

## **Creating and Assessing Student Spirituality and Initiatives in Higher Education**

### **A Summary of the Pre-Conference Workshop February 1&2, 2006**

2006 Institute on College Student Values

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Today, higher education institutions are increasingly forming close relationships with corporations, allowing colleges and universities to gain greater financial prosperity while providing an increase in goods and services for students. At the same time, many institutions see their primary purpose as one of preparing students for the work place rather than for the civic arena. Such focus on financial gain, however, may work against what students feel *they really need*. The aftermath to the 9/11 terrorism, for example, has caused many students to become more uncertain about the future and this uncertainty has motivated them to devote greater attention to their family, friends, and the cultivation of an inner life.

If more and more college students are actively exploring their own search for meaning and purpose, why does higher education rarely direct its attention to the inner development of students? How can faculty teach about spirituality without being accused of indoctrination? How can colleges and universities emphasize and cultivate authenticity and spirituality in the midst of a competitive, consumer driven culture? What are some ways to engage faculty in enhancing efforts to encourage spiritual growth? Can spirituality be encouraged for those who don't share the dominant faith of the school? What are some approaches and practices related to encouraging

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spirituality that seem to be effective on some campuses? Finally, how is it possible to assess the outcomes of such an ineffable domain of human experience?

These questions and others relating to spirituality and college student development were explored during the pre-conference workshop at the 2006 Institute on College Student Values in Tallahassee, Florida, February 2-4. This brief summary of the workshop provides some of the key ideas and strategies identified at the workshop.

#### Summary of Workshop Proceedings

Forty participants from twenty-three US colleges attended the workshop entitled “*Creating and Assessing Campus Environments That Encourage Moral and Spiritual Growth.*” The purpose of the workshop was to help college and university administrators, faculty members, and student affairs professionals from public and private institutions to strengthen their institutions’ effectiveness in promoting students’ moral and spiritual development. Jon C. Dalton, associate professor in educational leadership and policy studies and director of the Hardee Center for Leadership and Ethics at Florida State University; Arthur Chickering, author and special assistant to the president of Goddard College, and David Eberhardt, doctoral student and research assistant in the Hardee Center at Florida State University, facilitated the workshop proceedings.

Participants in the workshop included a wide variety of higher education professionals including the following:

- deans and associate deans of student life; vice president and associate vice president for student life
- associate vice president of university ministry
- assistant vice president for campus life
- executive director of office of vocation development
- director of student events and leadership development
- director of counseling center
- director of career services
- director of church relations
- director of assessment
- director of Lead Center
- director of Commandant’s Issue Team
- chief of character and leadership division
- assistant director of vocation programs
- assistant director of university ministry
- assistant director of student activities
- vocation counselor
- residence manager
- professor of psychology and professor of religion
- associate professor of religion
- vocation counselor
- coordinator of volunteer services and programming
- executive assistant to the vice president for student affairs

Prior to the Workshop participants received an electronic copy of the *Inventory for Assessing Moral and Spiritual Growth Initiatives* and were also asked to read *Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education* (Chickering, Dalton, Stamm, 2005, Jossey-Bass), identifying

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particular book chapters most pertinent to the areas of change they wish to effect in their own institution. After completing the on-line inventory, each team or individual participant sent a brief statement to the conference leaders describing the institutional initiative they wished to pursue.

In large group discussions, workshop presenters explored historical and philosophical contexts relating to spirituality and college student development. Art Chickering explained that although higher education makes claims to being value free, each policy and practice it adopts, each resource allocation or staffing decision that is made conveys a priority of values. In addition, although colleges and universities strive to avoid indoctrination, in effect, such indoctrination is unavoidable. Thus, leaders of institutions should be honest about their own motives and prejudices and recognize that many students and faculty share the need for spiritual cultivation and development. Chickering emphasized that higher education cannot address the importance of spiritual development merely through campus activities; many students do not take part in these activities. Thus moral and spiritual growth should be incorporated in various ways so that the various needs of students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds can be addressed.

Jon Dalton examined some of the ways in which the growing interest in spirituality among college students is reflected in campus programs and activities:

- designated space on campus for meditation and reflection such as chapels, spirituality centers, outdoor gardens, and labyrinths
- spirituality programs incorporating speakers, retreats, symposia, student-led groups, conferences, films, music, drama, service projects
- wellness and recreation including yoga, meditation, relaxation, self-realization, stress reduction, dieting, enlightenment, happiness and renewal, self improvement
- interfaith dialogue and interaction incorporating interfaith conversations, celebrations, study groups, living-learning groups, worship, study of eastern religions
- spiritual practices incorporating prayer circles, guided meditation, personal retreats, readings, devotionals, practicing silence, on-line spirituality groups and self-directed spiritual search
- campus climate and ethos incorporating campus covenants
- new administrative structures and titles, incorporating deans, coordinators of spiritual life, character development, centers for sport and spirituality, leadership and ethics, moral development, career and calling
- classes and curriculum incorporating spirituality theme residences
- travel, pilgrimages and other journeys of the spirit
- new student organizations and groups incorporating spirituality themes, projects and purposes
- spirituality conveyed through the arts, music, film, drama

During small group sessions, cross- institutional workgroups based on overlapping areas of interest worked to create plans for strengthening moral and spiritual growth opportunities for students and/or faculty in their schools. Institutional teams/individuals worked on drafting action plans and shared these plans with fellow attendees in the large group session. Chickering and Dalton responded to the action plans and provided time for participants to further refine their plans.

Shortly after participants returned to their campuses they were asked to identify specific goals for incorporating spiritual growth in their institutions. Following are some of the responses of participants:

- conducting a self-assessment inventory of their institution's spiritual growth activities, policies, and practices that will help to identify current strengths and weaknesses
  - cataloging current endeavors and developing specific outcomes
  - assessing status quo of student spirituality on Campus
  - starting conversations w/student leaders focus groups to assess current means of spiritual development
  - creating student task force to examine student perspective & implementation of ideas
  - exploring use of creeds and covenants
  - coordinating & collaborating with other offices
  - gathering "Partners in the Dialogue" to discuss "Connecting the Dots" to Achieve Institutional transformation
  - involving Ethics Center, Religious Life/Campus Ministry, Religion Departments, Vocation Offices, Campus Ministry Multicultural Affairs
  - reaching out to typical non-attendees/participants
  - focusing on Leadership Programs
  - workshops for students to focus on spirituality/authenticity leadership course around theme of Authenticity & Spirituality
  - involving in leadership training in diverse areas—RAs, OLs, etc
  - integrating institutional values, spirituality into programs and infuse into curriculum through academic collaboration
  - developing faculty training through Center for Teaching and Learning
  - determining how to add to coursework in FYE/Orientation Programs
  - infusing spirituality theme into programs and courses
  - staff/faculty role modeling and discussion of these issues
  - presidential sharing of own journey Code, Creed, Covenants— x3 Infuse Spirituality into Core Student Statements
  - examining our of language—"Academy" and "Community" vs. "Institution"
  - incorporating rituals—Orientation, Convocation, Ring Ceremony, Graduation
  - talking with parents about how to deal with student spirituality
  - giving awards to students
  - examining and encouraging spirituality emphasis in graduate programs in Student Affairs
  - adding courses in Spirituality/Student development
  - adding course to Teacher Education
  - getting faith-based organizations together
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