methodology I would use. In the first study, I explored two specific educational outcomes on the campus at which I work. In the second study, I explored the use of an application to help streamline the participant experience.

Pilot Study 1

The first pilot study was with a group of students who were exploring two specific learning outcomes on a small, liberal arts campus in the Midwest. Exploring the ways that students came to understand ethical behavior and citizenship expressed on this campus, I worked with staff within the Office of Institutional Research to conduct a photo-elicitation activity with the participating students. Having exhausted the student body's willingness to take surveys, the staff and I were seeking a way to explore a qualitative inquiry into these outcomes on campus. To help us understand the vague concepts of ethical behavior and citizenship, photography appeared to provide a unique vantage point from which to understand the informal ways these concepts were expressed. So we asked selected students to help us understand the broader ways

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in which ethical behavior and citizenship were practiced in the day-to-day experience of our students.

In this study, 20 student participants were given disposable cameras and photo logs to take and document photos of ways that citizenship or ethical behavior were happening on campus. Through the pilot, I gained some insight into the process of doing the study. One major takeaway was that the students found it somewhat cumbersome to carry the cameras, and they did not always have the cameras with them at the times they wanted to take the photos, even though they had agreed to participate, and the instructions told them this was what was required for the study. In addition, some of the photos participants returned lacked the necessary quality and resolution to enable a full understanding of what was happening in the photograph. With the lack of narrative, the other researcher and myself found ourselves wishing there were additional data available for analysis, including more specific information about why the participants selected the photographs they submitted.

Several aspects of the study provided information in relation to how students experience learning outcomes on the campus. Most notably, we found that students viewed citizenship as being reflective of the times in which they interacted with the larger community, whether those were interactions with others in class, on their floor, or off campus. Participants alternately defined ethical behavior as connecting to their individual experiences and as morals at play. The student participants in this study indicated their understanding of these concepts as having grown through their time on campus; further, coursework, volunteer opportunities, and involvement experiences on campus fostered this understanding. In addition, students did not always see ethical behavior and citizenship as two separate concepts. As one student noted, "I know when I was taking the pictures, ethical behavior and citizenship began to merge . . . because you know, .

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. . doing something in your community . . . when is that not ethical behavior?" Another student

shared, "I think for a lot of people ... being a good citizen is ... part of their ethical behavior."

Through understanding the various nuances associated with how students approached the

learning outcomes for this particular campus, I gained further understanding of the ways in

which asking participants to limit their photographs to a single learning outcome might cause

them to be challenged; this insight allowed me to think further about how I could have further

conversations with them in focus groups about the photographs that had been submitted.

Pilot Study 2

For the second study, I explored an application (app) called EthOS, which is a

smartphone app intended for photo elicitation. Visually, the app appeared similar to other social

media apps such as Instagram. I had considered using social-media tools such as Instagram or

Facebook when I formulated the study, but I wanted to allow participants to submit photographs

without having to share them with the world. Therefore, I sought an application that students

could download, but that would also mimic social-media platforms that numerous people across

the country were already using.

To identify participants, I used social media and asked for an open Facebook call. This

approach also provided me the opportunity to ask friends who worked on college campuses to

provide feedback about different aspects of the study, which worked to my advantage. I asked

19 staff and faculty members at 17 private institutions of higher education throughout the

country to take photos of their respective campuses to depict how they saw mission expressed on

the campuses. A total of 152 photographs were submitted based on the prompt "How do you see

mission expressed on your campus? Take five photos of subjects you see as being good

representation of your institution's mission. In addition, take five photos of subjects you see as

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being antithetical to your institution's mission." After they had taken the photos, participants uploaded them to the app, tagging the photos as either "on mission" or "off mission," as appropriate. I asked participants to download EthOS app to their smart phone or iPad, and to submit their photos through this application. I chose the EthOS app both for its interface on multiple devices and its online component, which allowed participants to interact and comment on one another's photos through the online login. Participants were asked to add comments or descriptions to their photographs, and this occurred to varying extent. When I had questions about why a specific photograph was taken, I contacted the individual participant to gain further insight. Instead of using individual interviews, narratives, or other approaches, I explored some opportunities for interaction on the app and used its most useful components.

Following the photo-collection period, the 19 participants completed a survey. I first provided participants with a link to the photographs taken, then I asked them to review and reflect on the photographs, thinking about which ones best conveyed their understanding of mission. Beyond this, the survey included several open-ended questions to obtain their understanding of the broader concepts of the study. In the survey, participants responded to the following questions:

(a) How do you define *mission*?

(b) What does it mean for an institution to be *on mission*?

(c) How do you see mission represented or enacted on your campus?

(d) What were you unable to capture in the photographs?

(e) What were you expecting to see in the photographs that was not present?

I used these questions to guide my understanding of how the participants understood the overall mission. This feedback informed my interpretation of the photographs to enable me to more directly understand how photographs expressed mission to the participants.

In this second pilot study, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of how mission is observed on college campuses. Findings suggest that on private college campuses, mission is understood both through member behavior, such as relationships, and through artifacts. Using the photographs and the survey responses, I sought to understand the intersections of values, people, and physical space, and whether mission was reflected in this intersection. The actions in the photos the participants took showed mission congruence among the students, staff, and faculty at institutions. The artifacts provided integrate mission intention through symbolism and rhetoric.

Lewin (1935) suggested that behavior is a function of environment and person. Because mission helps create environment, member behavior is impacted. In this second pilot study, member behavior included relationships and action that occurred within the photographs. The mission of the institution compelled members of the campus community to behave in ways that reflected an emphasis on relationships or action toward doing something. Although much of the research discusses how mission is expressed symbolically, the language participants in the study used to discuss how they saw mission expressed centered on how mission was enacted. Most frequently, this expression did not reflect how buildings were constructed but instead reflected the actions people took to "live the mission." Catching people in action proved more difficult, but participants were able to identify many ways in which members of their campus community were practicing mission.

When participants discussed the people at the institution, relationships with one another and their relationship to the institution were both relevant to how participants saw an institution as being on mission. The second area strongly represented through both written and photographic evidence was the expectation of action around mission through member behavior. The other area that was frequently demonstrated in the photographs, but less understood based on the survey responses, was the physical environment itself, including posters, sculptures, buildings, and other environmental components. Many of the photographs that did not have people within them were highly reflective of artifacts that were expressing institutional mission. Place was somewhat challenging for participants to identify. Beyond the symbolism of specific artifacts, one participant highlighted place as reflected in the renovations on the campus and as being representative of mission. Because the renovated spaces were classroom and academic spaces, this focus reflected the basic educational mission of the institution.

Lessons Learned

Based on these two pilot studies, I determined that photo elicitation would be an effective way of engaging with participants in the larger study to understand their experiences through the eyes of individuals immersed in a culture. Further, after I explored various technologies, it appeared that the use of the EthOS app would be an effective tool for the study. In addition, I expanded some elements of my methodology to best explore the photographs and get true participant insight without bringing in researcher bias. My intention was to increase how participants could share their insights about the photographs and their reasons for submitting them. Providing an opportunity for narrative feedback to make stronger connection to the ethnographic method became an important component of the study moving forward.

Research Design

The objective of this research project was to increase the basis for understanding how liberal arts mission was expressed across four different liberal arts colleges in the Midwest. Further, participants were identified on each of these campuses. In the following section, I outline how these research sites were identified and the steps that were completed for the study. I also address the data collection and analysis processes for the project. Finally, I discuss how trustworthiness was established for the project.

Research Sites

Although a number of institutions across the United States have defined themselves as liberal arts institutions, the Carnegie classification system no longer includes this definition for undergraduate student campuses. Therefore, in an effort to narrow the number of institutions participating in the study, I first restricted the potential list to the institutions within the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM). The 14-member institutions form the ACM as "a consortium of academically excellent, independent liberal arts colleges located in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Colorado" (ACM, n.d.). To further narrow the potential participating institutions in an effort to gain more robust data, I also used the organization and book *Colleges That Change Lives* (CTCL) (Pope, 2006). Although the members of this book are not limited to liberal arts campuses, the goal of the CTCL organization is focused on recruiting students: ". . .the goal of each student finding a college that develops a lifelong love of learning and provides the foundation for a successful and fulfilling life beyond college" (CTCL, n.d.). Five institutions overlapped between these two organizations. Four of the five institutions elected to participate in the study. These four institutions, located in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, were the focus of my study. After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Colorado State

University (CSU), I also approached the IRB at each institution to receive approval for the research project.

To gain access and develop researcher-participant relationships, I identified participants through a snowball sample by utilizing colleagues at these four identified institutions. Through the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) and provost at each institution (Appendix A), I identified from 10 to 30 potential student participants at each site. The instructions sent to the SSAO and provost suggested a desire for participation over a range of student leaders, class levels, races, ethnicities, genders, and other representative factors. Following identification of such students by the SSAO and provost, I invited those students to opt in to the study (Appendix B) and attend an informational session. During the informational session, I invited participants to encourage their peers to participate in the study (Appendix C).

Sample and Participant Selection

As noted, I utilized SSAOs and provosts to identify undergraduate student participants from the respective research sites; I then approached the identified students to explore their potential participation. I recognize this approach did not allow for a full representation from each of the schools, and so I collected demographic information at the start of the study to determine participant backgrounds (Appendix E).

To assist in establishing a rapport with the participants of the study, I held informational meetings via Google Hangout so participants could understand both the basics of photography, and also how they were expected to participate. These informational meetings happened on both a small-group and individual basis. The outline of these meetings and the information covered is available in Appendix M.

Data Collection

Following the selection of participants, I sent an email to them. This email contained an overview of the project (Appendix M), IRB Information (Appendix D), and the AAC&U Essential Values of a Liberal Education document (Appendix L). I also asked all participants to fill out a document that provided identifying information about them, including the institution they were attending, year in school, race, gender, general involvement, and major, so I could initially code those details when I imported participant details into the EthOS app. Following this import, participants would be able to access the study and submit their photographs, and also to see the tagging or coding structure prepared in the app. The demographic information imported into the app allowed me to sort submitted photographs by campus, academic year, and to do so before attending the focus groups. Beyond this demographic information, I asked each participant to define *liberal arts*.

After I had gathered the basic information, I held informational sessions for participants. I provided them with the AAC&U definitions so they would understand the four liberal education outcomes. I asked them to take multiple pictures of how they saw each of these outcomes enacted on their campus. I shared information with them about photographs and how to ensure consent from the individuals who might be shown in any photos. Participants received a photo release form (Appendix J), which shared information about the project, for those photographed to sign. In the event participants submitted photos without the signed consent form, I removed those photos from any possibility of being published. I then imported participant information into the EthOS app, through which the participants then received a second email invitation to download the app and sign into it via the Web. There was no cost to the participants to download the app, and I was given access to it as researcher because I

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received no funding for my study. Because the app is continuously being improved, the developers asked that I provide them with feedback on its usability after the participants had completed the study, which the developers would use to improve the product.

In March, I asked participants to begin taking photographs, using the EthOS app. Participants were given the prompt "Over the next 3 weeks, take photos of the ways that you see the liberal arts mission on your campus." They were asked to tag each photograph with at least one of the four liberal education outcomes they saw taking place; they were given the option to add further tags or categories they saw, as appropriate. These tags served as my first round of coding from the input from participants. Participants then noted the time, location, and reason they took the photograph in the description. Throughout the 3-week period, participants could continue taking photos; I asked them to take a minimum of four photos, with no maximum number determined. Throughout the 3-week period, I sent out periodic notices about the project to participants, reminding them to continue taking photographs (Appendix K).

Following the deadline for receipt of the photographs, I reminded participants of the essential outcomes and asked them to identify the four photographs they believed were most representative of the liberal education outcomes (Appendix F). These photographs did not need to correlate with or be from each of the four outcomes. From these four photos, I then asked participants to write a longer, four- to five-sentence narrative describing why they chose each photograph, what meaning the photograph had for them, and how they saw the content of the photograph as a representation of the liberal arts experience at their institution. The choice to integrate the narrative was based on other recent photovoice research and conversations with researchers who had used this method (DiCicco, 2014). After I received their photographs and narratives, I began to review and analyze how participants had tagged the photos.

Before the end of the semester, I scheduled semistructured focus groups with participants on the respective campuses to identify themes and make meaning of the photographs. Questions for these focus groups are located in Appendix G. The focus groups were recorded.

By gaining an understanding of the meaning participants applied to the photographs, I was better able to understand each participant's perspective and individual experience. To get at this understanding, I followed the focus-group framework established by Wang (1999) with the development of the photovoice method. This framework is set up using the mnemonic SHOWeD: What do you See here? What's really Happening here? How does this relate to Our lives? Why does this problem, concern, or strength exist? What can we Do about it? With the cross-section of individuals from different institutions exploring and describing the photographs, multiple themes emerged from the discussion about how one might depict the experience of the liberal arts campus.

Data Analysis

When the focus-group sessions were complete, I transcribed the recordings from each session. I sent the transcripts to the participants, inviting them to clarify or address concerns within the transcript (Appendix H). Then I began to code the results based on my understanding of how the participants perceived the liberal arts campus. I began by using open coding, coding from the language within the liberal education outcomes. In this process, I identified how artifacts and symbols were similar and how they were different among the campuses. Further, how these themes remained consistent and were differentiated across campuses helped me to identify how these students who were attending liberal arts colleges experienced the liberal arts.

I utilized a qualitative data-analysis software system called MAXQDA as a way to code the data and then look at specific codes. After I entered the focus-group and visual data into

MAXQDA, I looked at the codes created by the participants and understood how the photos had been discussed, both in focus groups and through the written narratives. Pink (2007) described this approach, in which the researcher uses different organizational practices to understand how the photographs and words spoken come together to inform the culture. Individually, neither of these elements is enough for full understanding; but together, they offer a more complete picture for both the participants and the researcher.

Specifically, after staying as true to the participant-driven photovoice method as possible in this photo elicitation, I asked the participants to help make meaning from the photographs. The participants drove the research by choosing what to photograph on their campuses, helping to code the photographs, narrowing and writing narratives about the images, and participating in the focus groups about the pictures. Within the focus groups, the participants collectively chose which photographs best represented the larger categories and codes to further create meaning connected to the liberal-education learning outcomes. The base list of codes then helped to inform my creation of themes. Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, and Dunn (2014) discussed how organizational researchers apply their own cultural value systems when researching an organization, yet often neglect to consider the cultural perspectives of the workers. Similarly, campus researchers often explore the campus without considering or obtaining the perspective of the students themselves. I sought to ensure ways of obtaining these viewpoints from the student participants in an effort to fully understand the campus environments that were created.

The initial coding occurred through the participants as they upload the photographs into the EthOS app and used a quick-coding or tagging method to label the photographs. In addition to their initial codes, I provided participants with codes that matched the four AAC&U-defined outcomes. Following this initial process, I began some inductive coding through the MAXQDA

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software. Inductive coding allowed me to seek findings that emerged from the data. This step

assured that I did not assume answers before I entered into the project; instead, I allowed the data

to create my understanding. Spencer (2011) suggested that visual research data, such as

photographs, should utilize inductive coding, similar to the approach used in grounded-theory

research, in which "the 'craft' of visual research requires a balance between inductive forces –

allowing the collected data to speak for itself, and deductive forces – structuring, ordering

principles derived from theoretical models and concepts" (p. 132).

As participants narrowed their images to four photographs, I again reviewed the codes

they used to label their selected photographs. To gain a better understanding of the images, I

looked for emerging themes as they tagged the images. Using a constant comparative model

(Boeije, 2002), I sought similarities and differences among the various participants in both how

they coded and tagged the photographs and in their narratives. By recognizing the multitude of

different sources of data for the study, I was able to connect each form and piece of that data

with one another. This process gave me the opportunity to follow up with participants to

determine whether themes that appeared from tags were truly similar in context or not. To better

convey how I explored and coded a photograph, I include the following example from the study.

Elizabeth, a pseudonym, labeled the photo in Figure 1 as *Sociology of the Environment*

Course Completion! She initially tagged the photo "knowledge of human cultures and the

physical and natural world."

When asked to narrow her selection of images and describe the selected photographs,

Elizabeth submitted the following narrative for this photo:

> I saw the liberal arts enacted throughout the duration of the course, Sociology of the
> Environment, from the cohesive reading material that drew on many disciplines
> (economics, psychology, history, and mass media), to the in-depth conversations we had
> inside and outside class sessions. Because discussion of the environment is relevant to
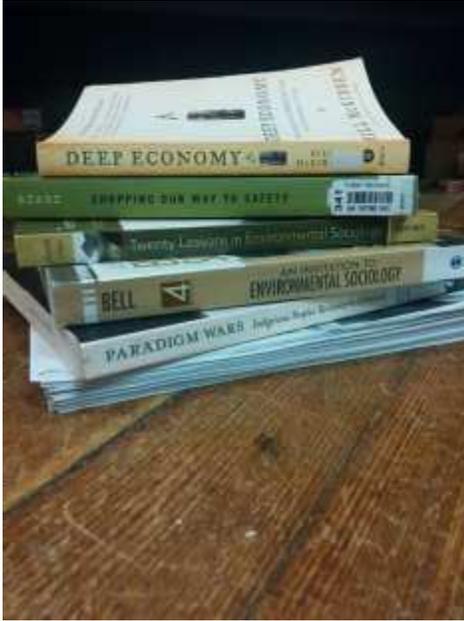
Figure 1. Elizabeth's books.

every discipline, really, and sociology is notorious for being a hodgepodge of the social sciences, this really was a perfect example of how the liberal arts works to increase interdisciplinary knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world. As we explored the complex facets of the intersection of humans and the natural world from a variety of perspectives, we engaged in critical examination of the connections that have led us to this point of worldwide environmental destruction. It's courses like these that inspire students to take action on issues they care about, to apply a wider worldview to a life of being a global citizen and human.

As I analyzed this narrative and photograph, a number of different codes emerged. I coded "cohesive reading material that drew on many disciplines (economics, psychology, history, and mass media)" as *integrative and applied learning*. I coded "in-depth conversation we had inside and outside class sessions" as *written and oral communication*. For "this really was a perfect example of how the liberal arts works to increase interdisciplinary knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world," I applied the dual code of *knowledge of human cultures, and the physical and natural world* and *integrative and applied learning*. I coded "critical examinations of the connections that have led us to this point of worldwide environmental destruction" as *critical and creative thinking*. I coded "It's courses like these that

inspire students to take action on issues they care about" as both *ethical reasoning* and *action and student activism*. Finally, I coded "apply a wider worldview to a life of being a global citizen and human" as *civic knowledge and engagement—local and global*.

Following this same process, I analyzed all the narratives and focus-group transcripts. Based on these open codes, I sought larger codes, and ultimately, categories. These codes then helped me to apply themes based on the overall codes I had identified.

Trustworthiness

With participant-driven research, my objective was for the participants to make meaning of their experiences. To understand appropriate themes, I utilized different components to reach trustworthiness. Guba (1981) identifies four constructs that should be considered: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility is understood through the use of a strong methodology. To achieve this, I reviewed several photovoice and visual methodology texts (Harper, 2002; Pink, 2007; Spencer, 2011) and studies (Comi & Eppler, 2011; DiCicco, 2014; Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, Ling, & Ling, 1996; Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1998), which helped me to understand the various approaches to photo elicitation and photo voice. Further, the pilot studies previously identified gave me a deeper understanding of the research design. Credibility is further understood through the use of member checks. By having participants both code the data and confirm the accuracy of the data, additional insight was gained.

Transferability was incorporated through the use of multiple sites for the study. Although the transferability in this study was limited, the study, along with other future studies, will shed light on how the liberal education outcomes exist across campuses. Through using thick

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description techniques, I have continued to enhance transferability. Transferability is noted

through noting the context of the environment where the data was collected so that readers can

understand whether the data and findings may connect to their environments. The results of this

research are intended to allow us to begin to connect learning outcomes and physical

environment, and to understand how students experience these concepts while on campus.

Dependability was considered throughout the process through conversations with other

researchers. By discussing findings and choices in codes and themes, I continued to engage with

external audiences.   Further, I outline the steps for the research process throughout this

dissertation and maintained a reflexive journal throughout which I grapple with the findings of

the research.

Finally, confirmability occurred as the participants were primary coders of the data. As

this concept explores how the findings are shaped by participants, rather than the researcher,

their integration throughout the research process reflects their engagement in the research.

Confirmability is further addressed as I define triangulation and reflexivity in the following

sections.

Triangulation

I incorporated several aspects of triangulation into the data collection and analysis to

establish trustworthiness. One of the primary aspects was building on Delueze's (1990) efforts

to connect the concepts of triangulation and reflexivity. Kojo-Lundberg (2015) defined the

combination of these two efforts within a single study as *triangulaxivity* and offered this

definition, "the use of multiple techniques and a commitment to self-inspection for gathering

and/or handling researchers' own thoughts and activities within a single study" (p. 37). She

further noted that these two concepts come together in an aim to create change, which also holds true for the use of photovoice within research.

As Creswell (2007) noted, "To further de-emphasize a power relationship [between researcher and participant], we may collaborate directly with participants by having them review our questions, or by having them collaborate with us during the data analysis and interpretation phases of research" (p. 40). To demonstrate triangulation in this study, the participants took the photographs and provided their meaning and context to me. Consequently, these steps improved the trustworthiness of the study. In fact, the participants provided numerous data points for triangulation throughout the process, both in terms of the individual interactions, but also in doing member checking further into the process. The data points I used included the photographs submitted, the resulting photographs participants selected that included written narratives, and finally, the focus groups, whose recordings I later transcribed. This triangulation of data was further increased through the use of multiple sites for the study.

Reflexivity

Similarly, my efforts incorporated an awareness of reflexivity as previously described. Following their submission of data, participants engaged in the initial analysis by coding the photographs, and then the focus-group discussions were built around the coding they used. During the focus groups, participants had the opportunity to reevaluate whether the initial codes they had assigned fit within the larger coding scheme, and to come to some resolution about their interpretations in the process. This collaboration continued to build on the relationship between the participants and myself. As noted, the participants were provided the focus-group meeting transcriptions, either to confirm that they found the transcripts accurate or to edit their input further and clarify their comments.

To support researcher reflexivity, I began a researcher journal after the research was approved by IRB. Throughout the research, I took notes about my process and any items I recognized as important components to the research. At times, the notes reflected codes I considered, connections I saw, or other items of importance or that seemed worthy of exploration. I noted my reactions to the participants' statements, codes, and notes. I've included a sample entry from my researcher journal (Appendix N), in which I explored one of the codes that was rising to the surface throughout the transcription process, and how I was reading into the participant comments at that point. Although the code was one I later incorporated into a larger theme that emerged, my struggle with the concept is illustrated in the journal entry.

Researcher Position

However, with these efforts to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I must acknowledge that the study is inherently positioned because I presupposed that environmental factors are present on college campuses, and also factors unique to the liberal arts campus. At the same time, further trustworthiness was developed through the continuous checking of my interpretation of information with the participants and asking them to be the primary ones to develop meanings from the data.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this photo-elicitation study was to enable discovery of how students at residential liberal arts colleges perceive the liberal arts mission. Additionally, I explored how undergraduate students understood the learning environments where they were gaining a college experience. In this photo elicitation study, primary research questions focused on the AAC&U's Essential Learning Outcomes of a liberal education. The central guiding question was "How do undergraduate students see the liberal arts mission expressed on their campus?" To answer this question, I posed a number of additional questions:

(a) How do students see knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world expressed on campus?

(b) How do students see intellectual and practical skills expressed on campus?

(c) How do students see personal and social responsibility expressed on campus?

(d) How do students see integrative and applied learning expressed on campus?

To answer these questions, I elicited photos from participants using a series of photo-mediated focus groups. Further, after the participants submitted photographs, I asked them to narrow the number of photographs to the four images that best articulated for them the liberal-education learning outcomes, and to write narratives about how each photo matched their understanding of the outcome they had assigned to the photo. With the intention of being participant driven, the photo elicitation process mirrored some aspects of a photovoice methodology.

Participant Demographics

A total of 19 research participants from four different campuses began the study. Of the 19 participants, 16 identified as White. One participant identified as multiracial, one as Latino, and another participant as Black or African American. Seven participants identified as seniors in college and six as juniors, five identified as sophomores, and one indicated a first-year status. Seven participants identified as male, 11 participants identified as female, and one participant identified as trans man. All participants reported living in on-campus housing. Additionally, all participants were traditional-age undergraduate students (ages from 19 through 22) when they participated in the study and focus groups. Participant majors were wide-ranging, with history, sociology and anthropology, and psychology being the most prevalent majors (see Table 1).

Table 1
Participant Majors

Major	Number of Participants*
Biochemistry	1
Biology	1
Business Management	1
Computer Science	1
Education	1
English	1
Environmental Studies	1
History	4
International Relations	1
Mathematics	1
Molecular Biology	1
Political Science	1
Psychology	3
Religious Studies	1
Sociology and Anthropology	3
Studio Art	1
Theatre	1

*Note. A number of participants indicated double majors

Participants indicated a wide variety of involvement in activities, student-employment positions, and other opportunities outside of the classroom. To preserve the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

The study participants provided data and initial analysis. Data collected from the participants included their responses to the initial intake survey, in which they shared their definitions for *liberal arts*; photographs of how the participants saw the liberal arts expressed on their campuses; the narrowed selection of photographs, related narratives, and codes for these photographs; and last, the transcribed recordings of focus groups in which all participants took part. The participants' transcribed comments from the focus-group sessions was later reconciled with the photographs and associated descriptions the participants submitted.

Data Analysis and Emergent Themes

I analyzed the research data in a variety of ways, both through the lenses of the participants and through my lens. Initial analysis by participants drove the ways in which the focus groups evolved. In allowing the participants to do initial and secondary coding of the photographs based on the research questions, I came to understand the intended meanings behind the photographs and the symbolism the participants associated with the objects, individuals, and aspects of the environment within each photograph. The labels participants gave to photographs, the narratives they wrote about them, and the focus-group conversations provided me with additional understanding of the student perspective. Following the participant coding and focus groups, I did additional coding based on the four liberal-education learning outcomes and their definitions, and followed this with open coding. Several of the codes were easily grouped together. For instance, I grouped relationship, support and friendship together quickly. Additionally, I had created a code for classroom/academic and one for residential campus, which

were joined within an environment category during secondary coding. Well-rounded came across consistently in several interviews, and as I explored what I had coded with that, I then developed the larger emergent theme from this to better understand what the participants meant when saying well-rounded. The concept of partnership began to resonate within the first focus group and then continued to emerge through later interviews. Using these ideas, the codes further came together to transform into my emergent themes. Five primary themes emerged from the study: (a) relationships: community, student-focused, support, and friendship; (b) environment and physical space; (c) well-rounded, integrative, and interdisciplinary; (d) partners, not consumers; and (e) the uncapturable.

Theme 1: Relationships: Community, Student-Focused, Support, Friendship

Participants discussed relationships taking place in a number of ways. Many participants discussed community, both how they experienced community and how they observed community being experienced as a whole on campus. Other conversations occurred regarding relationships that developed inside the classroom and through overall campus experiences. Through their photographs, they shared images of residence halls; events happening on campus; and groups of students who gathered together around a shared interest, passion, or cause.

As the students described the feeling of community on campus, they acknowledged that this community was something they could not pinpoint exactly; but there was an emphasis on the overarching sense of belonging and togetherness. In our discussions, I asked whether this feeling was because of the liberal arts components of their campuses, the residential aspects, or the unique academic calendars the various campuses provided. Participants were not as able to explicitly describe what brought them together in this sense of community. For example, Emily, a senior, described the experience this way:

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I was going to say you can't capture the emotion that you're feeling in everything. Building off what both of you said, my freshman-year floor was a family. We did everything together. I know that I have my friends right now, and we still do a lot of things together; and just the emotion behind it and the community and the hard work and the support that everyone has. . . You just can't ever capture everything.

Other students also spoke to the residential and small nature of their campuses. The relationships that developed within the residence halls, whether those relationships were facilitated through living-learning communities or they took place organically, created a sense of togetherness in these spaces. Ryan, a sophomore who took part in a living-learning community, shared concerns from his friends who attended larger schools:

And a lot of my friends who go to bigger schools—I have a lot of friends who go to the U of MN, and they say, "it's too bad you have to live on campus all 4 years," where they're out in the apartments after 1 or 2 years; where I say, "no, I like it. It's great. Everything happens on campus. You know, all of your friends are only a 10-minute walk away." I actually kind of enjoy all 4 years on campus.

Each of the participant campuses had a central dining hall where students came to eat. Participants discussed camaraderie within this shared space and the sense of security they felt. Discussion ensued about a photograph (Figure 2) in which a participant captured the breastplate of a student organization outside of the dining hall, with little apparent concern by anyone at the time for the security of the item.

Figure 2. A student's breastplate outside the dining hall.

The respect participants articulated, relative to this photo, for one another's interests, in addition to respect for one another's property, led to a discussion about how community was supported for students on campus. As Michael, a senior, shared,

> This just helped me become more appreciative of the fact that it's here, like, at our disposal, for us to use. It's surrounding us all the time. And it's just not something we're going to have exposure to at all times in our lives; and so it's just like, soak it up.

At the liberal arts college, students also articulated that they had the opportunity to explore their own interests and passions, whether those interests fit with the academic program or curriculum, or whether they meant doing something beyond the interests. Participants described friends as being individuals outside of their major, and those with whom there was less formalized connection, but friends they had met through other interactions.

Many participants shared photographs of themselves studying with friends outside of their majors. They discussed this sense of peer support of their academic life, even if the friends were unable to help them further their education or studies in a specific area. Multiple students from different campuses articulated that faculty members supported their academic and personal

interests through facilitating individual research projects; exploring courses around the interests

of a group of students, such as interest in a particular author or topic; and joining students in their

residence halls for food and fellowship. This sense that community created support for students

was echoed by participants across all campuses. Joseph, a junior, noted the intersection of his

academic life and friendship life, and the importance of these relationships, when he shared the

following:

> I started taking pictures in the laboratory, but I stopped taking pictures there. I don't
> know how many times I've gone back into my room, and my suitemates and I hear my
> roommates/suitemates talking about their future plans and spiritually how are they doing,
> who they're working with, their professor crushes—because we do have professor
> crushes—and our intentions for undergrad and all these different things . . . and I don't
> know . . . Thanks to my roommates/my suitemates, I know where I'm going in my
> research, but there's no way to capture how important that conversation is as the learning
> continues, or how many times I've fallen asleep while my roommate tells me about his
> interest in Byzantine history.

Other students echoed this sense of support, which they felt across campus. One

photograph in particular (Figure 3) matched this sense of togetherness and pride that came from

a campus participating in the study. Although the students described the photograph in the

context of the various liberal education outcomes, the focus of the photograph was a film that

was shot on the participating campus. Our discussion of this photograph consumed nearly a third

of our conversation as the participants talked about their interactions with the film. Although the

participants had had varying reactions to the movie and its importance, the general reaction

toward the film suggested that each participant resonated with it in some way, whether the

participant was on campus or studying abroad during the filming or release of the movie.

Participants discussed this film as a reflection of the liberal arts as they shared the range of their

understandings about the intersections between their campus and the film. This range of

Figure 3. Film premiere at local theater.

intersections included the financing donated in part by an alumnus of the institution, the acting in

the film, use of the campus and city where the campus is located as the setting, and the

participation of peers of the participants, who were able to take part in the editing and technical

aspects of the film's creation. The participants further discussed the sense of community and the

support from the entire campus that occurred when the film was screened. Three theaters were at

capacity with members of the campus community when the film premiered locally. Alexis

discussed the premiere:

> It was really cool to see all of the students involved and then at the premiere, which took
> up three theaters, like three screening rooms within the theater. A lot of people came.
> [The director] had, like, all the people affiliated stand up and recognized them and
> thanked everybody. . . . We gave out like a crap-ton of stuff, and everyone got free shirts.
> The movie was free; it was free transportation, free popcorn, free drinks.

Theme 2: Environment and Physical Space

A second theme that emerged in the conversation with study participants focused on the

physical spaces where students interacted. Participants spent a great deal of time discussing

some specific characteristics of the environmental components of their institutions. At times the

participants indicated the role that the physical space, artifacts, and architecture played in helping

to strengthen their understanding of the liberal arts. These spaces primarily included the campus gardens, artifacts, and spaces across campus.

Gardens. Each of the campuses included a student-run, on-campus garden, generally managed in conjunction with the food-service provider. In each conversation with participants on these campuses, the campus garden, regardless of its name, was described as a place where students found stress relief, an opportunity to give back to other members of the community, and a place where their skills were further developed (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Students work in a community garden on a campus.

Thinking about service, participants discussed their appreciation for being able to share in contributing to the meals on campus. Many participants indicated the role of the garden as one that tied them to their homes. As Anthony shared,

> I characterize gardening, and this might be because I'm from a farm and grew up doing it. . . I think on this campus, sometimes, that it's put in a box, that it seems like respite from intellectual, and more characterized by community involvement and this really important grounding activity.

This sense of gardening as an intellectual break from the day-to-day demands of their academic work was echoed by participants across campuses and focus groups. Amanda shared, "It's one of the easiest places to volunteer, so you can stop practicing your intellectual skills and take a break." Although for some participants taking a break took them away from their day-to-

day campus experiences, others connected this work with manual labor, something that the classroom component of a liberal arts education would not provide.

Anthony and other participants also went on to discuss the role of gardens in thinking about public space and the impacts on the community through gardening.

> Whereas gardening is much more grounded, it doesn't require that questioning. I don't want to. . . gardening is like, incredible and it represents a different side of the, like, liberal arts experience, which I think is, like, about engaging with the community, like thinking about public space. I guess all these things can be turned into intellectual pursuits, but I think the activity of it isn't as, like, intellectual, at least as I experience it here.

For some students, the thinking was more about the role of food in the public sphere and how to create access for individuals to these gardens. The participants seemed to grasp that their needs while in college were different from what they would be after they left the campus; and as a result, they saw a benefit to understanding the role of the garden in their acquisition of food and the importance of having that access to fresh produce. This understanding tied to the service learning opportunities in which some participants noted taking part.

The physicality of the garden reflected in the photo was a visual representation of the institution's ongoing commitments to sustainability. Each campus had employed the same food-service provider, a company with a focus on local partnerships with food producers. This provider helped provide momentum to other efforts of sustainability for participants. Participants shared that different clubs, student organizations, and courses highlighted the aspect of sustainability, but they also discussed how their food-service providers had heightened student awareness of the sustainability of agriculture. Jessica and Samantha discussed the connection of the garden to sustainability in their conversation:

> Jessica: The student garden is tying together practical, the practicality of actually growing things and setting up a garden and the actual skills involved in that, but also the intellectual piece of what grows well with what or how to effectively budget for this.

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Samantha: Also the intellectualization of *why*. Why would you have a student garden, and why is this a thing? How having a little student garden translates into the bigger picture of things. . .

Jessica: How sustainability is cool.

Samantha: Yeah.

For many participants, even when sustainability or the garden was not a primary focus of their time on campus, the notion they conveyed was that these topics were a significant enough part of the campus conversation that there was a general awareness of them. Although this topic connected for some participants to the liberal arts notion of personal and social responsibility, they also noted connections to different institutional mission statements.

Artifacts and spaces. In the focus-group discussions, the role of the physical space in terms of the artifacts conveyed a sense to both the participants and me of the subtle messages institutions were sending. Some participants discussed these artifacts in terms of the posters hung up around campus, while others referred to art work that was displayed in both student galleries and in other campus spaces. Other participants talked about some of the architectural decisions that had been made in construction and renovation to spaces on campus. These artifacts helped both to strengthen the academic nature of the campus and to engage students in recognizing how integrative learning happened across the campus, regardless of whether a building functioned primarily as a student center, an academic building, a library, or a chapel. Several participants indicated a sense of importance between spaces and new opportunities for learning.

Although the participants took few photos inside of classrooms, we spent considerable time discussing classroom spaces and how they facilitated class learning. The discussions were about how the classroom was set up reflected a sense of pride in the space. One student,

Courtney, brought together several aspects of the concepts around space as she shared in her

focus group that

> That classroom is so cool. I am really glad I remembered to take a picture that day
> because that classroom. . . it's in the [academic] center—I don't know if you've been in
> that building—if you have a chance to walk through the [academic] center because it
> opened up my freshman year. It used to be the old middle school in town. It's LEED
> gold certified. [Our campus] really values environmental awareness and environmental
> friendliness, and all the new buildings that they build, they do an incredible job; I mean,
> they used that old middle school and they used a lot of the insides of it to make this
> beautiful building. There's paneling around the elevators that's made of old bleachers,
> and there are these really cool sculptures made out of old desks and chairs. It's really
> neat. And the lights—they have this one classroom and they call it the sandbox. I've had
> a lot of classes there with [my major] but I actually think most [of our] students haven't;
> but the faculty love it because it has tables about this size, and there are six or eight of
> them throughout the room, and every wall is a whiteboard, and there's a lot of light.
> There's a teaching station in the middle. Above each table on the wall there is a small
> TV monitor like what you'd have in your house and on. . . um. . . two sides of the wall
> are big giant screens that also get projected onto that also have microphones and possible
> laptop hookup if you need it. It's very **cool** how you interact with them; and if you get a
> professor who knows how to use that room right, it's great. And I love being thrown into
> tables, so it's so easy. I'm taking a human-computer-interactions class; and the days of
> class that are the most fun are the days when the professor says, "Okay. . . here's the
> thing." Like we were given these Post-Its and "Figure this out and put it on the board."
> I'm trying to remember what the cat was. . . it was something sassy. Um. . . we were
> definitely being fresh. She asked what the definition of *formality*, so we drew a very
> formal cat. To define *formality*, we said black tie and then we gave him a monocle. He
> had a cummerbund, too, I think [see Figure 5].

Other students shared photos of equipment from their science courses and discussed how

there was no question they had entered a science classroom when they walked into the space.

Additional participant conversation about classroom is noted in theme five.
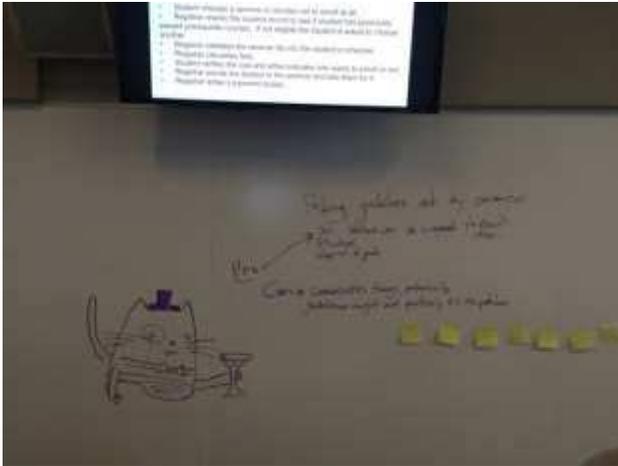
Figure 5. Defining formality in class.

Participants shared their thoughts about the artwork on their campuses and how the artwork further defined the spaces they were in. For some students, this relationship was related to the messages that the artwork sent, whereas other students reflected on the role of art on a liberal arts campus and how the art was essential in their becoming a whole person. Other participants connected the artwork to the specific mission statement for their institution. Students saw the way art was incorporated into the campus environment, both in terms of space, such as a theatre built in the lower level of a residence hall, and in terms of tangible artwork, as Figure 6, entitled *Staircase of Learning,* demonstrates. This sculpture hangs over the stairs in one of the campus centers. The integration of knowledge throughout the campus environment, and the expectations that learning could happen in so many different ways was reflective of the participants' experiences with their learning. They conveyed an increased appreciation for

Figure 6. Staircase of learning.

artwork that was done by members of the campus community, whether they were students,

alumni/alumnae, or members of the faculty.

One participant, Taylor, noted a piece of art created by an alumnus of the institution.

Taylor's narrative about the photo and the artwork (see Figure 7) suggests that the visual impact

of this artwork in the wellness center sends additional messages:

> Art teaches us about various cultures. In this case, Olaf's Viking boat sculpture is
> inspired by traditional Viking knarrs, or ships. Olaf is an alum whose sculpture was
> bought by the university and placed, interestingly, in the wellness center. This piece is
> one of the first things people see when they walk into the center, where gyms, an indoor
> track, racquetball courts, the pool, athletic locker rooms, counseling services, and the
> nurse's office are situated. This placement gives the great number of students, student-
> athletes, staff, faculty, and community members who come through on a daily basis a
> chance to experience and learn about fine art in a different setting.

For Taylor, art served a larger purpose and was highly noticeable throughout the spaces of the

campus. This awareness of the spaces and places of campus helped to validate Taylor's own

interest in the campus.

Figure 7. Viking knarr.

Finally, from a different campus, a conversation ensued about the impact of the campus's religious identity. As a Lutheran campus, participants discussed the impact of the constant reminders of this aspect of the institution through how the buildings were situated on campus. For instance, the student center was connected to the chapel, which offered daily religious services. In addition, the curriculum included theology and philosophy courses, which reflected the institution's Lutheran founding. Ryan, a sophomore, suggested the following:

> I know not all liberal arts colleges are, but [our campus] is one that is religiously affiliated. So we're required to take a couple of theology-based courses and then one ethics-based course. So there's kind of an idea that even if you're not a religious-based person, you should be able to speak intelligently about religion. I think the hope to instill some Christian values in people so that when you go out, you have this great education and the ability to do things that other people can't do and you'll be using those abilities not just for your own personal gains, but for the larger world as a whole, I guess. And we also talk a lot about vocation on campus. It's kind of a buzzword, but it's one of the. . . I guess it isn't necessarily the most prominent aspect of it, but one of the underlying aspects of the liberal arts is that your vocation should be meeting a need in the world. It should be something that's not necessarily going to just make you the most money or not going to make you the happiest in life, but it's also the idea that there are needs that the world has and you're able to fulfill those needs.

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This sense that the campus structures send a message about the institution and what it holds important also expressed itself on another campus with a chapel. This campus no longer is religiously affiliated, yet students discussed the chapel on campus as being important. One area they highlighted was the fact that the doors of the chapel did not face the campus, but instead faced the street and the community. For participants on this campus, this placement reflected the institution's desire to send a message that the campus intended to be open to the community and create a welcoming environment.

Theme 3: Well-Rounded, Integrative, and Interdisciplinary

One phrase that arose more frequently than any other phrase throughout the discussions, written narratives, and participant-created definitions was *well-rounded*. When participants were talking about how to define *liberal arts* or what that meant in terms of the liberal arts experience, the term that first came to mind in almost every interview was that the participants believed themselves to be *well-rounded* as a result of their liberal arts education. As the conversations evolved, I further identified this concept of *well-rounded* as being representative of the raw concepts of *integrative* and *interdisciplinary*. Participants highlighted experiences from their work in the classroom and their interactions outside of the classroom as having led to these ideas around being well-rounded.

In thinking about well-rounded experiences and how participants articulated this concept, I realized that much of their reporting evolved around the idea that the liberal arts education was broad and encouraged them to think across disciplines, to apply concepts from one course to another. For instance, Samantha stated, "Liberal arts is an academic environment in which everything you study is interdisciplinary." She found that, in her classes, they might discuss a concept overall, but that she would later find herself considering the same concept in another

class, or thinking about how a concept would be applied in a different discipline. Other students

echoed this perspective, but also continued to affirm the ideas of *well-rounded* as holistic. When

asked to define the liberal arts, Anthony stated,

> Um. . . that's a little tricky for me. I think if I had to think of a succinct definition, I would say that the liberal arts focus on kind of a holistic educational experience that tries to prepare students to be adaptive and culturally competent critical thinkers that don't come out of college with a set toolbox full of concrete skills, but with the ability to adapt to situations and problems and think critically. Um, yeah, I guess a big part of the liberal arts is being. . . also being exposed to perspectives and situations you don't normally find yourself in, and hopefully make you question and feel uncomfortable. So I think it's like studying at a liberal arts college, like, a big part of that is kind of questioning your identity and hopefully forming a new one.

This idea that students would be pushed to consider new ideas and perspectives in order

to become well-rounded was discussed in several groups as they explored what they had learned

on their respective campuses. In one interchange, a group of students discussed how they

understood *well-rounded*:

> Kayla: For me, liberal arts is a lot about studying life and humanity, and it's not about focusing on one subject, one aspect of the world we live in. But getting the most well-rounded education I can.

> Jessica: I think *well-rounded* is the best way to describe it. That's like the buzzword I always think of.

> Joseph: And the buzzwords that I see or that I always connect with the liberal arts is *interdisciplinary learning*, just because you try and pick out something you learn, even if it seems like two unrelated courses, like religion and science. I mean, you try and make the connections that are there, even if it was like 3 or 4 years ago, and the kind of assignments you have play off that.

The concept that students would need to apply things across the curriculum, whether

faculty were intentionally leading this charge or leaving it up to the students to facilitate for

themselves, resounded across the focus groups. Some participants even suggested they felt as if

the curriculum within their major helped them to be well-rounded. Sarah, a junior, shared, "I'm

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a history major, and you have to have a class from this area of the world and this time period, and it helps you become more well-rounded."

Further, participants indicated that this experience happened whether they were discussing class-specific topics or integrating beyond class into their cocurricular and social lives. One photo (Figure 8) that was submitted highlighted the well-rounded experience for the students on one campus. They emphasized that this photograph, which is from the student

Figure 8. Signage in a student center.

center, had posters from three events, which represented those opportunities that created a well-rounded experience for them. The photograph's posters include an advertisement for a student theatre production called *Fat Pig*, another event sponsored by the student organization Students

for Sensible Drug Policy, and a poster for the student-research symposium happening the following week. These three somewhat contradictory components of the student experience at this institution led the participants to believe that their opportunities spanned the curriculum and across their experiences to help them think about issues from multiple perspectives.

Michael described this photo as also reinforcing the concepts of sustainability previously mentioned. Michael discussed his perspective of the photo:

> About the same picture, with the posters. . . I don't know if it was intentional, but the recycling bins are underneath that, which is just more integrative learning, which is just thinking about the science behind recycling and the negative effects outside of our country and tying it all back in to why we should recycle. Whether or not we do is still to be determined by environmental club, I hope. And then additionally, I see this place where we sit and eat all our meals up in [the cafeteria] or down in [the market], and I imagine the conversations I've had there, which is definitely integrative learning, because all of our friends from different majors which we talked about earlier. . . And then hatching all of these plans that we have for campus that we would want to see would be the applied learning part, too.

The interaction between learning inside of the classroom and learning outside of the classroom did not end in the discussion about being well-rounded. However, participants did have significant remarks around their involvement and the opportunities that their involvement afforded to them. Jessica shared, "I think the liberal arts education allows us to put on so many hats. It teaches us to think critically about how we do things and how we learn and analyze the information we are given to move forward." William agreed, saying that

> It's almost impossible not to have that happen at an institution like this, where you do have that reach for people from different areas of life and the world, and you try to bring them together to create that more well-rounded discussion, whether it be a dramatic reading of *50 Shades of Gray*, or an actual discussion about LGBTQ issues on campus. It varies.

Theme 4: Partners, Not Consumers

Another emergent theme from the data indicated that the participants viewed themselves as partners *in* the institution, not as consumers *of* the institution. In discussing their interactions

with faculty and staff, their student-employment positions, and the other areas in which they were contributing to campus, participants discussed their role as one of helping to drive forward the institution.

Inside the classroom. Participants discussed how they contributed to learning inside the classroom. When discussing the curriculum, one participant highlighted an experience when he and a group of friends suggested a course to a faculty member as a topics course. Several participants cited examples of times when they felt their faculty members were teaching courses in the faculty member's area of interest, whether or not the course fit significantly within the larger realm of the academic curriculum. Whether discussing ancient Mideastern texts or taking a course focused on Abraham Lincoln, participants indicated that their liberal arts experience allowed them to further explore the interests about which they were passionate. After discussing a course whose chosen text centered on a faculty interest area, Christopher shared his experience with a faculty member, who willingly read Christopher's honors project, even though the faculty member was on sabbatical. Christopher went on to say,

> You can like, bring stuff to [professors] also. Like, we were trying to get a class going on *Gravity's Rainbow,* that Thomas Pynchon novel, and the professor was like, "Yeah, I'm too packed right now"; but it was a legitimate conversation where we were going to have him read this book with us. And, like, teach. Because there were like, five or six students interested. But, that definitely would not happen somewhere else.

In referencing both course ideas and descriptions, and the efforts put forward in the courses, participants discussed how they felt they brought unique contributions to the classroom experience.

Similarly, Courtney shared her thoughts about taking the knowledge that she had gained inside of the classroom and translating that into experiences outside of the classroom. As a student learning German in college, she discussed starting a German radio show on the college

radio station. Courtney saw this outreach as being educational and as her working in partnership

with the German department as an ambassador for German culture:

> I host a show with the German department. I'm the closest thing we have to a German major. I've taken so many classes, I'm like the student departmental representative. It's fairly common for language majors to have radio shows. There's definitely an Arabic language show, and there were a couple of us who were like, "We should host a German show," but we should do it all together so that we don't all have to be committed to being there each week. So one or two of us will be there and will play whatever German songs we can think of that we know, or tongue twisters. It's pretty great. We have like an hour time slot that we fill. We had a half hour one in the fall, and it was actually kind of short.

This belief that the students were a part of a major and had a responsibility toward other students

in helping to teach the benefits of a particular interest, whether it was their own interest or that of

their faculty members, is a reflection of how the students saw themselves as part of the

institution.

Outside the classroom. The perspectives of participants regarding how they helped

move the curriculum forward inside the classroom was strong, but their belief that their

partnership with the institutions was essential became more evident in the discussions that

occurred about student work outside of the classroom. In many instances, the participants

discussed their feeling that, without students assuming leadership roles with student

organizations and groups, the work would not always be done. They indicated that it happened

through leadership roles within Student Senate, but they also highlighted the situation in relation

to the work different student organizations did connected to identity.

One student, Alexis, discussed her role in leading a student welfare committee (Figure 9)

made up of members of the student body, faculty, and staff from around campus. This

committee was concerned with the work of the campus community to enhance the student

experience:

> I'm the chair of Student Welfare Committee, and I just thought that was a good opportunity; the people on the campus, the committee is mainly staff members. We have,

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like, four to five student members, but the majority of members are staff, representing, like, all the different facets of campus. . . . We work together. Everybody brings their individual knowledge in. We'll work together to make decisions or pass legislation or whatever.

Alexis's experience working with this committee was further clarified as she discussed how they move forward on their work. This was communicated when she and Christopher discussed the work of the Student Welfare Committee:

Figure 9. Alexis leads a committee meeting.

Christopher: How often would you say you're successful?

Alexis: There's usually, like, probably two big things that are done every year. So, like, um, the smoking legislation that got passed, making [campus] a smoke-free campus, came out of student welfare and, um, I mean, you hear this like every week in General Counsel, but we did um, the Just Bring It Back campaign where we put all the bins in all the dorms so you can return your dishes in. That was to encourage people to stop bringing dishes and leave them in their rooms, but it kind of backfired and just encouraged people to bring more out. So that was like huge, that we got that program set up 3 years ago; so now we're reversing the program and that's what, like we've been focusing on this year. We're working on restructuring parking on campus.

Christopher: Yeah, well, like, I know the bigger things, but like, you guys did the printer upstairs; but like, how many, percentage wise, would you say you are able to get in and do something about?

Alexis: Um, a good percent, I would think like 70? A lot of stuff is stuff that, it isn't that we, we can't do anything about it, but a lot of stuff comes to us and it's more of a

complaint. It's not exactly something that people need to change. I mean, we talk about everything that gets brought to us, outside of committee or General Council. Like, having the library be open longer, which got brought up a couple weeks ago, we discussed and we have a rep from the library and from facilities and like, all of the people who need to be part of the decision; and then we reach out to the people who brought it up to us. But the little things like the printer or the computer lab being open on 4th floor being open 24 hours; but of the little things, I would think like 50 to 70 get fixed, but a lot of the little things that don't get fixed, it's not that we ignore it, but it's because we can't, but there's sometimes a reason why it needs to be done a certain way.

This sense of ownership about the campus and the involvement of the students in these committee meetings, sometimes even as chair of the committee, resulted in the students voicing their perception that, without them, the campus would not function.

Participants also showed pride in the types of activities they were able to accomplish without the assistance of the administration. At one campus, they discussed an event called Cabaret (Figure 10), which Christopher described as

It's basically like a variety show where people do various [talents]. No, they basically do different acts from around the world, um, usually, like within the group there's someone from that culture, maybe a lot of people in that group are, but you have to be, necessarily, to be in the performance. So, probably the most is like, dances, traditional dances mixed with like, modern dance, with elements from various countries. There was a Japanese dance, a Korean dance, a Chinese dance, a Bolivian dance. And then there's also people that perform like songs from their homeland also. There was a Bengali song, and a Hawaiian song. It's mostly like a song-dance type thing. I think they all are. I don't think anyone does spoken word, other than like the emcees, which is what I do, which is basically like, creating the entertainment in between and like introducing and doing funny little riffs.

Alexis added to the description:

I think the flags are good, too. We have a really great international population on campus and I think that that shows, like, not only what countries are represented, but that was taken at Cabaret, which is something. . . is such a. . . is like used to highlight cultures and their uniqueness, and their abilities they bring to campus. I think cabaret is really useful.

Figure 10. Flags at Cabaret event.

Student activism. A similar discussion happened about a different campus, as

participants discussed the role of student organizations in helping to fill the gaps of the work of

the institution:

> Joseph: This is something that wouldn't happen the same way at other institutions. For example: the trans*panel. We don't have a GLBT health center here. And it isn't like resource groups like [Alliance] and other groups affiliated with intercultural life led by students and offered to students on campus. Um, yeah, that's pretty much what you said. Never mind. Again, it's students doing these things and appointing themselves to be educators and um, mentors and resources; and at another school, they'd just go call another organization that's connected to the campus, that visits twice a week, that gives a quick lesson on the dos and don'ts. . .
>
> Jessica: I think that we all fill the gaps that the administration has.
>
> Joseph: Or do a better job, and we are better off having some of the groups around here than having some person with a PhD in gender studies who is worried about doing research. You understand what I'm saying?
>
> Kayla: It's sort of interesting what you're saying because it's a really dark cloud that has a silver lining. The fact that our administration doesn't do this is really upsetting and frustrating and um, but because it's student run, it automatically lends itself to that community. And that social responsibility and personal responsibility. . . And, um, although it's out of a bad situation and it shouldn't happen, the fact that it does allows for people like Samantha who are super-activist ladies, and people who are passionate about it, and someone who I really, really admire and something I know I couldn't do, and it's really, really cool to see those people now and know that I'm meeting people who are going to change the world, no matter where they go. I think maybe that happens at all colleges, but specifically here, I know that I'm meeting people that I'm, like, you're

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going to go places, and I want to be able to call you and crash on your couch when you make it.

The participants shared over and over how their work and involvement not only benefited themselves, but also provided a benefit to the campus community. Multiple events, including panels and presentations, when students were attempting to raise awareness with their peers, resulted in positive contributions to the campus community. For instance, another participant shared a photograph from a fair geared toward educating students about learning disabilities (Figure 11). Brittany shared, "I see the liberal arts in these efforts, where students educate each other and challenge each other to critically think about relevant issues and causes."

Figure 11. Students lead educational sessions about learning disabilities.

The relevant issues and causes participants discussed included a range of areas around many issues of social justice. Student activism was discussed as a part of this partnership and how students could and did challenge the status quo in an effort to help move different conversations forward. Ryan, a sophomore, discussed an instance when students were helping to influence the general education requirements:

So two of our general education requirements are called the MCD and MCG; so those stand for *multicultural global* and *multicultural domestic*, so the idea is that with those classes you get exposed to new ideas and new cultures. There's actually a student initiative this year, and they felt that those, um, curriculum components did not really cover what they were supposed to cover. They were like, "Hey, look—other cultures are interesting," rather than a critical discourse about power and privilege and globalism and things like that. And so they went actually through student government and the faculty

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curriculum committee to propose changes to make it more sociological, more power imbalance- and social justice-based course. And so that curriculum committee has now formed two task forces that are each looking at one of the requirements, and one has developed some suggestions to bring it more in line with what the students are suggesting; and it will go to the faculty eventually for a vote on whether they want to adopt it, and then the other one is still being worked out. I would say, based on that, the classes as they currently are don't teach that, but there's a desire for them to teach that. And I would say even the classes that I have, they definitely dealt with issues like globalization and the effect that has on third-world countries, so I think it did play into those issues; but the students who were leading that group wanted it to be even more explicit and more intentional focus in those courses.

The consensus across the liberal arts institutions that students could help drive discussions around activism and the topics that should be on the agenda was evident.

Theme 5: The Uncapturable

Although this research project was based on photographs, one theme that emerged was around the areas for which participants were largely unable to capture photographs. The participants highlighted a number of different reasons they were unable to take photographs in these areas; some of the reasons were consistent across the campuses. The primary reason participants felt they were unable to capture these areas in photographs was because of the people who would have been in the photographs. At the time of the initial instructions to study participants, I had explained that they needed to obtain consent forms from anyone whose face was visible for any photograph that would be published. In the focus groups, the participants indicated that they were leery of taking photographs of individuals with whom they had strong relationships, for example. They alluded to their peers as they discussed whom they would have wanted to capture, but they indicated relationships as the component they would have wanted to capture. The participants addressed a desire not to disrupt their classroom environments by taking photographs in those spaces. This discussion led to some conversations in the focus groups about the cliché of pictures being worth a thousand words, as the participants

simultaneously acknowledged that, even if there were a thousand words, those words still would

not capture some of the photos.

Residential campus. Many participants acknowledged that there were times they wanted

to capture their roommates, student organizations, other majors, and the like in their

photographs, but they were unable to do so because of circumstances. In this instance, the

relationship with a roommate, for example, was essential to their experience, but it was not

something they wanted to open up about by capturing it in photographs. In all focus groups,

roommates were referred to as sources of support, as discussed in Theme 1. And although

participants were hesitant to take photographs for which they would need to get signed waivers,

when the groups came together, the conversations led to discussions about the role of other

students in helping to formulate the participants' experience on campus.

Ryan discussed the importance of these relationships with other students, but noted that

he made a conscious choice about not including people in his photographs:

> All of my photographs were inanimate objects [but] the personal relationships are huge.
> They're what makes my experience what it is, so I could have included some of those.
> I've a very social person. I'm an extrovert, so I get my energy from being around other
> people; so if it weren't for my classmates and being around acquaintances, my experience
> would be so much different.

In contrast to the relationships that Ryan referred to, Samantha discussed that students

were missing from the photographs, even when there might be posters or other items that had

photos indicating that something has occurred:

> I think especially one thing we don't see is the people who plan these events. We have
> photos of all these different things because a lot of times students are getting involved.
> The sex-ed Easter egg hunt was student planned. The trans*panel was student planned.
> Like, a lot of these things are getting students involved, and I think that says a lot about
> the liberal arts and we're not just attending events—we're planning events, we're
> creating events, we're running them, and that takes a lot of skills and a lot of teamwork.

Some other participants discussed one photo in which the photographer was missing because he was unable to capture himself in it. For this photograph (Figure 12), Michael discussed the interaction he had when he was studying with another student, and he described the photograph he took:

Figure 12. Students study together.

For Michael, this photograph was about the interdisciplinary components of the studying experience, and how he and another student were working together for each to be academically successful:

> This photo reflects the liberal arts in that it reflects the interdisciplinary learning and friendships that are fostered on such campuses. [My friend] is reading a book on Norse mythology, and I am researching raptor biology for my major's capstone. Furthermore, the work that I am doing in the picture reflects applied and integrative learning because it is based off of *[sic]* genetic research that I completed last summer. In the photo, I am adding information to explain how my research pertains to the "bigger picture" which involves an analysis of policy, and human activity/culture. This pertains to personal and

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social responsibility due to the implications of my study, and it also demonstrates knowledge of culture and the physical/natural world in that [my friend] and I would continually take breaks to discuss what we were each going over, especially if we ran into hard-to-understand concepts that we needed to hash out verbally.

While capturing a photograph about interdisciplinary learning, Michael had become focused on how he and his friend were working through problems together, despite their being in different academic areas.

Anthony furthered this conversation as he talked about the residential experience:

I think because I know you didn't want pictures in residence halls or in dorm rooms. . . but what I think isn't necessarily communicated through these photos is the fact that [our campus] is residential. I think in terms of what defines this campus. . . is one of the most important things—is that people who are here are here to say this is a community they chose to be a part of for 4 years. And everyone living together, it kind of fosters the kind of community that I've found most valuable about the liberal arts. Like you can't really. . . there's downsides like the bubble, and you can't really pay attention to anything outside of [this campus]; but I think the kind of student activity and kind of applied liberal arts and applied knowledge and all the other things. . . I guess all the things we really went over here, wouldn't happen to the same extent if people didn't physically live here.

Other participants discussed the role of the residential liberal arts campus as all-encompassing in the lives of the students. The following interaction conveys a sense of the conversation that occurred during one focus group:

Christopher: I've realized here, like when something is happening, it's like happening everywhere here. And, like, it's the thing. And you feel it in waves. This year, it's been like the [film] thing, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which has that thing, like, maybe it's just for me, but a lot of the stuff at [Senate] just feels like, centered around [*sic*] that. The place of Greek life. This issue comes up and [campus] needs to be a place for all of us. And it's just like, it's a small enough place, that like, like, yeah. . . So, like a fraternity losing a house or gaining a house back becomes something that everybody talks about. Like, I'm assuming that everyone here has talked about that with their friends.

Amanda: I was abroad when it happened and I still heard about it.

Alexis: And they just got [the house] back.

Christopher: Yeah. So, like, all that stuff. We all ask about it, we all talk about it. I've talked with the president about it. Which is, like crazy. The president of the school is

walking around, being like, what do we think about this? Um, yeah, and that to me is very liberal artsy as well. And it's hard to capture in photos.

Alexis: Like this conversation is liberal artsy. In that we got off on a tangent of your Arabian Nights class.

Academic life. Almost unanimously, the participants discussed their classroom experiences at some point during the focus groups. Although some of the conversations about classroom are highlighted within other themes, there were also several conversations about events and discussions happening in the classroom in which there were no associated photographs. Relative to classroom experiences, two or three photographs of lab equipment or other indications that learning was happening were submitted, yet the majority of the photographs centered on other spaces on campus.

When asked about the academic nature of his campus and its connection to the liberal arts, Anthony shared:

> I think in terms of academics and the liberal arts, I think that like, a lot of it is about disorientation and teaching you to then orient yourself and find your own way, kind of question these things that you've taken for granted, and things like taking on a creative project. Like creating music is a way to kind of do that with yourself, especially with like a faculty mentor who could make you question and challenge and put yourself out there.

The idea of how students change while they are at college was also affirmed in the discussion as something that could not be captured in a photograph. Other students discussed the sense of relationship with the faculty members as also being difficult to capture. Amanda spoke to this particular challenge of taking photos in the classroom and elsewhere:

> Taking photos of the classroom is not exciting, and we all know what those look like. But just like capturing that feeling of, you have these relationships with your professors that are pretty unique. . . Like, I babysat my professor's kids a couple of times. And that those [relationships] grow and change all the time, but I didn't want to ask to take a picture and then talk about you. So, yeah, things like that were more difficult.

Other students talked about how the residential campus and the academic climate came together. Oftentimes, this experience happened over meals, such as Joseph highlighted:

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I don't know how many times I've seen professors on campus. I see numerous professors eating lunch or eating dinner with their spouses right here on campus. And they engage with students, and the conversations are always meaningful. They're about something that was taught in class or something with future plans for research or something important that needs to be discussed at 9 p.m. The professors here make themselves more available than even at other liberal arts schools. I have other friends who go to other liberal arts schools and their professors live in the area. God knows how many times I've seen [a professor] picking through fruit at the grocery store. It's times like that when I can talk to him about Buddhism because I'm very intrigued about Buddhism and having a liberal arts education.

At other times, such experiences happened in the wake of campus tragedy, as Courtney described:

I have only called professors by their first names. They are very much like we are peers. They are just a little more educated about stuff than I am. Faculty are so great. We had the guy who was chair of the department but who also is just really well known and is one of the professors who lives near campus; when [a classmate] died last year, he was also [in my] major. [The professor] had the whole department over to his house. He was basically like "I don't know what to do, but I'm Jewish, and I've got a lot of food, and I'm going to make you eat." And we were like, "Sounds good." And, like, I almost didn't go because I wasn't sure I felt comfortable being around people [in my major] with it, because that wasn't really the context in which I was friends with him; but it was actually really cool. It was weird, being in this professor's house and to all be kind of sad, but also to be kind of laughing because it was a little awkward but really nice.

Secondary Research Questions

In addition to the themes that emerged from the study, several discussions also were explicit to the secondary research questions, as posited through the AAC&U outcomes. In this section, I discuss how students perceived the questions and reflected their perceptions through their photographs and in the focus-group sessions.

Secondary research question: How do students see knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world expressed on campus? Participants most frequently discussed the concept of knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world as they submitted their initial definitions of liberal arts and as they discussed the definition after joining the focus groups. As discussed previously, the AAC&U has specified that students will acquire

knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world "through study in the sciences

and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts, focused by

engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring." Ideas about the disciplines

and concepts participants studied that helped them to become "well-rounded," as noted for

Theme 4, were frequently part of the discussion. And as the students defined *liberal arts,* their

words further clarified how they understood this Essential Learning Outcome for a liberal arts

education. For example, Elizabeth stated in her initial definition, "I define a liberal arts

education as one in which students experience and immerse themselves in a variety of

disciplines."

Other participants discussed this outcome while sharing thoughts on the role of

disciplines to which they might otherwise not have been exposed. Anthony recognized this

incorporation of learning from across the curriculum as he reflected on a photo (Figure 13)

submitted by one of his peers:

> One of the photos was artfully taken—you know, there was a shadow, um. . . but I think
> that art, and engaging with art, is like, in terms of what can be captured in a visual sense,
> is really indicative of the liberal arts experience in what I've experienced, although I've
> never taken an art course.

Figure 13. Theater in the basement of a residence hall.

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Anthony's note on this photograph suggests that, despite not having taken a course specific to photography or art, he has grasped an understanding of what makes something artful. He sees this extension of learning as a part of the liberal arts experience.

On another campus, a large discussion evolved as Christopher discussed a book he was reading in a class he was taking, a book that he would have never chosen to read otherwise. Christopher had photographed the experience (Figure 14) for one of his submissions.

Figure 14. Text being used in Christopher's class.

Christopher: The other one is this thing we were reading for class. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*. . . who was, like, this really obscure guy, who just like, basically traveled around, like, all the world basically. We're reading it for this class and it's just like, so weird that, like, it seems sort of liberal artsy, where I'm reading this thing that I literally would have never heard existed, like, this is a thing that I know I would have never come across in my entire life. The class is called Arabian Nights, and I know what Arabian Nights are, and I took it because I wanted to read them; but then this thing came up and now I'm reading something I've never heard of, which I think happens a fair amount here, like, I think in high school most of the stuff that came up were things that I. . .

Alexis: It was so predictable. . .

Christopher: Yeah, things I knew, like we're doing *Huck Finn*.

Alexis: Everybody in here has read the same stuff, and we're not even from the same area.

Christopher: But the guy who teaches this class, is basically just interested in this. And like, he wanted to teach a class in this, and you can tell he likes *Ibn Battuta,* and so we

read it in his class every Friday. This is part of. . . no, like wider curriculum, in any way. It's just a thing that he thinks is cool and wants to talk about and like, help us understand the like, larger Islamic world. Which is cool. . . I mean it's not like. . . I don't find it particularly interesting, like if I hadn't read it, I'd be fine. Like I don't feel like I'm missing out on something here, but it is kind of cool that you're introduced to stuff that can have an effect on you. And you would've never thought about. Like, a lot of stuff that I read for class is stuff that you would have never heard of. But I'm glad that I did.

Later, after a significant discussion about this course that focused on the stories from

Arabian Nights, the conversation led to this discussion:

Christopher: Yeah, I mean like, maybe some of these were. I'm just going by the fact that Jesus appears in some of the stories. He's not like a character, but he'll be referenced.

Amanda: Yeah, like one of the classes I took last term. . . like, I never thought I would try stuff in my classes, but I read the *Qur'an*, and that's the only religious text I read, but I read it.

Alexis: Was it good? Was the class interesting?

Amanda: Yeah. It was really good, and like, how he makes it, like really accessible.

In a different focus group, there was significant discussion about how another submitted photograph created a sense of strong knowledge among some participants because this photograph represented their ideals about acquiring knowledge on a college campus. In the photograph the participants discuss, an event where individuals are doing a public reading, they are in a library in a house on campus. The individuals in the photograph are surrounded by books, resulting in students discussing the space and place in which the event was occurring. Due to a lack of consent from all individuals in the photograph, it has not been included here.

Jessica: I don't actually know where that is. I don't know what those books are about, but there seems to be people gathered, reading, surrounded by all this knowledge, literally, of the physical and natural world, and they're there, they seem to be not just sitting down and reading, but talking about it. There's someone standing up; they look like they're holding coffee or holding something and that is not just about reading but is about discussing the knowledge they have around them. And that, like inherently builds on your knowledge.

Kayla: They're actively engaging.

Participants struggled with this research question when we discussed the photographs during focus groups because of the focus on knowledge of human cultures, in contrast to the AAC&U definitions, in which diversity, intercultural knowledge, or multiculturalism fit more within the definition of personal and social responsibility.

Secondary research question: How do students see intellectual and practical skills expressed on campus? During the discussion of intellectual and practical skills, participants immediately brought up the gardens on each campus, which were discussed under Theme 2 earlier in this chapter. In terms of intellectual and practical skills, participants also focused on their student-government and student-organization experiences. As the students thought about intellectual and practical skills they considered the AAC&U definition, which includes "inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, [and] teamwork and problem solving practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance."

Ryan encapsulated several of these ideas through his reflection about student-government activities. Similar to the response of many other participants, it became easiest for him to focus on the aspects of intellectual and practical skills when he was discussing the aspects of teamwork that were created through his liberal arts experience:

> I'm involved in a lot of student-government activities, so that makes me think of that, being a leader on campus or whatever, and things that a lot of people learn to do in all the activities that are available at college, but especially the things that student government provides are skills that are applicable to the real world. There are basic ideas about teamwork and organizing meetings and following through on goals and things like that, and it's a lot of things that you can't really say, "I learned *x* skill by doing *x* event or participation," but it's things that you recognize that, as you are doing these projects, you learn what makes for a good planning process, what makes for a bad planning process,

what brings ideas to fruition, and what makes them fail in the idea stage; and those are really applicable to any business or corporate setting. And then if you're involved with any civic groups or associations or things like that. . .

Other participants discussed intellectual and practical skills connected to teamwork in terms of sitting on committees and gaining real-life skills to know how committees might function in their postgraduate life. When the participants were discussing the photographs submitted, Figure 9 suggested a similar idea to them about the impact of serving on or chairing a committee. Alexis and Amanda discussed this idea during their focus-group session:

Alexis: Because we deal with, like, intellectual stuff, but it's also teaching you, at least teaching me, as the chair, like how to run a committee, how to delegate, how to report back to a larger council, or whatever stuff. I'm a government minor, and I don't know what I'm going to do; but if you go into any form of politics, that has a huge practical element. So, for me, that's definitely intellectual and practical.

Amanda: I think the other ones are good for intellectual, but they don't cross over as much for practical. I think the committee one too, just because being on a committee can also be a practical skill. . . .just like working with people and knowing how to persuade people, which is intellectual; so yeah, it kind of works together.

Another frequent discussion point around intellectual and practical skills focused on two other submitted photographs (Figure 15 and Figure 16). These two photographs show different elements of campus radio stations, which were discussed on three of the four campuses. Nearly one-fourth of the participants had experiences with the radio stations, whether through hosting radio shows at some point during their time on campus or in working on the production side of the station. None of the participants planned to pursue a career in radio following their time on campus, but many acknowledged that this experience represented practical skills they would not learn in any other place.

Figure 15. Photo of radio board.

Figure 16. Albums in radio library.

Beyond the skill of running a soundboard or simply understanding that experience,

participants also acknowledged the creativity that was a part of the music-creation process,

which may have happened inside or outside of the classroom. Christopher synthesized this idea

in the following statement:

> That's like the radio station here, that I'm, like, the station manager for. We have this,
> like, vast archive collection that spans, like, 50 years or something, and it's CDs from all
> over the world. Basically they're packed in this tiny room from. . . it's sort of this weird

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thing that I'm sure a lot of people don't even know exists. I mean, there's a lot of stuff like that on campus, like the archives from the library where there's other stuff like that, where it's just all this crap packed into there. It's weird to think, like, every single CD is something that someone made and was important enough to them that they wanted to put it down and send it to college radio. . . um. . . which is kind of insane because there's tens of thousands of them there. I mean, you could say the same thing for like, the library as well, I guess.

On a different campus, Courtney discussed her interactions with her German radio show:

Anyone at [my campus] can have a radio show. They give you, or you're supposed to go to, a new DJ, things when you start, but I just learned by helping friends with their radio shows. Being able to say I know how to operate this really old-style radio booth and what's playing on the radio is kind of a weird skill to graduate college with; but I don't know where else I would have gained such an opportunity other than a college being a small liberal arts school, with little competition.

Critical thinking was a significant part of the discussion connected to intellectual and practical skills. Participants not only highlighted classroom experiences when their ideas were challenged, but also discussed the importance of speakers who visited their campuses and helped them to understand their own ideas and positions on different issues. For one photograph she submitted (Figure 17), Samantha wrote the following narrative:

Living in Iowa means enjoying a political spotlight at times, especially when a leading presidential candidate comes to visit [my town]. Many college students are voting for the first time, but most don't vote because they aren't willing to vote absentee or have not registered in their new state of residence. Meeting a candidate can motivate students to get involved in the political process. Learning about who is running and important issues takes serious commitment, but it's worth it in the end. Hillary Clinton may not be the best candidate for president, but I doubt anyone really is. Meeting her and having a photo to show friends and family means I'm more aware of my own opinions and those of everyone around me. If I can think critically, discuss openly, and vote as an informed citizen, then I am using my skills in the classroom out in the real world.

On other campuses, students indicated a similar sense of the role of speakers on campus.

Ryan discussed having another political leader, Senator Olympia Snowe, visit the campus, and

Figure 17. Samantha meets presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

Figure 18. Advertisement for speaker on one campus.

his reflection not only on her speech, but also on the larger meaning behind bringing these kinds

of speakers to campus:

> This poster [Figure 18] advertises that Sen. Olympia Snowe will be coming to speak on
> campus. Her trip will be funded by the student government on campus. College
> campuses offer a unique opportunity to hear from fascinating people who are experts in
> their fields, and even a small college like mine can attract a big name like Olympia
> Snowe. One of my regrets is that I haven't taken advantage of more events like these. I
> might never get the chance to hear such interesting people once I leave college. This
> photo reflects the liberal arts goal of instilling useful knowledge about the world. Senator

Snowe offered interesting insights about the world of politics, and she also issued a call for students to join her in fighting for bipartisanship and compromise in politics. This charge also connects with the college's goal of fostering civic engagement and public-mindedness in its students.

Secondary research question: How do students see personal and social responsibility expressed on campus? As participants discussed the concepts of personal and social responsibility, many of them shared how they understood personal and social responsibility to occur both inside and outside of the classroom. This outcome appeared to permeate all aspects of the campus environment. One participant submitted a photograph of a glass of beer (Figure 19). In the discussion of personal and social responsibility, his focus was on the personal decision making and regulation that needed to occur for him to be able to continue studying later

Figure 19. Christopher drinks beer and practices personal responsibility.

in the day and remain focused in class the next day. On other campuses, the connection between alcohol and personal responsibility continued. As Ryan shared,

> There has recently been controversy on campus because some students feel that the college's dry-campus policy prevents students from learning personal responsibility. They argue that 21-year-old students should be allowed the personal freedom to make their own choices regarding alcohol use. I'm not sure whether the group promoting campaign truly believes this or whether it simply makes for a convincing argument.

Either way, it is telling that they believed that this message is one that would resonate with the campus.

Participants also spoke to social and personal responsibility in the realm of a larger discussion about social justice. On each campus, a discussion about needing to educate oneself and explore perspectives and backgrounds different than one's own became a frequent conversation. On one campus, the discussion evolved around a sign advertising a speaker who had survived the Holocaust (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Advertisement for Holocaust lecture on campus.

Kayla: I mean, tying back to what Samantha is talking about, the picture on the upper left [in Figure 21] is the sign for, I believe, the holocaust speaker. And just the topic of the Holocaust and understanding history and what we've done wrong completely represents personal and social responsibility. The personal responsibility of taking it on yourself to understand what happened in the Holocaust, understand this woman's experience in the Holocaust, as a survivor, and personally understand and empathize with it in order to empathize with other people who are being discriminated against in our world today. And then on top of that, just collectively the social responsibility to understand our history and understand our cultural memory of past mistakes and cultural memory of what we've done wrong; and that ties into responsibility that we as a community need to empathize and understand, or empathize and be compassionate towards what this holocaust survivor has been through.

Joseph: Not only understand and hear her story. We should hear her story, but we should take time to hear her story. Dr. Laxova was so amazing. . . But, like, we have a responsibility to hear her story and listen because. . . does anyone understand what I'm trying to say here? Us listening to her indicates that this is something we should be listening to for as long as we actually can, and should be listening to. She was awesome.

Jessica: We have a social responsibility to listen to what has happened to prevent these things from happening again. Yes.

On a different campus, a student responded to a photo of a panel about transgender awareness. In this photo, three or four students are sitting on a panel and answering questions about gender (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Panel discussing transgender issues on campus.

Courtney responded to this image with the following reflection:

Ooo. . . that is the winner. For sure. For personal and social responsibility. Any kind of tabling or panel is usually a winner in my mind because that's standing up in front of your peers for something you believe in to educate others so they are more aware of it. And it's something that's not always easy to do, especially on a panel like that. Mad props.

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Liberal arts and my education has made me lots more comfortable thinking about where I stand on issues and also made me comfortable with how to have productive conversations about it. I'm still not the most comfortable talking to people about things I don't feel as knowledgeable on, but I am eager to learn and hear what they have to say; so I think, gaining that knowledge, I become a more responsible citizen. I'm not comfortable talking about politics and I'm not comfortable talking about a lot of social issues, but I just make myself do it because I want to be able to know more, and I want to be able to learn more. I know a lot of people here are more passionate when they are talking about social issues, and I would like to be able to keep up.

Anthony had a similar response:

I think that the panel again reflects personal and social responsibility in the sense that I think that the students, and to a certain extent, I guess, the administration, really place an emphasis on a need to actively engage with other people on campus and come to community understandings. I think this is common to most liberal arts colleges, but we need to have. . . I think that it's important that we understand each other. I think it's important that we have a responsibility to come to understand where we're coming from, so I think that communicating in a really specific and intentional way is a really productive way to do that.

An interaction in a different focus group also focused on this photo:

Kayla: And the same thing ties into the trans*panel. We have a responsibility to understand what people who don't fall into the gender binary go through, and a social responsibility of. . . of a call to action of being able to become more aware of yourself. And how you talk about the gender binary. And how people can fall outside of it, and how sensitive you can be if you fall within it on the spectrum, or completely off the spectrum, as well.

Jessica: And to be educators.

Kayla: Yeah. Educators and educated.

Other discussions around personal and social responsibility happened as participants reviewed Figure 2 (highlighted in the discussion about Theme 2), which features a breastplate outside of the cafeteria. Amanda shared the following when she submitted the photo, "This shows the trust that students have to leave their things around the cafeteria. It also shows the nerdy- and quirkiness of [our campus]!" During the focus group, as the conversation about the breastplate began, it led to a discussion about the honor code on campus and trustworthiness.

Amanda: And just, like, I don't know. That whole leaving your stuff around and trusting people thing. [murmuring about honor code]

Gwen: Do you have an honor code?

Amanda: We do.

Alexis: We get to use it for everything. It's why you can leave the room to take tests. Why you can literally do everything. It's like a. . . what's the word?

Christopher: I hereby affirm. . . pledge.

Alexis: No. What is the word for all those letters together? It's an acronym. That we write on everything. But, yeah, we leave out our coats and backpacks and everything, outside of our cafeteria downstairs. And, like, I've never had anyone take anything. Ever.

Christopher: I don't know how effective it is. I mean. . .

Alexis: I mean, I don't think that's why people don't take stuff. I think it's just like the campus mentality and environment.

Christopher: Also, like the. . . I don't know if I should say this. But I think the majority of people here are privileged enough to be going here and, like, they don't need to steal someone's backpack; you know what I mean? I think, like, people here, we all have laptops, for the most part. And so, like, people have their own laptops, so they're not looking to steal someone else's laptop. So when you're in an environment that doesn't have people in that, like, need, it differs. And I also don't know how effective the honor code is when it comes to, like, leaving the room and test taking.

Alexis: I mean that's why we're allowed to. Like, I don't know if that's what people do when they leave, but that's why we're allowed to leave. That's why they have to let you. . . they don't have to let you; a lot of them don't, but. . .

Christopher: They technically. . . every teacher has to let you leave if you want to?

Alexis: I. . . That's what I've inferred, but I have had plenty of teachers who have said that you can leave, like, if you have the medical reasons or whatever. But a lot of teachers are, like, "I don't care. Type it, write it, go to your room"; like, "go wherever."

Christopher: Which is, like, crazy.

Alexis: I Know. They have to know that the majority of kids that leave cheat. There's no way that so many kids leave and don't cheat.

Christopher: I took an astronomy midterm recently, and I didn't get in my pass/fail thing on time. And I wasn't able to. . . wasn't able to. . . I forgot to turn in my form; and I submitted to the Dean of Students and was like, "Hey, can you let me do this?" And they said "No." And then I went and saw him, and they said "No."

Amanda: Just because it was late?

Christopher: And it sucks. But, like, I can't argue with him. Because they made this rule for a reason. I went in like the Monday—it's the first 2 weeks of the term, and I went in the Monday of the next week. . .

Alexis: It's 3 weeks!

Christopher: Well, then I went in the fourth week. Whatever. I went in the Monday after it was due. And, um, this is going to just kill my GPA because I have no idea what's going on. But, like, I took the midterm, and she left the room and was, like, you can go anywhere. And I don't know why I didn't cheat. It is the. . .

Alexis: Yeah, like. . .

Christopher: It is the dumbest thing. I mean, I'm going to do fine. I got a *C* on the midterm. I'm gonna get a *C* in the class. I could be doing, like, all I gotta do is pull out the notebook or like, use the Internet. It would be so, like, it's so easy. But for some reason, I was like, "No. I'm not gonna do it." And, like, I don't know if that's, like, the liberal arts education. That may be, like. . .

Alexis: It may be, like, the honor code. You have to sign it. You feel like you're lying if you cheat and then sign it.

Christopher: Yeah. I don't know. I think, more, it's like, been instilled in me from my family. Like, I've been caught cheating before as a kid and it felt really. . . so maybe it's that. But, like, I don't know. I don't think me not cheating on that test, is like, intuitively, what this whole place is doing. I think the majority of people maybe are cheating; but it's so, like, it's so weird, because I think the honor code does work in the case of me, where it's like, "Well, all right, fine; I'll just do it. If I do bad, that's okay. I'll just study for this dumb thing."

Alexis: I think even though the breastplate is taken to be showing the breastplate, I think the larger picture there of all of us leaving our stuff, I think that speaks to it. That's personal and social.

Participants also spoke to the interactions in the residence halls when they were sharing about personal and social responsibility. Ryan discussed these relationships as he shared,

That's also why I included a residence hall, because a lot of living on a residential campus is learning. Like maybe if you don't get along well with your roommate, you learn how to mediate conflicts and just sharing resources, like everyone keeping the bathroom clean, not being too loud in the hallways, and things like that. Because in the real world you'll probably have your own house or your own apartment, so you might not need those exact skills, but kind of the broader idea that your actions have an impact on others, and you should be cognizant of those actions and impacts.

Secondary research question: How do students see integrative and applied learning expressed on campus? Across the campuses, participants addressed the different types of learning that were applied on their campuses. They discussed how they saw their peers building skills in one class and applying them in another, and talked about the times they had taken material from one area and applied it across the curriculum.

During her focus group, Kayla spoke about a photo (Figure 22) she had submitted.

Figure 22. Props for a theater production on campus.

That's a puppet. So that's one that I took because I'm an assistant stage manager for a puppet performance. And, um. . . I put these. . . the picture of the fish is also a puppet.

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And then that's my friend looking into the puppet that she is the feet of [Figure 23].
During the whole performance, she controls the feet and all the walking. And that so
deeply to me is integrative and applied learning because it's taking the skills of visual
artists with the skills of performing artists together to create a piece. And, also, just
applying what we learned, we had two [courses] . . . [one class] we had a puppetry
performance class and then [a second class] we had a puppetry construction class, both of
which this person took. And, um. . . so she took what she had learned for both classes
and directly applied it to her ability to perform in this production. So she's staring into
the main character of the puppetry show that you all should come see.

Figure 23. A student engages with her puppet for a theater production.

This sense that participants had learned something in class and then applied that learning

to an activity outside of the course was mirrored in other student experiences. Many of these

experiences were discussed relative to Theme 4, but a discussion about a drug-policy-awareness

week on campus sponsored by a student organization led to the following interaction, as well:

> Samantha: I know there have been a lot of SSDP events lately, but um, I'm looking at
> the picture of their poster [Figure 8] and I feel like, for some of those people, they're
> learning about science and so they're studying about enzymes and little particle thingies
> that make up things, and they're learning about it; but then they're taking that and then
> applying, like, socially how do things play out? Like, why do we consider certain things
> drugs, and why are certain drugs illegal, and how can they be used medically? I think it's
> a good way to apply what you're learning in a science class into like, a social-science
> class, um. . . learning about drug use or addiction, or scientifically what are the
> chemicals, and what's going on, and how can we use this to better ourselves?
>
> Joseph: Um. . . genetics. But, their advisor, she's um. . . she's really wonderful. She was
> showing us. She drew out this long, really complex genetic thing and told us, "This is
> illegal." She erased like, literally, one little piece and said "This is legal; it does the same

thing to you, though." It goes along with what you were saying, because of one OH group thing at the end of a molecule thing. It's like removing my phone from this table, the table's now legal, but it does the same thing.

Samantha: I feel like also with SSDP there's a lot of social cultural things, too, of, like, we need to talk about the war on drugs, but, like, what are the racial and class issues involved in that? So, like, you're bringing the science and the chemistry and the social issues and the social-justice issues, and you're putting them together in one organization; and it's like, let's bring in law and legality and it's like, that's a lot of stuff together.

Joseph: I don't know how many times I've seen talks like that, where a politics professor is sitting next to a biology professor and a sociology professor, and an anthropology professor will drift in and, like, hearing them in conversation with one another is a really interesting piece.

Students said they appreciated hearing their faculty members discussing issues across the

curriculum. This was in part due to the personal experiences of the students, as Ryan discussed:

Our General Education Requirements ensure that we are exposed to a broad range of academic content. We also have several interdisciplinary courses and concentrations that encourage students to break down traditional boundaries between fields. Many students also double major in two subjects that are quite unrelated.

Another component that was reflected on multiple campuses was the idea of going into

the community as part of an academic component. Figure 24 shows a photo of a vehicle being

used for an experiential learning opportunity. Participants discussed this happening on their

campuses. Anthony shared,

I think the van is something that jumps out with this. I think on campus, on [our] campus, the vans definitely represent, um. . . applied learning in that people who go into the community to do academic civic engagement stuff always go in campus rented vans and um. . . yeah; so I think that's really big. They definitely get a lot of use, especially at [our campus] because there aren't that many vehicles, so it's kind of interesting—it's almost like a bridge out of academia and into the real world where we can apply what we've been, um. . . thinking about.

Another participant, Emily, who had extended class periods, observed,

But I think the fact that a lot of classes take field trips to unique places to use that outside of the classroom experience gives us that opportunity to apply it in more than one way. Like, oh, here, learn this, memorize it, regurgitate it on a test. Now we're going to
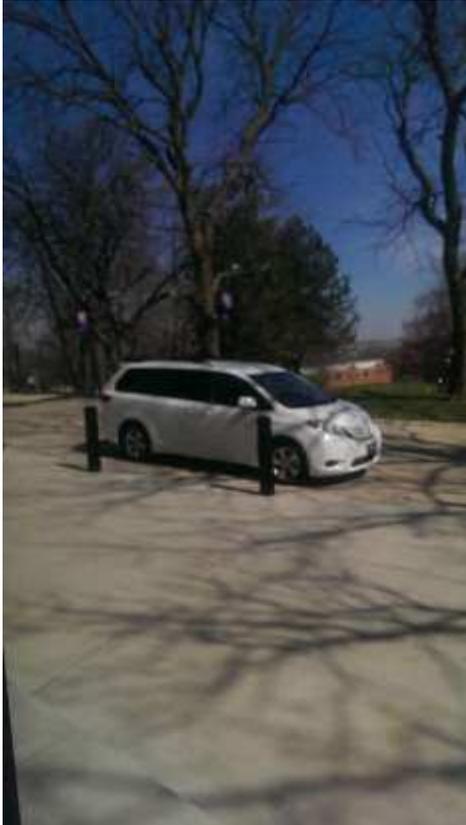
Figure 24. A vehicle used off campus for transportation.

actually apply this outside of the classroom so that you might be able to use it again in the future or relate it to something else. Like, I think that one's really cool, especially on a liberal arts campus because you have. . . I'm not so sure that would happen on a big campus. When you have an hour class, how far are you going to get in an hour? You have another class to get to.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover the ways in which the liberal arts mission is expressed for undergraduate students at liberal arts colleges. For this study, the overarching research question was "How do undergraduate students see the liberal arts mission expressed on their campus?" As the photographs taken by participants and the conversations with the participants illustrate, the students in the study saw the liberal education outcomes throughout their campuses and the experiences they had on these campuses. Across the campuses, student participants indicated ways in which their learning and college experience was reflected in the

relationships they developed, the physical environment around them, the well-rounded and integrative curriculum, and the experiential learning that occurred through their partnership with faculty and staff on campus.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this study, I have explored how undergraduate students experienced the liberal-education learning outcomes through the visual and physical expressions of the liberal arts on their campuses. In 2004, the AAC&U led a cooperative study across higher education associations, accreditors, and institutions, and thereby developed "a remarkable consensus on a few key outcomes that all students, regardless of major or academic background, should achieve during undergraduate study" (2005, p. 2). Other more recent research has indicated that campus environments send a variety of messages about the respective institutions (Strange & Banning, 2015), and numerous authors have suggested a connection between institution mission and campus environment (Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Renn & Patton, 2011; Strange & Banning, 2015). The research has contained indications that the residential campus environment creates a meaningful experience for students related to their academic success, as understood by their willingness to use resources, get involved on campus, and have a stronger sense of place in terms of their connection to the campus. Yet there has been a gap in the literature showing a connection between liberal education outcomes and the environment.

In the current study, I sought to increase my understanding of how undergraduate students at small, liberal arts campuses in the Midwest experience, on those campuses, the liberal education outcomes, as defined by AAC&U. I wondered whether students saw these outcomes reflected in the structural components of their institution, or whether the outcomes were better reflected through the less tangible campus experiences of those students. The primary question of the study was "How do undergraduate students see the liberal education mission expressed on their campus?" Within this overarching question, a number of research questions exist: (a) How

do students see knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world expressed on campus?; (b) How do students see intellectual and practical skills expressed on campus?; (c) How do students see personal and social responsibility expressed on campus?; and (d) How do students see integrative and applied learning expressed on campus? I explored these research questions through photo elicitation, narratives, and focus groups. In this final chapter, I provide a summary of the research project, highlight key findings and emergent themes, explore implications for future practice, and suggest areas for future study.

Summary of Research Project

The participants in this study began by attending an informational session with me to learn about the project and to understand the liberal-education definitions. The study continued with participants photographing their campus and how they saw the liberal education outcomes articulated on their campus over a 2- to 3-week time period. Following their photography activity, student participants had the opportunity to narrow the number of potential photographs for submission. I also asked them to submit narratives to help me understand how they saw the liberal education outcomes expressed on campus. Finally, participants engaged in focus groups to interact with various other students across campus to further clarify and help me understand more fully their experiences. The research questions helped to define the original four concepts that were part of the research project. Based on the narratives and focus-group conversations, five additional themes emerged, revealing other foundations of the liberal arts campus experience.

Key Findings

In this and the following sections, I discuss further details of the current research findings in the context of the four secondary research questions and five emergent themes. I also explore the connections to the literature and note where there are gaps.

Secondary Research Questions

In addition to the emergent themes, it is important to revisit the idea of liberal education outcomes and how they are reflected on campus.

Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world. Participants discussed this concept in how they encompassed thinking about a well-rounded education. This concept is further reflected through the literature, which positions the well-rounded education as something intentional about a liberal arts education. Hersh (1997) discussed the perceptions faculty and students around the meaning of liberal arts. The author suggested that 81% of faculty and 86% of liberal arts college graduates would define liberal arts as a "broad introduction to a wide variety of academic disciplines/well-rounded education." Hersh went on to say, "This is the outcome most parents and employers in our survey identified as a *unique purpose of a liberal arts education*" (p. 22; emphasis in original). More recent studies have suggested that students do not always choose a campus because they expect the liberal arts to provide a well-rounded education; yet, in one study of a first-year writing class, approximately 25% of the students indicated a connection between the liberal arts and being well-rounded (Carlyle Aitchison, 2015).

The discussion of participants regarding disciplines to which they might not have otherwise been exposed also is recognizable through the literature. For instance, Dammen McAuliffe noted that "The advancement of human knowledge depends on creating intellectual

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communities that span the globe, that draw in different perspectives, different expertise" (2014, p. 151). Participants discussed a perception of learning from different disciplines and connecting it to their other areas as interdisciplinary learning. This perspective reflects Spellman's (2009) ideal definition of the liberal arts college introduced earlier in this chapter. Participants appreciation for this additional perspective reflects the place liberal education continues to have within the academe.

Intellectual and practical skills. Throughout the study, participants identified ways in which intellectual and practical skills were expressed on their campuses. They discussed how they had gained intellectual and practical skills by having a role in their college experience. In this context, they further identified that their experiential learning opportunities, which ranged from service work to running committees, had fostered in them a sense of intellectual and practical skills. Lee (2011) discussed this idea as components of inquiry that included learning focused on inquiry, identifying and asking good questions, analyzing and interpreting evidence, and selecting a problem's best solution.

Participants also discussed teamwork as being an essential skill they built while they were attending school on their liberal arts campus. They saw teamwork through the organizations they joined, the groups they experienced in class, and the committees of which they were a part. Riggs (2013) suggested that graduates of liberal arts campuses have a strong focus on teamwork. Other literature has noted the role that service learning plays in supporting themes of cooperation and teamwork (Taylor, 1997), and several participants mentioned having taken part in such service learning during their college years.

Other participants noted the importance of the development of technical skills. Highlighting both the experience they had building skills in the campus garden and the radio

station, and also the skills they learned building theater sets, putting together events, along with other essential technical skills, participants noted that these experiences were unlikely to happen inside of the classroom. Although there have been strongly articulated arguments in the literature suggesting that liberal arts campuses must walk this line carefully so as to not become "professional colleges" (Breneman, 1990), liberal arts campuses also spend time building evidence that they are helping students develop other nontechnical skills that employers are seeking (Koc, 2010). Like other areas within this topic of practical skill development, much of the research that has been done has focused on service learning as the core element in skill development that occurs in meaningful ways (Kolb, 2014).

Personal and social responsibility. Participants discussed the personal and social responsibility as occurring both inside and outside the classroom. Their discussion of these aspects ranged from the campus alcohol policy to their roles as activists on campus.

One participant submitted a photo of his partially drunk glass of beer. The photo was coded as personal and social responsibility, and his response connected to the need to practice personal responsibility in drinking moderate amounts of alcohol. Trosset (2013) reflected this idea that alcohol use in college is often framed within the context of personal responsibility. Similarly, Reason et al. (2013) affirmed that a focus on personal responsibility in college inherently suggests that colleges have a responsibility to educate students about alcohol abuse, in addition to academic dishonesty and student-on-student violence. Participants noted that they had gained clarity about their own values and ethics while they were at college as they discussed issues such as alcohol and other personal values. This experience is reaffirmed through data from the Wabash study, which indicated a significant and positive relationship for self-reported gains in personal values and ethics at liberal arts campuses (Bowman, 2011).

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Other participants highlighted their experiences in becoming student activists as essential

to their understanding and practice of personal and social responsibility. These participants

identified the activities with which they were involved outside of the classroom, which

sometimes tied to their major, as situations in which they were expected to be socially

responsible toward humanity. Oftentimes, this perspective was further reflected in the causes in

which the participants believed and that ranged from educating their peers on sexual activity to

other areas such as learning disabilities, the dynamics of race, sexual orientation, or religion.

This outcome again ties to literature focused on service learning, civic engagement (Banks,

2004), and studies associated with the social-change model of leadership (Dugan & Komives,

2007). Martin (2014) also noted how personal and social responsibility encompasses both an

individual and a communal perspective: "Student activists not only reflect a larger movement but

individually they also reflect a personal story or experience that has led them to be passionate

about the issue they champion" (p. 90). Hersh and Schneider (2005) identified personal and

social responsibility as a way of growing one's own ethics and values. They indicated that, if

colleges and universities intend to engage in education in this area, that education must also

"pervade the institutional culture, and the entire faculty and administration must be committed to

it" (p. 12).

Integrative and applied learning. As participants discussed integrative and applied

learning, they frequently talked about courses that allowed them to explore topics from multiple

perspectives, or to apply something they had learned in one course to another course.

Sometimes, they saw this integration happen in the progression of courses, whereas other times

the process was indicative of their experiences in interdisciplinary courses. Huber and Hutchings

(2004) reinforced this notion in their description of the liberal arts: "At the heart of liberal

education lies the idea that learning should be greater than the sum of its parts" (p. 1). The AAC&U and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2004) released a joint statement on the integration of learning, stating that integrated learning is "one of the most important goals and challenges of higher education" (p. 1).

In the focus groups, participants discussed events outside of the classroom as places where they saw faculty from a variety of disciplines showing interest in and providing perspective on the topic being discussed in the room. One group of participants discussed this multidisciplinary approach in connection to discussions on drug policies that occurred on their campus during the study, in which they heard politics, biology, sociology, and anthropology faculty engaging with students about the legal, biological, and social implications of drug use. The joint AACU-Carnegie Foundation statement on integrative learning also reflects these types of interactions: "Integrative learning comes in many varieties: connecting skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences; applying theory to practice in various settings; utilizing diverse and even contradictory points of view; and understanding issues and positions contextually" (A Statement on Integrative Learning, 2004, p. 1). This perspective is furthered through the work of Huber, Hutchings, and Gale (2005), who stated that integrative learning must be intentional for it to be meaningful, whether it is occurring "within a major, between fields, between curriculum and co-curriculum, or between academic knowledge and practice" (p. 6).

Learning across the curriculum happened in both intentional and unintentional ways for the study participants. Barber (2014) had identified three aspects of current higher education that can prevent students from integrative learning. These are "(a) compartmentalization, (b) the ever-increasing collection of digital tools available, and (c) a lack of opportunities for reflection"

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(p. 12). These are areas that can be addressed and improved to help students connect across the disciplines, and to expand beyond the "four walls of the classroom" to acknowledge the intellectual and practical skills and knowledge the students bring with them into the classroom.

Finally, study participants also noted that integrative learning had occurred for them through experiential learning opportunities such as service experiences or field trips. They discussed the opportunity to move from theory to practice with their learning, which also demanded their connection to the community. Huber, Hutchings and Gale (2005) discussed the importance of students making connections across the curricular and cocurricular experiences, and also highlighted the importance of all members of the campus community engaging in these conversations. They furthered the notion of civic engagement and service learning as an opportunity for integrative learning, suggesting that community engagement can

> contribute to building knowledge that informs efforts to foster integrative learning at colleges and universities around the world. Such an approach will not only deepen our collective understanding . . . it will give us the tools and knowledge and networks necessary to go beyond "hoping they 'get it' by the end." (p. 7)

Participants suggested that this outcome was possible through their community-service activities.

Emergent Themes

To recap, the emergent themes reflected the following observations: (a) Relationships comprised community, and the nature of campus, support, and friendship was student focused; (b) Environment and physical space played a role in the student experience; (c) Campuses provided a well-rounded, integrative, and interdisciplinary student experience; (d) Students viewed themselves as partners, not consumers in the fabric of campus; and (d) An uncapturable component, which included residential campus and classroom experiences, was also present and created an important student experience.

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Student-focused relationships and community. Participants indicated that their environment and educational experiences were highly shaped by the relationships they built with others. These relationships reflected the sense of community, support, and friendships they felt on campus, but they also reflected the student-focused nature of the campus. This sense of relationship, which includes the residential campus and student classroom experiences, mirrors what researchers and their seminal texts, such as Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted in their book *How College Affects Students,* have depicted. Such relationships are built by friendships inside and outside of the classroom, as students live together, work together, eat together, and join student organizations together. Buote et al. (2007) noted the difficult transition issues first-year college students encounter and highlighted the importance of friendships and social interactions in helping students to adjust to college. These relationships, built on social interactions, range from occasional interactions to what students often portray as best friendships. Participants in the current study acknowledged this range throughout the narratives they submitted and their focus-group conversations.

Recent literature has suggested that friendship within the college classroom and academic environment be called "critical friendship." Swaffield (2002) defined this friendship as "the point of balance along a continuum from 'total friend' to 'total critic'" (p. 3). As one participant in the current study discussed his participation in a living-learning community and the impact that involvement had on his experience at his liberal arts institution, he discussed having reached a point of critical friendship. The other individuals with whom he had lived during his first year of college were not always his best friends, but they helped him to grow in his knowledge and experience. This friendship, support, and community that resulted reflects the critical-friendship relationship that Swaffield expected from a classroom and college environment.

Other participants discussed the role that friendships had on making them feel at home on the college campus. These relationships that they built helped participants to confirm they had made a good choice in their selection of college campus. There were not necessarily key indicators to show that students had made the right choice; instead, they described feelings of affirmation that the institution where they were studying was a good "fit." Some literature addresses this good fit as sense of place. In literature that discussed college residence halls, Clemons, Banning, and McKelfresh (2004) noted the importance of a sense of place: "Sense of place refers to the feelings of belonging to an environment and security within it" (p. 1). Other literature addressing place attachment has suggested that "One unself-consciously and self-consciously accepts and recognizes the place as integral to his or her personal and communal identity and self-worth" (Seamon, 2014, p. 17).

The attachment of relationships mirrors the connection that individuals have to place (Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Similar to Strange and Banning's (2015) discussion of 10 different ways campus spaces can support inclusion, security, engagement, and community experience for students, Bowlby (1982) suggested four components that create attachment in interpersonal relationships: proximity, safe haven, secure base, and separation distress. The overlap between safety and security was reflected in the current study in participants' discussion of trust and community on campus, such as when they were discussing leaving backpacks and other items outside of the dining hall. There is significant support in the literature for security being of importance as friendships and relationships are built (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Another study defines close friends as "Someone you spend more time with than your causal friends. Key features of close friendships include shared emotional support, loyalty, trust, intimacy and fun," (Grant, Brown, & Moreno, 2013, p. 3).

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Environment and physical space played a role in the student experience. A second theme that emerged in this study was that the environmental and physical space participants encountered helped to shape their experiences. Strange and Banning (2001) described how interactions with the physical space can reaffirm relationships (the first emergent theme): "Institutions must also look beyond issues of belonging, stability, and comfort to consider the nature of environments that might encourage engagement and the investment of time and effort, in other words, those that call for participation and involvement" (p. 137).

Participants reflected a sense of not intentionally noticing the environment until they were participating in the study and were asked to consider the physical environment. This concept is noted in the literature as one understanding the space from "existential insideness: a situation where one feels so completely at home and immersed in place that the importance of the place in the person's everyday life is not usually noticed unless the place dramatically shifts in some way" (Seamon, 2014, p. 14). Participants discussed the concept of place as reflected in the artifacts and spaces that were located on campus, either as artwork, buildings, or their campus gardens. This notion of artifact is also affirmed in the literature. Seamon discusses place realization as "the palpable presence of place. The environmental ensemble of the place (its particular physical constitution as a landscape or building or furnishings or otherwise) coupled with that place's human activities and meanings" (p. 17).

Other participants focused on the artifacts and symbols on campus that communicated messages to them. Ranging from sculptures placed to posters hanging on campus, messages about campus values and desired experiences for students were evident. Scannell and Gifford (2014) discussed these obscure concepts as symbolic as they noted, "When physical proximity is impossible, it can be achieved symbolically" (p. 26).

Well-rounded and interdisciplinary student education. The most frequent recurring theme for participants in this study was the well-rounded education they believed they were receiving at their liberal arts colleges. As participants continued to discuss this topic, it became clear that part of what they were referring to was an integrative and interdisciplinary approach. This characteristic is reflected through Spellman (2009), who discussed the core aspects of the liberal arts campus as being "about small class size, close faculty-student interaction, an innovative and interdisciplinary common core in the arts and sciences, undergraduate research experiences, senior capstone projects, service learning and community engagement, and a rich and diverse co-curricular life" (p. 1). We can interpret this interdisciplinary aspect of the liberal arts campus to be essential to the liberal arts experience, according to this literature.

As they were discussing the integrative curriculum, current participants talked about the connections they made across the disciplines they studied. This principle also is reflected within the literature. Hersh (2000) described it as "Here the classroom lessons of history, sociology, philosophy, literature, economics, and biology, for example, converge with the influences of peers, mentors, and the moral atmosphere of the community in which one is expected to participate fully" (p. 186). Pascarella and Blaich (2013) affirmed that the "deep-learning experiences" at liberal arts colleges, which include assignments, coursework, and capstone courses that incorporate integrative learning, make an impact on the student experience. Rocconi, Ribera, and Laird (2015) have since affirmed this perspective.

Student-university partnership. Participants in the current study highlighted experiences inside and outside of the classroom through which they defined their relationship with the campus as a partnership. This experience is reflected in the literature, as new studies have suggested that part of the liberal arts educational methodology is to view students as

partners in the teaching environment (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014). As an example, over the course of the past several years, there has been an increased focus on creating opportunities for student-faculty research. Similarly, Furco and Moely (2012) discussed the example of service-learning and civic-engagement offices creating opportunities for students to be partners outside of the classroom and in the community. They further talked about faculty partnerships with community members, which often were offered through service-learning opportunities inside the classroom. Cook-Sather (2012) identified that students had their "voices amplified" through formal programs on some liberal arts campuses that reflected their partnerships with faculty and with staff members. These partnerships with staff members often involved leading committees, as participants in the current study also highlighted. Participants also discussed the idea that some aspects of campus life would not exist without their student activism. This idea is also reflected in the literature and related discussions by Cook-Sather et al. (2012, 2014). Fielding (2011) highlighted research that depicted the student voice as influential in the move toward democratic community on campus.

Participants discussed the opportunities for suggesting classroom topics to faculty. They mentioned reaching out to various faculty members to create a different environment where learning occurred. These opportunities to join in partnership with their faculty members helped students to feel a different level of investment in their learning and the learning their faculty members were providing to them. Similarly, Hagenauer and Volet (2014) discussed the relationships between students and faculty members on college campuses and noted that this is an underresearched area in higher education. Despite this lack of research, they noted that developing the teacher-student relationship would likely help both student and teacher retention, and assist attaining excellence in university teaching across campuses.

The uncapturable factor. Another emergent theme was reflected in those aspects of student experience that participants found to be uncapturable. The components discussed as a part of this theme included locations and subjects for which participants desired to capture images, but other aspects of the study limited their ability to do so. The residential nature of the institutions and the classroom experiences were highly reflective of the student experience in the liberal arts institution; yet because of social norms, the students determined that taking photographs within the classroom was problematic and potentially disruptive. They also were uncomfortable obtaining releases for such photos from their peers and overwhelmingly did not do so. This theme reflects the liberal arts ideals. Such experiences as these, which happen outside of the regular course curriculum, help students to think about the world differently, are a vital part of the college experience, and yet participants felt restricted when it came to capturing the experiences in photographs.

Participants noted how they interacted with faculty inside the classroom, and that they felt they could not comfortably take photographs in the classroom environment. So although participants discussed a variety of different ways in which the interactions inside the classroom were driven by group work, conversation, and intellectual pursuit of knowledge, the environment itself was not something they captured. Some of the literature hints at this element of the uncapturable, as when Chism and Bickford (2002) noted, "Faculty and students alike have become so accustomed to meeting in spaces that are sterile in appearance, unable to accommodate different instructional approaches, and uncomfortable for supporting adult bodies that most have taken this condition as a fact of college life" (p. 1).

The idea that the residential experience is uncapturable but essential in a campus setting also is affirmed through the research of Banning, Clemons, McKelfresh, and Gibbs (2010).

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Their research focused on the concept of third place, as a "place outside of home and work that serves as a place to find comfort, retreat, and community" (p. 1). This uncapturable concept, which until 15 years ago did not have a name, has become a likely descriptor for the feeling participants exuded when discussing their related residential experience. Blimling (2015) notes that residence halls provide an opportunity for interacting with peers. Further, these peers "offer a way to learn social skills related to friendship, group interaction, leadership, and participation within a social community" (p. 31). This perspective validates the role of the residence halls as a third space, where community and comfort is created.

Implications for Future Practice

Students experience the liberal arts and the liberal arts campus in a number of different ways. The results of this project indicate that some of the most notable experiences students have with their campus are connected to the interactions they have with other students, faculty, and staff members of the campus. Those who work at liberal arts institutions can continue to explore, as they engage the liberal arts, how they, as staff and faculty, interact with the members of the campus community and students, as they explore the liberal arts. Therefore, a number of implications for practice are notable based on this study for administrators, faculty, and staff, as they consider how students are experiencing the campus.

Connection Between Mission and Outcomes

First, the student participants highlighted a number of ways in which the particular mission of their institution matched the education they were getting; yet frequently, they were not able to define a liberal education. Instead, they spoke to broad outcomes or their being well-rounded as reflections of the liberal arts environment and education. Although I do anticipate students being able to talk about the specific disciplines incorporated into a liberal arts education,

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there also are opportunities for individuals who work regularly with students to ask the students to reflect on metacognitive concepts surrounding the educational experience they receive at liberal arts institutions. Several participants were able to highlight aspects of their institutional mission statements that were lived on their campus, even when they struggled to apply specific liberal education outcomes. As this study evolved from a focus on mission to that of liberal education outcomes, I found it to be quite interesting when participants discussed examples that were foundational to their institutional mission statements, whether or not these examples reflected the liberal education outcomes. This observation ties to the recommendation for a metacognitive practice to help develop students' understanding of the connections between the liberal education outcomes and the stated mission for a specific campus. Campus administrators and faculty can better reinforce their priorities if they maintain a comprehensive, big-picture view of the campus environment.

To better reinforce the stated educational outcomes of an institution, whether through artifacts or building layout, those intended outcomes also need to be highlighted and discussed beyond their references on an admissions tour or in a viewbook. When there are opportunities to reinforce the identity of the campus and the values of the liberal arts, campus staff should seek ways to engage students in sharing the liberal arts tradition of the campus and illuminating how a liberal education influences the structures, general education requirements, courses, and interdisciplinary experiences of the campus. Liberal arts campuses, which frequently find themselves needing to be explicit about job-placement and graduate-school-placement percentages, and medical-school acceptance rates, and having to explain what students can do with a liberal arts major, also should seek ways to talk about the liberal arts that go beyond the long-marketed "well-rounded" education students can receive at their institution. The oft-

highlighted small class sizes and community built on liberal arts campuses reflect the learning environment, but campus administrators can also highlight the benefits of the liberal education outcomes.

Cognition

In addition to staff and faculty working with students on a metacognitive level in relation to liberal education outcomes, institutions that stand firmly in a liberal arts framework should consider reflecting on the institution's goals and outcomes. In doing so, mapping these outcomes, mission statements, and other guiding documents against liberal education outcomes, such as those provided by the AAC&U, might increase the opportunity for institutions to better and continuously articulate the benefits of a liberal arts education. As liberal campus representatives increasingly face public scrutiny regarding the job preparation offered by their institutions, they can be more focused on the liberal-education mission if they also understand the reasons the campus is grounded in a liberal arts and liberal-education purpose.

In addition to how liberal arts institutions and the individuals working at or attending them can take a metacognitive approach to the liberal education outcomes and how they are lived on campus, practitioners also have an opportunity to take note of the subtleties reinforced through the environment. As Courtney discussed relative to the classroom building in which she had classes, and several other participants discussed in terms of their campus garden, there are possibilities to reinforce campus messages about its values through the physical environment created. Some campuses have focused on branding the institution through this physical environment—through flags hanging on busy sidewalks, standardized signage, standard building materials, or other elements; for other campuses, this focus has been secondary to function. Yet

as practitioners, we have an opportunity to be more attuned to these subtleties and what they reinforce about the campus' priorities and values.

Collaboration Across the Institution

Student participants in this study experienced collaboration across the institution in a number of ways. Highlights of the ways in which student activism occurred and created highly meaningful experiences for the participants include contribution to meals through the garden and experiences in working with faculty and staff on issues of significance. Discussions in these areas often led to an increase in student knowledge about a topic, and at other times led the students to ask new questions about processes, procedures, and the ways in which they approached concerns. As participants in the campus structure, student-affairs practitioners, administrators, and faculty are tasked with providing students either with multiple viewpoints that reinforce an idea, or with introducing a new lens through which students can learn. We can take advantage of large-group interactions with students such as those discussed in this study to engage with them and help contribute to the concept of their partnership with us, rather than relating to them as a group with whom we need to debate.

Such collaboration often creates the benefit of interdisciplinary learning across different perspectives and results in new opportunities for learning for students, staff, and faculty. By looking at collaboration as a reframing of the conversation about the dynamics that exist between different campus units and roles, we inherently also serve as role models for several of the intellectual and practical skills outlined in the liberal education outcomes.

Physical Space

As we as residential liberal arts campus professionals continue to think about the physical spaces in which students experience their campuses, we can consider how these spaces also

create opportunities for students to engage with the liberal education outcomes. Whereas several libraries, science centers, and student unions have been built or renovated with the idea of offering a learning commons, residential liberal arts campuses can also consider this principle as residence halls are renovated and built. With special attention to intellectual and practical skills, applied learning, and personal and social responsibility, the interactions within residence halls can create a strong environment in which the outcomes of a liberal education are reinforced.

One of the larger questions that remains from this study is "Where does the responsibility for creating a campus environment lie?" It is not ideal to suggest that the environment inside the classroom relies on faculty, facilities-management staff assume responsibility for the exterior of campus, residence-life staff are responsible within the residence halls, and similar divided responsibility elsewhere on campus. Instead, the learning environment should be a part of the ongoing conversation across areas within an institution. Whether driven by student-affairs staff, faculty, or facilities management, others, including the marketing, admissions, development, and other departments, should be involved, as well. The outcomes of this research study suggest that students do not see the various parts of the institution as separate from one another, as functional divisions within the organizational structure of the campus might suggest. Yet the physical environment can assume an even greater role within the campus community if it becomes a consistent part of the campus conversation and not an afterthought.

Notes on Methodology and Technology

Throughout the project, I found several considerations surprising. These areas, which could be of use to future researchers, range from methodology, to participant awareness, to utilization of technology in the collection and assessment of data. In an effort to assist future researchers, I highlight some of these considerations.

For the methodology, which I continued to refine over the course of the two previous pilot studies, I would shorten the time period during which participants took photographs. Despite the frequent reminders to them about taking the photographs, participation in the study was not a priority for the participants. And although the ease of the app mitigated some of their previous concerns by increasing their accessibility to ongoing participation in the study, the 3-week time period for taking photographs did not force them to participate fully. For similar studies in the future, I would suggest a 2- to 3-day window for researchers to be on campus, with the kick-off and explanation of the study happening the first day, followed by 24 to 48 hours of taking photographs. Then students would return for a final, 90-minute, focus-group session, with participants writing narratives about the photographs they chose, immediately prior to the group discussion, that best illuminated their experiences on campus. This process would create more of a composite snapshot of the institution, but also incorporate an expectation for participants to enter into the metacognitive components of the liberal education outcomes.

Continuing to collect photographs either in an app or digitally would also be of benefit to the students. Their limited participation contributed in some small ways, but I did not have any participants who indicated interest and then were unable to participate because of a technology need. While this approach could be considered, future researchers also could consider providing other digital tools for participants to use for a short window during data collection.

Future Research

The purpose behind this research project was to provide data that would help professionals at liberal arts institutions understand more about the liberal education outcomes and how students experience those outcomes on a liberal art campus. The findings address several of the questions raised throughout the project; however, several additional questions

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arose for me throughout the research process. Therefore, further research could be done to offer

a better basis for understanding how students experience messages about campus identity and

liberal arts identity.

Messages

An ongoing question about branding and marketing that my second pilot study raised is

left unanswered. Artifacts across campuses often provide explicit or symbolic meaning for

individuals who encounter them. Ongoing research with marketing and admissions literature

might provide campus administrators with an awareness of how the liberal arts education is best

introduced to future students. This information also could provide important clarification to the

researcher seeking to understand the connections between mission statements, educational

outcomes, and branding. Specifically, I note that, in this study, participants from several

campuses, including residential liberal arts campuses, felt branded when they were walking on

campus because of the use of logos and colors throughout the campus environment. But such

branding does not always connect to the larger outcomes of the liberal-education mission.

In addition to this notion of branding, future research can be done based on an

understanding of how students connect mission and core values, whether or not these are the

mission and core values of an institution in general, or those of a specific and larger higher-

education concept such as the liberal arts mission and outcomes. Research could be done

questioning whether these aspects are communicated through people on campus, as suggested by

the current research findings, or through other mediums. For instance, administrators and faculty

members might communicate them through speeches, syllabi, classroom discussions, advisors,

coaches, residence-life staff, other staff members at the institution, or through communication of

campus traditions. With further research, we could develop a better understanding of each of

these potential communicators, and such research might provide an opportunity for institutions to capitalize on the places where these connections are happening, to further embrace communication beyond the physical environment.

With shifts in their use of technology as students are walking across campus, there is a question about whether they are less likely to take in the physical components of their environments. Future research might consider how we introduce the concepts of place and space more intentionally to students as they arrive on campus.

Environment

Potential opportunities for research also exist in further exploration of who has ownership or responsibility for shaping the liberal arts spaces and learning environments. Significant research has been done that has looked into the sense of place for students within the residence-hall environment, but less has been done exploring the campus environment as a whole in that context. Additionally, the library as a learning commons has been explored, but application of liberal education outcomes has not been as explicitly tied to these environmental patterns. Further opportunities exist in exploring student unions, classroom buildings, and exterior spaces.

Finally, a suggestion for future research is that it might also incorporate asking faculty and administrators and entry-, middle-, and senior-level students to complete the same study, to gain an understanding of how these various groups perceive communication of the liberal education outcomes on campus. By understanding the congruence or incongruence among these students, we might be able to explore how the various on-campus constituencies across different liberal arts colleges experience the liberal arts. Further studies might also recreate the current study using prospective students or families, to increase our understanding of how they experience the liberal education outcomes when they visiting these campuses.

Summary

As I reflect on this study, I am highly conscious of how we need to help students make meaning of their liberal arts experience. I am appreciative of the 19 students who were willing to engage with me and share the joys and frustrations they found in their campus experience. As a campus administrator, I am conscious of the fact that many students do not feel as though they have a voice with their administration, or they feel that their voice may not be heard.

I learned so much from the participants, ranging from ways that I want to do my job differently and provide options for students to give voice to their concerns, to also continuing to "meet students where they are," as we often say in student-affairs discussions. On my own campus, as participants discussed concerns such as those covered in the emergent theme that focused on campus activism, I found myself looking for ways for us to be better campus partners, as well. This study has reminded me of the importance of looking through a different lens, whether that is a student lens as a whole or a specific student-group lens. It has also reminded me how important it is to explore whether the ideas around which we are seeking to engage students are purposeful and meaningful, or, as Christopher exclaimed at one point, these are "the same old liberal arts bullshit" that has little understandable value for the students.

Hearing the participants discuss their experiences as meaningful both inside and outside of the classroom continues to push me to articulate the value of the cocurricular experience for our students. These opportunities provide a number of students with ways to partake in experiential learning. As I think about the notions of space and place, I continue to have questions and thoughts about how campus administrators can better communicate our intended learning outcomes and larger ideals to students through artifacts. I am reminded of a unit in the first-year seminar course I took at St. Catherine University, in which we explored aesthetics and

researched an artifact on campus. I cannot help but connect this experience to my ongoing fascination with campus architecture, artifacts, and place.

Through my continued conversations with students, I find myself engaging in discussions about educational outcomes, whether they are specific to my campus or connected to the larger base of liberal education outcomes. Each time this happens, both the student and I walk away with new insight. This reinforcement of the value of metacognitive reflection on the student experience reminds me that this process needs to be ongoing across the campus community.

In summary, liberal arts campuses today are struggling to articulate the value of a liberal arts education in the United States, even as they sometimes struggle to remain open. Yet research indicates that knowledge, skill development, a sense of individual and communal responsibility, and the ability to apply concepts across disciplines and to other types of projects are core to the liberal education experience for students. As educators, we can reinforce the importance of these outcomes and how students experience them on campus. While my study focused on liberal arts campuses, the liberal education outcomes are reflected across a variety of different campus types. As measurements continue to hone in on technical skills, it is vital that educators also note the larger liberal education outcomes as important aspects of the college experience. If we do not use all of the mechanisms we have available to articulate and communicate these goals to our students, we risk incongruence both in how we express our values and in the outcomes that result.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO SENIOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

OFFICERS AND PROVOSTS

Date
Name
Institution

Dear (Name),

My name is Gwen Schimek and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership program at Colorado State University's School of Education. In addition to my doctoral work, I currently serve as Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Student Life at Cornell College in Mount Vernon, IA.

I am embarking on my dissertation research, in which I am exploring the ways that undergraduate students see the liberal arts mission expressed on their campus. I am hoping to complete this research at five different institutions within the Associated Colleges of the Midwest and would greatly appreciate the participation from students at your institution. The title of this research is "Visual Expression of the Liberal Arts," and the Principal Investigator is David McKelfresh, Ph.D, Associate Professor in the School of Education.

I would like to ask your assistance in identifying 10 to 15 students to participate in this study. I've attached a sample letter of invitation to aid you. In this study, I am interested in gaining perspectives from a variety of students, both in terms of demographics and involvement.

I have also enclosed my conditional IRB approval to begin the study, and I understand this may need to be submitted to your research-approval board before you are able to invite any of your students.

Thank you again for your consideration of this study. I will contact you within the next week to begin the research-board approval process and to answer any additional questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Gwendolyn Schimek
CoPrincipal Investigator and Doctoral Candidate
Colorado State University
School of Education
319.895.4103/gwen.schimek@colostate.edu.

David McKelfresh, PhD
Principal Investigator and Associate Professor
Colorado State University
School of Education
David.McKelfresh@colostate.edu

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Date
Name
Institution

Dear (Name):

As Vice President of Student Affairs at (institution), I have agreed to send this letter on behalf of a doctoral candidate seeking potential participants in a research study involving students enrolled at our institution. Gwen Schimek, a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership program at Colorado State University, will be conducting this research entitled "Visual Expression of the Liberal Education Mission." The research study explores how undergraduate students attending liberal arts campuses in the Midwest see the liberal arts expressed on their campus.

This letter is being sent to a group of students at our institution. Ms. Schimek is seeking up to 10 to 15 students to participate in the study. Ms. Schimek will select students randomly from those who respond to her by (date one week from date of letter) by filling out the Electronic Information Sheet.

As a participant, you will be asked to download an app onto your smartphone or tablet, take photos of your campus, and upload them to the app over a 4-week period. Following this, you will be asked to narrow the photos and write a short narrative about four to six of the photographs. In early April, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute to 90-minute focus group that will take place on campus in a location to be determined. The purpose of the focus group is to discuss the photos and your experience with the liberal arts. There may be some follow-up questions after the focus group. The identities of all participants will not be revealed and responses will be kept confidential. Participants and the institution at which they are enrolled will be given pseudonyms. Participation is solely voluntary and under no circumstance will the names of the individuals agreeing to participate in the study be revealed to me or to anyone else beyond the researcher herself. There is no penalty for students who wish not to participate.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please contact Ms. Schimek directly at 319.895.4103 or via email at gwen.schimek@colostate.edu Please also feel free to contact her if you have any other questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

College Official

APPENDIX C: LETTER TO STUDENTS VOLUNTEERING TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Date
Name

Dear (Name),

Thank you for your interest in volunteering to participate in my study. My name is Gwen Schimek, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership program at Colorado State University. You may contact me with any questions at gwen.schimek@colostate.edu or by calling me on my cell phone at 651.245.6903.

For my dissertation research, I am investigating how undergraduate students in the Midwest see and experience the liberal arts mission of their campus. I am gathering information for this study at five different institutions in the Midwest. The title of this research is "Visual Expression of the Liberal Education Mission." The Principal Investigator is David McKelfresh, PhD, Associate Professor in the School of Education; I am the CoPrincipal Investigator.

To participate in this study, you will need to download the EthOS App onto your Apple or android device. There are a few steps needed in order to begin your participation:
1.   Go to your app store and download the Ethos App. Right now the app is available for android, and Apple users.
2.   Below is your invitation to the Ethos App. You'll need to accept the project on a desktop or laptop (an app browser won't work), logon, and change your password.

After these steps, start taking photos. I'm asking you to take photos of subjects you see as being good representations of the liberal arts. You can take them within the app, and as you upload them to the "Liberal Arts Campus Environment," please tag them based on the liberal arts definition below. Feel free to add any other tags you would like to add that you think would be helpful to understand what is being seen. You are welcome to add as many photos as you would like, but I would like to have a minimum of 10 photos from each of you.

Over the course of the next 2 weeks, I will ask you to take photos on your campus of the ways you are seeing the liberal arts expressed. For the purposes of this study, liberal arts are defined by the Association of American Colleges and Universities as
- Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world,
- Intellectual and practical skills,
- Personal and social responsibility, and
- Integrative and applied learning (https://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes)
You are asked to upload as many photographs as you would like into the app, and tag each one with the liberal arts outcome you believe is best expressed through the photograph. In 4 weeks, I will be asking you to narrow the number of your photographs and write a brief narrative about each of the photographs you have selected.

In early May, I will be visiting your campus to conduct a focus group with you and the other student participants from your campus. During this time, I will be sharing the photos you have selected and asking you a series of questions about the photos.

Next week, I will be offering some online informational sessions about the research to provide you the opportunity to ask any questions that you may have about the research program. Prior to this date, I encourage you to download the app and try taking and uploading a couple of test photographs. If none of these times works for you, please respond with a list of dates and times that would work best for you.

(List of dates and times and Web address)

These focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be kept secure and confidential, and all consent forms will be kept separate from the focus group transcriptions to keep participants identities confidential. At a point after the focus groups, I will contact you to ensure that the messages I understood from the focus groups accurately reflect what you were stating in the meeting. You will have 10 days to review these messages and submit any corrections to me.

All information collected will be kept confidential and secure. Following the focus group, you will select a pseudonym and your real names will not be released to anyone. The data collected will be analyzed and reported as a part of my dissertation. A summary of the results will be available upon request.

Additionally, I am seeking up to 20 additional participants from your institution. If you know individuals who may be interested in participating, please direct them to fill out the interest form: http://bit.ly/1EuyFMu

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Gwen Schimek
CoPrincipal Investigator & Doctoral Candidate
Colorado State University
School of Education
319.895.4103/gwen.schimek@colostate.edu.

David McKelfresh, PhD
Principal Investigator & Associate Professor
Colorado State University
School of Education
David.McKelfresh@colostate.edu

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project title: Visual Expression of the Liberal Education Mission
Researcher: Gwendolyn Schimek
Faculty Advisor: David McKelfresh, Associate Professor Colorado State University

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study conducted by Gwendolyn Schimek for completion of a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. David McKelfresh in the School of Education at Colorado State University. You are being asked to participate because you are enrolled full time at one of the participating institutions in the study. Up to 40 students will participate in this study. Please reach this form carefully and ask any questions you have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this visual-ethnography study is to discover the way the liberal arts mission is perceived by students at liberal arts colleges. Participants in this study will contribute to a greater understanding of the ways in which institutional environment is created and how undergraduate students perceive the liberal arts mission expressed on their campus.

Procedures:
As a participant in the study you will be asked to download an app for your android or smartphone device, take photos of the ways that you see the liberal arts mission on campus, narrow the number of your photographs, write a narrative about these photographs, and participate in one 60- to 90-minute focus group regarding your experience. Specific topics of the interview include questions regarding how you define the liberal arts, how you experience the liberal arts on your campus, how you see the liberal arts happening on campus, and how you understand the learning outcomes of the liberal arts. Other questions will include How did this project change what you noticed on campus? What were you unable to capture in the photographs? and What would you expect to see at other liberal arts campuses? This focus group will occur at a mutually agreed-upon location and will be audio recorded and then transcribed at a later time. You name will not be used, and the name of you institution at which you are enrolled will be given a pseudonym. I will also be sending you a copy of the transcript to ensure that your statements are accurate.

Risk/Benefits:
The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are no greater than ordinarily encountered in everyday life. However you may feel discomfort taking photographs of your peers. A synopsis of the findings of the study will be provided to all participants who may benefit from learning about the experiences of their peers. Finally, the study will contribute to the literature working to inform and increase the understanding of campus environments.

Compensation:
There is no financial compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:
All information collected that identifies individuals and the institution will be assigned
pseudonyms and will be kept safely secured by the researcher. All consent forms will be stored
separately from the interview transcripts to keep participants identities confidential. All data,
including the audio recordings, will be keep in a secure location with access only available to the
researcher. All data will be destroyed within 2 years of the completion of the study.

Voluntary participation:
There is no penalty for students who wish not to participate. Participating is completely
voluntary and you have the right to terminate your involvement at any time for any reason. If
you do not want to be in this study, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from
participating at any time without penalty.

Questions:
If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact the researcher,
Gwendolyn Schimek, or the faculty advisor, Dr. David McKelfresh, at the contact information
listed below:

Researcher: Faculty advisor
Gwendolyn Schimek   David McKelfresh
600 First Street SW   Associate Professor
Mount Vernon, IA 52314   School of Education
Phone: 651.245.6903   Colorado State University
Email: gschimek@cornellcollege.edu   Fort Collins, CO 80523-1588
                                                     Email: david.mckelfresh@colostate.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the
Colorado State IRB.

State of Consent:
Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information approved
above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in the research study.
The researcher will provide you with a copy of this signed form for your records.

The undersigned freely and voluntarily consents to participation in the research.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX E: ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SHEET

Please take a moment to answer the questions listed below. This information will assist in providing further information about the results found in this study and will be used only by the researcher. Your name will not be used, and this data will be kept in a secure location with access only available to the researcher. All data will be destroyed within 2 years of the completion of this study.

1. Institution   _____

2. Year in School   first year, sophomore, junior, senior

3. Major   _____

4. Student Involvement _____

5. Gender   _____

6. Race   _____

7. I live   on campus, off campus

8. How do you define "liberal arts"? _____

9. How do you experience liberal arts enacted or represented on your campus?

APPENDIX F: NARROWING THE PHOTOS INSTRUCTIONS

Date

Name

Dear (Name),

Thank you for taking photos throughout the past several weeks. At this time, I would like you to narrow your photos to the top four photos that you think best represent the liberal arts at your institution.

For each of the photos, please write a four- to six-sentence narrative about why you have chosen this photograph and how it relates to the AACU's liberal arts value. Please use these questions as a guide:

- Why did you chose this photograph?
- What meaning does the photograph have for you?
- How do you see what is in the photograph as a representation of the liberal arts experience at your institution?
- Does this photograph connect to a specific liberal arts value? If so, which one and how?

As a reminder, for the purposes of this study, liberal arts are defined by the Association of American Colleges and Universities as

- Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world,
- Intellectual and practical skills,
- Personal and social responsibility, and
- Integrative and applied learning (https://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes)

In early April, I will be visiting your campus to conduct a focus group with you and the other student participants from your campus. During this time, I will be sharing the photos you have selected and asking you a series of questions about the photos. Please send your narratives at a minimum of one week prior to the focus group.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Gwen Schimek

APPENDIX G: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

- How do you define "liberal arts"?
- How do you experience liberal arts represented or enacted on your campus?
- Look through the photographs overall to get a sense of what was chosen.
- How do you define "knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world?"
  - These photos were submitted to represent this. Which photo do you see as best representing this? What do you think is happening in this photo? How does this relate to our lives at liberal arts institutions? Where is there strength for this?
- How do you define "intellectual and practical skills"?
  - These photos were submitted to represent this. Which photo do you see as best representing this? What do you think is happening in this photo? How does this relate to our lives at liberal arts institutions? Where is there strength for this?
- How do you define "personal and social responsibility"?
  - These photos were submitted to represent this. Which photo do you see as best representing this? What do you think is happening in this photo? How does this relate to our lives at liberal arts institutions? Where is there strength for this?
- How do you define "integrative and applied learning"?
  - These photos were submitted to represent this. Which photo do you see as best representing this? What do you think is happening in this photo? How does this relate to our lives at liberal arts institutions? Where is there strength for this?
- Think about the observations you made when taking photos. Had you noticed what is shown in these photos prior to the project? To what extent did this project change what you see?
- What were you unable to capture in the photographs?
- Think about the photographs you've seen. What would you expect to see on other liberal arts campuses?
- What makes your campus unique? What would you expect to see in a photo of at your institution but not others?

APPENDIX H: MEMBER-CHECK INSTRUCTIONS

Date

Name
Institution

Dear (Name),

As we discussed, attached is a copy of the transcript from our focus group on (date).

Please review this transcript and contact me if you would like to clarify any of your responses.

If I do not hear from you by (date), I will assume that you believe the transcript is an accurate depiction of our conversation.

As mentioned in earlier communications, once the study is complete I will forward you a summary of the findings.

Again, thank you for your participation, and I appreciate the time you gave me.

Sincerely,

Gwendolyn Schimek

APPENDIX I: FINAL THANK-YOU EMAIL

Date

Name
Institution

Dear (Name),

Thank you again for your assistance with my dissertation research. Attached you will find a summary of my findings. Again, thank you for your willingness to participate. I am hopeful that your participation will help inform others about how students experience the liberal arts environment.

Sincerely,

Gwendolyn Schimek

APPENDIX J: PHOTO RELEASE FORM

Visual Expression of the Liberal Arts Mission: A Photo Elicitation

Release Form for Use of Photograph/Videotape

Gwendolyn Schimek
David McKelfresh
School of Education
319.895.4103
Gwen.schimek@colostate.edu

Please print:

Name of Participant: _____

Address: _____

I am 18 years of age or older and hereby give my permission to [your name] to use any photos or videotape material taken of myself during [his or her] research on [title of project]. The photos and videotape material will only be used for research purposes and for the presentation of the research. My name will not be used in any publication. I will make no monetary or other claim against CSU for the use of the photograph(s)/video. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for photos or video footage of me to be used in this research project. [Provide the participant with a copy of this form.]

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal

guardian:

Printed Name: Date:

Parent/Guardian Signature:_____

APPENDIX K: REMINDER EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Greetings!

Thank you again for being willing to participate in my pilot study testing the EthOS App on your phone. I wanted to take a moment to remind you that I am hoping to have most photos taken by DATE.

It looks as though many of you have had an opportunity to sign into the website, and hopefully download the app at this point. It has been great to see the first several photos roll in.

This is your subtle reminder to keep taking photos and submit them in the course of the next couple of weeks.

As always, if you have any questions, please let me know.

Thanks,
Gwen

The Essential Learning Outcomes

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

★ Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

★ Intellectual and Practical Skills, including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

★ Personal and Social Responsibility, including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

★ Integrative and Applied Learning, including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

Note: This listing was developed through a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning; analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business community; and analysis of the accreditation requirements for engineering, business, nursing, and teacher education. The findings are documented in previous publications of the Association of American Colleges and Universities: *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (2002), *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree* (2004), and *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007). For further information, see www.aacu.org/leap.
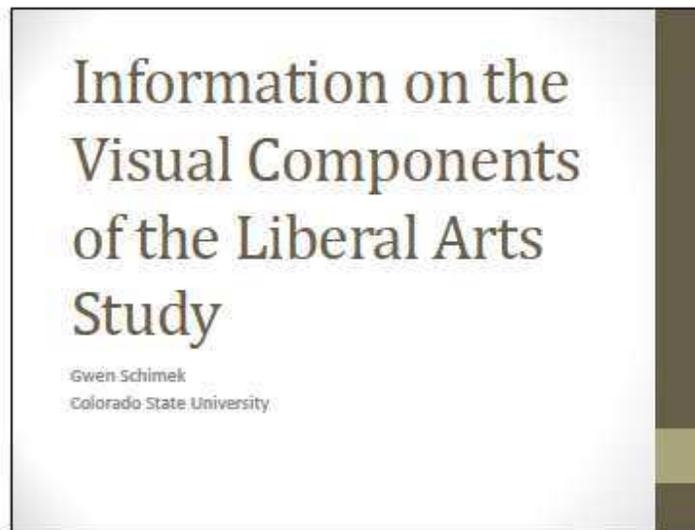
LEAP

170

10/15/2015

Information on the Visual Components of the Liberal Arts Study

Gwen Schimek
Colorado State University
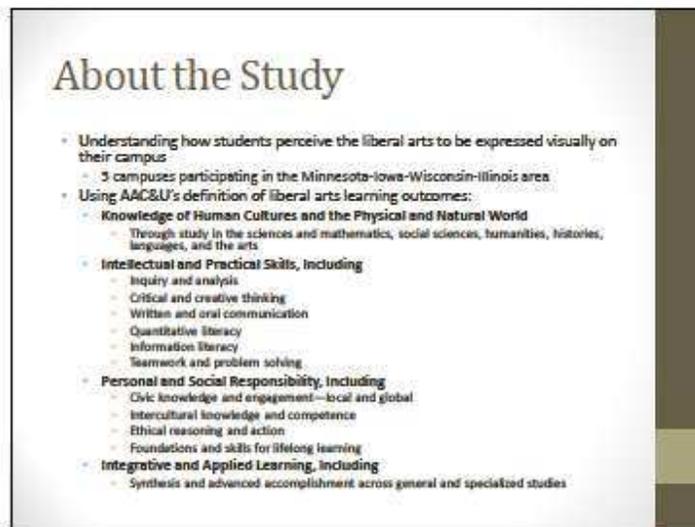
About the Study

- Understanding how students perceive the liberal arts to be expressed visually on their campus
  - 5 campuses participating in the Minnesota-Iowa-Wisconsin-Illinois area
- Using AAC&U's definition of liberal arts learning outcomes:
  - Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
    - Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
  - Intellectual and Practical Skills, Including
    - Inquiry and analysis
    - Critical and creative thinking
    - Written and oral communication
    - Quantitative literacy
    - Information literacy
    - Teamwork and problem solving
  - Personal and Social Responsibility, Including
    - Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
    - Intercultural knowledge and competence
    - Ethical reasoning and action
    - Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
  - Integrative and Applied Learning, Including
    - Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

1

Methods

- Phase 1
  - Photo collection
- Phase 2
  - Narrowing of photos & writing a brief statement
- Phase 3
  - Focus group on campus
- Phase 4
  - Data analysis
- Phase 5
  - Member-checking findings

Informed Consent Document

- Purpose
- Procedures
- Risks and Benefits
- Confidentiality
- Voluntary Participation
- Questions

1

Instructions

Over the next 2-3 weeks, take photographs around campus of ways in which you see the liberal arts essential learning outcomes expressed. These photographs may or may not include individuals or may not include individuals. Throughout this time, ensure the photographs are taken in public spaces.

Public spaces are defined as campus property accessible to all students, faculty, and staff.

Private spaces are defined as residence halls rooms, residence hall restrooms, locker rooms, and restrooms in campus buildings.

Please do not take any photos in private spaces, as we will not be able to use them for the study. Since we will not be able to use photos from taken in a private space, we will destroy any photos that appear to have been taken in a private space.

Taking Pictures in a Respectful Manner

Take photographs on the campus minding the following:

• If a person or persons will appear in your photo, ask for their verbal permission before taking the photo.

• Be respectful. If certain people do not want their photo taken, respect their wishes.

• Be aware of your surroundings and do not go into unfamiliar places.

• Be knowledgeable about the project in order to answer any simple questions.

• Be personally safe and not take physical risks to achieve a certain photo or angle.

1

Photo Release Form

Please print:

Name of Participant: _____

Address: _____

I am 18 years of age or older and hereby give my permission to [your name] to use any photos or videotape material taken of myself during [his or her] research on [title of project]. The photos and videotape material will only be used for research purposes and for the presentation of the research. My name will not be used in any publication. I will make no monetary or other claim against CSU for the use of the photograph(s)/video. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for photos or video footage of me to be used in this research project. [Provide the participant with a copy of this form.]

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:
Printed Name: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Photo Log

- Each time you take a photo, upload it and write a description or tag it with:
  - Location
  - Names, if any
  - Reason for taking photo

1

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What makes these images effective?

Questions

1

APPENDIX N: RESEARCHER JOURNAL SAMPLE

June 9, 2015

As I have continued transcribing over the past 2 days, two additional codes are rising to the surface.

One code is around reflection. Students have been talking about things that are intersections across the curriculum and the connections they are needing to make. I'm still somewhat unsure whether these are unique to the liberal arts, whether students experience them in a different way across the liberal arts, or if there are additional ways of looking at it. However, this idea of reflection is somewhat reflected in their conversation. I'm curious whether this means that reflection and intersection are inherent in the liberal arts curriculum. Some research (and conversation) would suggest that there are intentional ways of creating the liberal arts that require the students involved in liberal arts study to be specific and purposeful about making connections across the curriculum. With these things in mind, a follow-up question, discussion, or pondering will occur around the question: **Is reflection inherent to the liberal arts experience?**

A second concept which has come up numerous times is training. The students identify that **they are training for something**. Or the classroom provides training for something they will do in their cocurricular lives. One piece of me shudders each time I find myself typing it into the transcription because in some ways it goes against the idea of learning for the sake of learning. I wonder if this is where the neoliberal and liberal education components come together and are in direct opposition to one another while remaining part of the student experience. Have traditional undergraduates grown up in a world with such constant **rhetoric around education as a training ground** that these are the only terms with which they can discuss it, while it seems that what they are experiencing is application of the skills and concepts they are learning in class? Is this training? Perhaps it is. . . but training seems to be so specific to the role where skills and concepts are transferable, and isn't a liberal arts education built around the idea of transferable experiences? Maybe this is convoluted language to be caught up in, but it's intriguing to me that I seem to get caught in the language. I had a similar experience in my last paragraph as I was typing my final question.

I have been intentional about saying **liberal arts experience** throughout the study, rather than **liberal arts curriculum**, although I found myself typing curriculum earlier as I was typing my question. Why do I find this to be such a questionable terminology? It seems a few years ago in student affairs, in an effort to heighten our credibility with academic affairs, everything was being designated a curriculum. Our residence-life programming model was a curriculum. Our programming-board leadership training was a curriculum. Our dining program featured a healthy food curriculum or a sustainability curriculum. But the students with whom I work have an experience. They take elements of their experience and apply them to other areas of study, other opportunities they pursue, and other areas of the academe and life. They don't always move from point A to point B to point C. There isn't one set way to have the college experience. It's something that is simultaneously created for them and created by them. For each of these reasons, curriculum doesn't seem like the right fit; neither does training. And does reflection seem like the right fit? Hmmm. . . to continue to think about the codes. . .