Megan Krakowiak
Boston College
krakowia@bc.edu
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Against All Odds: Formational Education as Bridge across Deep Division

Abstract

Formational college education can promote dialogue across deep divisions. Regardless of university affiliation, students regularly declare themselves, "spiritual, but not religious." Deeper than a trend in contemporary language, transformational learning offers the possibility for a more complex relationship with the self, others, and the world. Whether or not a university claims to be forming its students, developmental theory would say students are, most certainly, in a stage of profound formation. This paper will overview the landscape, and suggest a holistic, transformational way forward.

Against All Odds

Distracted by semantics and operating under false dichotomies, faculty and administrators on university campuses are missing an opportunity. This missed opportunity could play a pivotal role in the growth, development, and success of college students and societies. For centuries the debate has lingered—What is the purpose of a college education?—leaving behind a wide spectrum of opinions. Developmental theorists point out two distinct ends of the spectrum. Geared toward the acquisition of skills and knowledge is *informational* learning. *Transformational* learning, on the other end, aims to lead people toward more complex relationships with the self, others, and the world. More important than this distinction itself is whether or not a college or university recognizes its role in forming its students. Developmental theory states: students, at this point in their lives, are being formed. Transformational learning, then, is an important opportunity afforded by college education. Following the identification of false dichotomies and a brief exploration of contemporary research data, a holistic, nuanced, transformational way forward is possible.

"It's funny: I always imagined when I was a kid that adults had some kind of inner toolbox full of shiny tools: the saw of discernment, the hammer of wisdom, the sandpaper of patience. But then when I grew up I found that life handed you these rusty bent old tools - friendships, prayer, conscience, honesty - and said 'do the best you can with these, they will have to do'. And mostly, against all odds, they do."[i]

False Dichotomy 1: Spiritual, but not Religious—Interior/Exterior

"I'm spiritual, but not religious," college students across North America report, to the great dismay of many professionals within higher education, and the great disinterest of countless more. This proclamation suggests a gap—perhaps more accurately, a fault line, between "religion" and "spirituality." The perception of this gap, and the subsequent need to repair it is, of course, well intentioned. College students[ii] for the past fifteen years have increasingly referred to themselves in this way.[iii] Over the course of this same time period, the bafflement has grown in direct proportion. University professors and student affairs professionals in both secular and religious institutions wonder: What, exactly, do they mean? What is it that college students seek? And what is the point of a college education?

In 2003, as an attempt to better understand this question, Helen and Alexander Astin began their work as Co-Principal Investigators for a multi-year project out of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA. They entitled their project, *The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose*. The work was funded by the John Templeton Foundation. Astin and Astin wrote,

> The project is based in part on the realization that the relative amount of attention that colleges and universities devote to the 'exterior' and 'interior' aspects of students' development has gotten out of balance...we have increasingly come to neglect the students' inner development—the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, spirituality, and self-understanding.[iv]

While this comprehensive study is certainly of value to professors, administrators, and other professionals within the world of higher education, it is helpful to highlight its underlying assumption, betrayed by the use of *inner* development. Namely, that the "interior" and "exterior" lives of persons are fundamentally different, existing on some sort of physical, locational, binary. By definition, that which happens outside is not that which occurs within. This can be expanded to say, that which happens in an *informational* type of learning environment is separate from that which occurs as a result of *transformational* learning experiences. Those pieces constitutive of transformational learning fall under the interior life of the student: sense of self, role in relationships, sense of wonder, meaning and purpose. These aspects are excluded from the exterior life of the student: academic success, mastery of skills, acquisition and execution of leadership roles.

False Dichotomy 2: Secular/Sacred

Charles Taylor defines the notion of *secular* in its original context, Latin Christendom, wherein it was understood as one term of a dyad. That which was secular had to do with profane time, or "century." It was contrasted with the second term in the dyad, that which was eternal or related to *sacred* time, kairos. The secular/sacred, profane/kairos, temporal/spiritual distinction was one in which each half of the equation functioned simultaneously. In other words, the secular fundamentally depended upon the sacred and vice versa. Neither acted alone.

Across history a major shift occurred, in which responsibilities formerly falling under the jurisdiction of church slowly became the responsibility of each individual citizen, or non-church organization. The meaning of "secularization" with respect to this general shift, beginning post-Reformation, is rather obvious. "This configuration of the "secular," where it still holds, can make secularization a relatively undramatic affair…basic features remain unchanged."[v] Society

grows increasingly secularized as individuals and organizations not associated with organized religious communities (churches) take ownership for needs traditionally left under the umbrella of church. By definition, this development is not problematic.

However, the gradual progress of a new and different configuration has arisen. The secular, according to this arrangement, acts alone, and is "opposed to any claim made in the name of something transcendent of this world and its interests."[vi] This shift has left the secular/sacred dyad fundamentally disconnected and in conflict. In terms of the interior/exterior dichotomy outlined above, the exterior—that which is observable and concrete—is that which matters. To put this in the context of the university setting, students' exterior lives, comprised of academic performance, demonstration of skills, and leadership roles are the only aspect worthy of investment. This conception of the secular drives informational learning. Transformational learning, geared toward illuminating and enriching the messy interior lives of students, where self-understanding, relationship skills, and wonder for one's place in the world, is left to the ethereal realm of the sacred.

To complicate things further, the distinct domains are ordered hierarchically, the lower being the secular. According to this ordering, the secular is that which can be understood immediately and clearly. It creates a new formulation, in which good social and political order is disconnected from the traditional ethics of the good life. Goodness no longer has room for that which is interior, relational, or potentially religious. Good, according to this formulation, is that which contributes to the smooth and ordered functioning of the exterior lives of persons. Secular Goodness consists of measurable skills, acceptable academic prowess, appropriate public performance.

It is interesting to consider what religious communities, as well as institutions of higher learning, have done to fabricate this dichotomy, and effectively perpetuate a false sense of conflict between the secular and sacred. For centuries the notion of the spiritual/transcendent/intellectual had been ordered over and above the secular/temporal/immediate/bodily. Within the Catholic theological tradition, Thomas Aquinas physically sketched out a pyramid to demonstrate this idea. Sacred Goodness could be understood as the way of religious piety, humility, and following the rules of God, which were only ever interpreted by a small governing body. As human persons and human culture have developed and changed, the suggestion that a body of selected, consecrated individuals should hold power to interpret the transcendent and hand down rules and regulations for the lives of others has (understandably) lost its luster. For these historical reasons, and a variety of others, sacred goodness has been colloquially linked to the religious. Left shadowed and obscure, having something to do with rules, maybe transformation, and interior "stuff"—religious is a label rejected by contemporary young people.

"We Are Not Responsible for Forming You"

Taken to the extreme, a secularized approach to informational learning falls on one of the far ends of the "Opinions on the Purpose of College Education Spectrum." One might find someone like John J. Mearsheimer, professor of political science, offering a welcome address to the University of Chicago Class of 2001 as part of the "Aim of Education" [vii] lecture series at this end. His compatriots would conceptualize the separation of sacred and secular with a firm, impermeable boundary. Mearsheimer would argue the university is a place for critical analysis of the exterior—facts, figures, and skills that matter. *If* there is something to be said about that

which is sacred or interior, there is no place for it within the precious intellectual fortress that is university.

Proudly tracing what he calls "the effort to develop a scientific morality" across the course of the twentieth century, Mearsheimer lands on the judgment that it has failed "almost completely." He extrapolates that contemporary *elite universities* operate under a distinctive and delineated separation between intellectual and moral purpose, "and they pursue the former while largely ignoring the latter"—the underlying suggesting being that this delineation is precisely that which constitutes the elite. He seems glad to pronounce the University of Chicago a "fundamentally amoral institution," affirming that it "makes hardly any effort to provide moral guidance."[viii] He understands the purpose and value of the University of Chicago, alongside other elite colleges, as providing an education centered on teaching its students to think critically, not ethically.[ix]

Careful to indicate his sense that there is no "good life," per se, the professor promises, "a Chicago degree will go a long way towards helping each of you to lead the **good life**, however you define it." This promise echoes Taylor's false dichotomy: the "good life" passed on through centuries of religious and philosophical tradition no longer exists, but one can have a good life insofar as it is made of external, objectively beneficial things. Over the course of the rest of his speech, he outlines what one can only surmise is a list of qualities of The Good Life According to John Mearsheimer: a jumpstarted career, lots of money, an "upper-class lifestyle."[x] The importance of getting a "good" job is included, although the goodness of the job is not related to: utilization of one's talents, contribution in some meaningful way to a fulfilling endeavor, or service the greater society in any capacity—those would be interior goods.

When he does mention responsibility, it is to one's spouse, children, and house. "Be prepared, which is another way of saying, make sure you have a lot of money in the bank, and the more of it you have the better."[xi] He notes the possibility of crisis, but assures the students their "intellect will help you deal with it."[xii] Because, he explains, "The sort of critical thinking we encourage is especially necessary when you are facing a personal crisis, and having a broad array of intellectual resources can be a source of real comfort."[xiii] Again, external skills and resources, he promises, will be enough to assuage the interior tribulations associated with crisis.

Following the line of theory constituting the "secular/sacred," and the "exterior/interior" dichotomies, Mearsheimer proclaims, "We are not responsible for forming you." One could argue, whether or not a university is making a concerted effort to effectively form the young adults enrolled there, the students are at a developmental stage that is fundamentally formational. To put this parochially, if you say you're not doing it, it means you're not paying attention to it, which probably means you're doing it poorly. It's hard to accidentally form people well.

This particular presentation of the far end of the spectrum is incredibly narrow. While others, when asked this same question, might not necessarily disagree entirely with his claims about the value of critical thinking or preparation for economic stability--informational learning, to declare an institution "amoral" or entirely disinterested in the formation of its students is severely limiting. This view dismisses the possibility of a "something in the middle," a third way, that would provide both critical skills and personal development. It also dismisses the empirical research surrounding students' desires, and fails to take advantage of the season of life during which human persons are most deeply becoming themselves—in both exterior and interior ways.

Spiritual-Secular /Religious-Sacred

It is important to note that, within sociological research, the dichotomies compound; the term religious has become associated with the sacred while spiritual has been tied to the secular. "The trend toward dichotomizing or polarizing spirituality and religion is accompanied by a tendency to characterize spirituality as 'good, individualistic, liberating, and mature, while portraying religious as institutionalized, constraining, and childish.'"[xiv] If, in contemporary college student lingo, the spiritual is tied to the secular, and the secular is that which is real, practical, and (according to this line of thought) can be trusted, it makes sense that a young person making any claim on an interior life would claim ties to that which is tangible. It would be counterintuitive to make claims toward an "imaginary," communal, transcendent, ethereal, *religious* identity. Perhaps this shift in the vernacular is partly the cause of the self-reported refrain, "I'm spiritual but not religious" ringing out on so many college campuses.

To summarize, following paradigmatic shifts, the sacred is that which is ethereal and governed by an outside authority. The sacred is understood as being tied to the religious. The sacred is confusing, intangible, and undeserving of trust. In a convoluted way, the interior life is tied to this faulty notion of the sacred; it is left to the wayside. The secular is that which is immediately available and trustworthy. The secular is that which drives the perceived need for institutions of higher learning to graduate adults with skills and knowledge. The secular is close at hand, clear, and readily available. In some ways, it is miraculous that students today claim the spiritual at all—they understand it to be close at hand, available to them, and worthy of investigation!

This contemporary web is of course in stark contrast to the understanding of spiritual as that which has been carried quietly through the lived reality of persons belonging to communities of faith. It is important to remember that, within the world of religion and religious traditions, the spiritual is often tied to the myriad ways in which individuals and groups demonstrate their beliefs and commitments. Across the span of centuries, the spirituality of persons and communities has contributed in deep and meaningful ways to the lives of whole societies, regardless of whether or not those societies claim the same God as the spiritual persons and communities.

Empirical Research

Nancy Ammerman, professor of sociology of religion at Boston University, has conducted in-depth research on 'spiritual practices' in the secular age. She uncovered numerous respondents hinting at real and important experiences, but having no shared language to articulate easily what the experience is about; nor the ways in which the participant knows the experience to be significant for themself and their life.[xv] In other words, Ammerman's research has found people willing to give voice to their interior lives, but unable to accurately language their experience exteriorly. This, it seems, is an outcome of the process of secularization in which individuals and groups have moved away from the shared lexicon provided by belonging to faith-based communities or formalized religions. It is a symptom if informational learning, focusing on skills and knowledge, but not interior development and language to articulate one's inner life.

In 1999, Love and Talbot worked to define five interrelated processes in spiritual development. They found that it involves:

- An internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development.
- The process of continually transcending one's current locus of centricity.
- Developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and union with community.
- Deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in one's life.
- Increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing.[xvi]

All five of these processes could be described as developing internally. They would not necessarily be observable on the exterior, and would not likely be included in the evaluation of an informational learning process. A college student exploring spirituality in an intentional way, quite possibly finding *success* in developing connectedness, deriving purpose and meaning, or increasing openness, would not necessarily present any differently on the exterior. It might appear as though nothing was happening.

Nancy Ammerman has found in self-reported studies of spirituality that, "experiencing a sense of awe is not unrelated to what some people described when they talked about unexplained and mysterious happenings...a spirituality of awe is about affect, what one feels."[xvii]As was outlined in the previous section, common wisdom in contemporary culture holds that religion is about institutions that assert external authority, and spirituality is about authentic and internal individual pursuits.[xviii] Based on the work of Ammerman, it seems students are talking about an affective experience of awe when they utilize the word spiritual.

The work of Astin and Astin suggests the "interior" lives of the students are those things tied to spirituality, meaning, and purpose. At this point in human history, a stark separation of interiority from exteriority in daily life is widely accepted. The 2003 study directed by Astin and Astin resulted in the 2005 HERI report, which summarizes findings from the survey of 112,232 entering first year students, attending 236 diverse colleges and universities across the country. Astin and Astin understood the role of higher education in the US context as one representing "a critical focal point for responding to the question of… 'exterior' and 'interior' [balance]."[xix] One of the most salient findings of the study is the fact that students consistently agreed with survey statements about the expectation that their time as an undergraduate student would encourage and support their spiritual exploration and development.

Dawn Overstreet, in her doctoral dissertation, studied students' use of the terms spiritual and religious, to better understand this trend of self-identification. Looking to the 2008 study entitled the Boston College Questionnaire,[xx] she found that 81% of students in the study sample identified themselves as spiritual, while only 60% self-identified as religious. This 21% gap, she summarized, "reinforces the idea that students understand these two concepts to be different from each other and that more investigation in this area is necessary."[xxi] Students in the HERI study regularly and consistently indicated spiritual growth as an expected central aspect of college. Of the students polled in the study, 80% indicated, "having an interest in spirituality;" three-fourths of the students said they were "searching for meaning/purpose in life."[xxii] It is interesting to consider where these students went on their search, and whether or not they were met with enthusiasm or dismissal.

Other studies, with less carefully selected terms, found "religious development" to be positively correlated with both moral development and developing a sense of meaning or

purpose in life.[xxiii] This, of course, is no surprise considering the tangled lines of development and connection behind the interior/exterior, secular/sacred, and spiritual/religious dichotomies. Religious development was also found positively associated with efforts to enhance multiculturalism on campus.[xxiv] These outcomes are not associated with *success* according to an informational learning model. They are, however, associated with success when it comes to reaching across channels of deep division and making strides toward peaceful coexistence. These are measures of success according to a transformational understanding of learning.

What's the Point?

At this complex juncture, Sharon Parks would call attention to the particular fabric of the contemporary context- creating a sort of threshold, or hinge time in human history. She says, "We have unprecedented access to knowledge of our cosmos, our planet, our selves, and each other…creating a context in which social-cultural covenants are being reordered."[xxv] Throughout this season of unprecedented change, and problematic separation of vague dichotomies like interior/exterior, secular/sacred, spiritual/religious, one thing remains: young people are growing up, and they are seeking ways to make meaning of their lives. Colleges and universities are uniquely poised to aid in the formation of emerging adults. Contemporary college students demand a more nuanced explanation, better-informed educators and mentors, and a better toolbox with which to equip themselves for the "cusp time,"[xxvi] in which they live and learn, and ultimately, will be tasked with creating meaning. Providing opportunities for inner growth and development is not simply a nice thing to do—it is an important and readily available avenue toward bridging deep societal divides.

Transformational Learning

Unfortunately for those hoping they can simply refuse responsibility for forming their constituents, college students are at intense stage of human development. Sharon Parks points out that the traditional college years occur during a period when one's critical thought includes an examination of the "tacit assumptions that comes with one's family and culture, and the construction of an intellectual framework more adequate to the diverse, complex, and morally ambiguous world of contemporary adulthood."[xxvii] She goes on to explain that as one's perception of authority shifts from external and implicit to internal and self-constructed, individuals begin to move toward questions that allow for a more spacious way of knowing.[xxviii]

Moreover, if recent research findings are correct, contemporary students are more interested in "things spiritual" and "exhibit more diverse religious affiliations and expressions of those affiliations."[xxix] If colleges and universities are willing to invest time and resources into the spiritual growth and development of their students—that is, the interior lives of their students—their communities will benefit from "a broadly-inclusive, pluralistic climate on their campuses."[xxx] Common sense suggests this broadly-inclusive, pluralistic disposition will follow students after graduation as well. Given the increasingly globalized world into which college graduates move, to equip students with the skills and sensitivities to better navigate difference is not only a desirable educational outcome, but a necessary one.

As was seen above, one might articulately argue that the purpose of a college education is to produce educated adults with appropriate skills and motivation to join the workforce, find pleasurable jobs and monetary success, and critically reason their way through any crises that

might arise. This is one valid end of a wide spectrum of opinion. Another option might be to help form adults with an increased capacity to deal with the complexity of life in an increasingly secularized, complex context.

Sharon Parks notes, in her works from 1986 and 2000, that this time of development, young adulthood, is a time during which individuals are significantly invested in questions regarding purpose, vocation, and belonging.[xxxi] She highlights the need of individuals for "familiar and dependable networks of people, places, and communities to explore themselves and their values."[xxxii]

Parks' theory outlines forms of knowing corresponding to four periods of development. These periods include distinct levels of dependency and emotion. Within various theories of cognitive development, it is understood that over time, human persons move away from an external locus of authority, experiencing the gradual and uncomfortable realization that truth they have been taught is imperfect, and desiring a state of independent exploration. It is natural and *good* for students to endure a period of discomfort, seeking, and wonder. Simultaneously, Parks explains, it is imperative that students have conversation partners with whom they might discuss shifting perspectives and worldviews.

> …It grows daily more urgent that those elders who would be intellectually, ethically, and spiritually alive heed the call of responsible mentorship, seeking not simply to pass on our disciplinary learning, but to embody our wisdom on behalf of the next generations as we pass the torch in this cusp time of both peril and promise.[xxxiii]

Through her research, Parks highlights the value of mentors, healthy relationships with those mentors, and peers for the formation of college students. While the University of Chicago might disagree with Professor Mearsheimer's presentation, in which he suggests *not* forming students, he nonetheless suggests a list of values: careerism, affluence, intellectualism.

Parks and the empirical studies noted above demonstrate that college students are at a place of actively seeking opportunities to explore, study, and discuss spiritual development—that is to say, development of a vocabulary for notions of meaning and purpose. This is a key to successful human development. Some argue spiritual development could be a critical factor in the increasing number of college students struggling with issues of anxiety and depression in a contemporary context, where major shifts are occurring and traditional models of success and pathways to adulthood are dissolving altogether. As society becomes increasingly complex, people struggle with daily salience of questions like, "Am I going to make it?" and "What is the point of all this?" In this way, deep existential questions of adolescence and young adulthood intensify.

Given the dissolution of these pathways and the struggle endured by many as a result, it would be fair to say a well-rounded education is a public health concern. Meg Jay, author of *The Defining Decade*, and TED presentation entitled, "Why 20 is Not the New 30," contends that a major challenge facing the current cohort of emerging adults is a decreased ability to deal with increased complexity. Cognitive development theory would suggest that a key to healthy development is moving toward a capacity to hold conflict and tension without immediately moving to resolution. Like Parks, Jay suggests ours is a sociocultural location that increases uncertainty, partially because of ever-changing networks, technologies, and possibilities.

How Do We Do This?

Within an entirely secular framework, the college years provide an opportunity for young people to develop skills, dispositions, and relationships to better face uncertainty. They have the networks to help them become more inclusive, honest, and discriminating persons. Parker Palmer says that as they develop, humans move toward a more inclusive, honest, discriminating disposition.[xxxiv] Developmental theorists use the language of crisis to speak of occurrences that disrupt equilibrium and force a person to face a developmental task that might be outside of their reach at a given time. Crisis, in this context, is a helpful motivating force to push persons into deeper exploration and development. In this way, college is a great time for a crisis.

A holistic approach to college student formation, one that blends secular and spiritual frameworks, would suggest the work of the college years is to learn to better handle these moments academically, spiritually, emotionally, and socially. This is quite a different toolbox than looking to one's very sharp intellect at a time of crisis. The traditional undergraduate educational years provide an excellent developmental window for students to explore new information, practices, and resources, while surrounded by helpful and invested peers and mentors.

Within a religious or spiritual framework, young people at a point of wonder and discovery might come to a point on their developmental journeys where they begin to ask questions specifically of spirituality and religion. At this time, they likely begin to look for a community of persons or collection of practices to help enrich their life's journey, and support them as they grapple with the possibility of a larger context and purpose. This is the point at which the rich spiritual resources of a given religious tradition or faith community can be of great help. They can be accompanied as they explore the possibility of the transcendent, wonder about the meaning and purpose of life, and develop into young adults with vibrant spiritual lives, nuanced belief systems, and rich communities of support.

Development in College—Theological Contributions

Students consistently report a clear interest in searching for meaning and purpose. This requires more than simply developing the intellect. *Aesthetics* is born from the Greek—*aesthesis*. Aesthetic experiences are those of art and beauty, "…distinctive for the powerfully gratifying ways they absorb our attention, unify our consciousness, and engage our emotions…"[xxxv] The ancients considered philosophy the study of an embodied way of life.[xxxvi]

Oftentimes, the subjects in Ammerman's studies talked about particular activities that might cultivate, evoke, or encourage the growth of the spirit.[xxxvii] When prompted to talk about spirit, many respondents referenced inexplicable instances in their everyday lives. The type of events they described pointed to the limits of human understanding, and hinted toward the sense that despite the progress of scientific understanding of the natural world, there would always be some part 'beyond us.'[xxxviii] Gleaning wisdom from the work of Nancy Ammerman, and the shared knowledge of those who proudly self-identify as spiritual, religious, or anything in-between, it is known widely that the everyday lives of human persons are sacred, and provide opportunities for recognition as such. This, of course, includes the lives of college students.

Richard Shusterman overviews, and in some ways introduces the idea of *somaesthetics*, an interdisciplinary approach, comprised of theory and practice. He defines it broadly as both a critical study and supportive tilling of the body (*soma*) as the site of both sensory appreciation

and creation of the self. Aesthetic experiences are those of art and beauty, "…distinctive for the powerfully gratifying ways they absorb our attention, unify our consciousness, and engage our emotions…"[xxxix] Somaesthetics looks particularly to the body as the place where aesthetic experiences occur, that is, within the senses. As a discipline growing out of, and committed to an attempt to *make better* the understanding of both theory and practice, somaesthetics explores epistemological questions in the fields of science, theology, psychology, and sociology, to name a few.

The interdisciplinary field of somaesthetics contributes rich material to theological questions raised by Luke Timothy Johnson[xl] as he explores a God who is ever new. Belief in a creative God welcomes the possibility of the lived experiences of human persons revealing never-before-known truths about that God. For Johnson, the human body is shorthand for human experience, inasmuch as it is in and through the body that human persons experience life.

Johnson claims that the Living God is made known in the world through the same processes in which bodies participate. He challenges misconceptions of faith, defining *authentic faith* as that embodied by those who trust and obey the one whom Scripture designates as the Living God. This Living God is one who is revealed through the accounts of Scripture as one who, at every moment, creates. Insofar as the human person can apprehend its experiences in the body, Johnson says, the human body is the *essential arena of a never-ceasing process of divine revelation.*

An article in *TIME Magazine* from 2014 highlighted the "spiritual" experience of high-powered women with stressful lives who schedule near-impossible workouts with the explicit goal of a good cry in mind.[xli] The article talks of women craving the space for physical self-expression and release. People gather regularly inside studios in major cities for exhausting group fitness classes and workshops. They seek someone who can lead them through their embodied experience. Physical activity functions as a spiritual practice for many because it is an invitation and daily reminder of the present. It offers structure, rhythm, repetition, and ritual. "If spirituality is sometimes signaled by the beauty of the natural world, it is also sometimes experienced in the transcendence of the social world. Finding (or losing) oneself in the ocean of a common human spirit is another of the things people mean when they say something is spiritual."[xlii] If university professors and student affairs professionals could find a way to bring ritual and rhythm into the busy, embodied, real lives of young people the way Instagram fitness influencers and yoga instructors have, they would be on their way to a vibrant educational revolution. To embrace one's physical reality as *creature*, as *beloved*, and as *good* is to open the door to questions of meaning and purpose.

In the secularized world, bodies are affirmed and included in spiritual practices because lives are lived through bodies. If spirituality is an inner drive for self-transcendence—a moving beyond the self to reach out in love to seek truth and goodness[xliii] —then it is always tied to the richness of an individual's living. In her research, Ammerman found that people reported objects of beauty as spiritual "…when they evoked awe, when they asked a person to stop, step out of the ordinary business of life, stretching the mind and imagination toward what might be."[xliv] This is the task of educating in a contemporary context: to ask a person to step out of the ordinary business of life, or the traditional rhythm of the school day, to reclaim the ordinary as sacred, and help students to reimagine *and re-embody* the significance of their own lives.

Countless possibilities like movement, art, mentorship, and meditation contribute to a holistic approach to college student formation. Incorporation of these aspects might lead a student to recognize inherent value in the self and others. Stemming from this recognition,

students often desire to situate themselves in the presence of a community exploring similar questions and sensibilities. This contributes in a dynamic way to students' spiritual maturity—a valuable theological goal. Providing students with rich intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual groundwork during the college years prepares them to build and live a good life.

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End Notes

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[i] Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith.* Pantheon Books: New York, 1999.

[ii] College students, for the sake of the data included in this paper, will refer to students in the United State context, falling into the "traditional" college age of 18-24 years.

[iii] Astin, A.,W., Astin, H.S., Lindholm, J.A., Bryant, A.N., Calderon, S., & Szelenyi, K. (2005). The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose (Full Report) http://spirituality.ucla.edu/docs/reports/Spiritual_Life_College_Student s_Full_Report.pdf.

[iv] Ibid.

[v] Charles Taylor, The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere "Western Secularity" 2011, p. 2

[vi] Taylor, 2.

[vii] John J. Mearsheimer is the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Political Science and the College at the University of Chicago. Philosophy and Literature 22.1 (1998) 137-155; Symposium, "The Aims of Education," John J. Mearsheimer.

[viii] Mearsheimer, 9.

[ix] Ibid., 9.

[x] Ibid., 11.

[xi] Ibid., 12.

[xii] Ibid., 11.

[xiii] Ibid, 12.

[xiv] Johnson, Kristeller, & Sheets, 2005, 3 cited in Overstreet, D. V. (2010). "Spiritual vs. Religious: Perspectives from Today's Undergraduate Catholics." *Journal of Catholic Education, 14* (2). http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1402062013, 11.

[xv]Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 37.

[xvi] Hartley, Harold. "How College Affects Students' Religious Faith and Practice: A Review of Research." *College Student Affairs Journal* 23, no. 2 (2004): 111-29.

[xvii] Ammerman, 35.

[xviii] Ammerman, 24.

[xix] Astin & Astin, et. al, 2005.

[xx] "The BCQ is a quantitative study that analyzes the impact of the undergraduate experience on students attending Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. The study provides detailed information on the activities, practices, and attitudes that could be linked to student outcomes aligned with the mission of a Catholic university (Fleming, Overstreet, & Chappe, 2006). The BCQ has been administered every other year since 2004 to a total of 11,200 seniors at six Jesuit Catholic institutions." Cited in Overstreet, 244.

[xxi] Overstreet, 244.

[xxii] HERI Study, 2005.
[xxiii] Hartley, 125 (Citing: Astin, 1993; Dalton, 1997; Parks, 1986, 2000; Young, Cashwell, & Woolington, 1998).
[xxiv] Hartley, 123 (Citing: Hodges, 1999; Pascarella et al., 1996).
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[xxvi] Parks, *Leadership*, 1.
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[xxviii] Daloz & Parks, 21.
[xxix] Hartley, 125.
[xxx] Hartley, 125.
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[xxxii] Patton et. al., 205.
[xxxiii] Daloz & Parks, 22.
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[xxxviii] Ibid., 30.
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[xliv] Ibid., 35.