

Research Project Summary
Cindy Miller-Perrin & Don Thompson
September 2015

Research Overview

We have collaborated on several projects on life purpose development for the university since 2002. These belong to three categories as a function of the subjects being studied. First, we have done extensive work on Seaver College students and University Faculty, as described in our CSRI work. Second, we recently began working with Pepperdine University Alumni, ages 30-40, in hubs around the country. Finally, we are collecting data on life purpose development among students who are part our four graduate and professional schools. Much of our work is collected on our research website: <http://community.pepperdine.edu/spirituallife/research-institute/default.htm>

Here are summaries of each area:

1. Christian Spirituality Research Institute (CSRI)

Annual Funding

Provost - \$5000

Center for Faith & Learning - \$10000

The 2014-15 academic year was another busy one for our work in the *Christian Spirituality Research Institute (CSRI)*. This report summarizes our activities for the year, including presentations and publications.

- Drs. Miller-Perrin & Thompson worked with four undergraduate psychology majors: Namele Guitterez, Shelby Stone, Johante Webb and Genevieve David during the 2013-14 schoolyear. At the conclusion of their work, Shelby Stone chose to write up her work and submit it for publication. We sent it to the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, but they have suggested major revisions, so Dr. Miller-Perrin, Dr. Thompson, and (now graduate) Shelby Stone are working on the revision, hoping to submit it in the coming fall semester.

Identity Development as a Mediator of General Life Purpose and Perceived Well-Being
Among College Students

Shelby C. Stone, Dr. Cindy Miller-Perrin, and Dr. Don Thompson

Identity development was examined as a mediator of general life purpose and perceived well-being among university students. As students develop a personal identity, especially through determination of life purpose, students may help contribute to a more positive and balanced well-being. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the hypothesis that college students with a better sense of life purpose develop a solid concept of identity, resulting in a more rounded perception of well-being. The results from this study reinforce the idea that general life purpose and achieved identity status correlate positively. Both life purpose and identity status were also found to significantly predict perceived well-being. While results indicate that identity achievement failed to mediate a relationship between life purpose and well-being, results determined that identity diffusion and identity moratorium both negatively mediated a relationship between life purpose and perceived well-being. Overall, this study helps to explore the meditational impact of identity status on how general life purpose influences perceived well-being among college age students. [Poster Link](#).

- Jossey-Bass publishing invited us to contribute a book chapter in an edited volume on Student Affairs and Global Education. That chapter was published in the late summer of 2014. Here is the citation with a link to the chapter:

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. (2014). [Outcomes of Global Education: External and Internal Change Associated with Study Abroad](#). In Ann Highum (Ed.) Undergraduate Global Education: Issues for Faculty, Staff, and Students: New Directions for Student Services, Number 146, Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

- **International Programs**

We continue to assist Charles Hall with a longitudinal study on the effects of study abroad. Our first cohort (with over 800 students) ran from fall 2010 through fall 2012, measuring several such effects as spiritual development, global awareness, emotional intelligence, and academic maturity. Our work was presented at a recent NetVUE: Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. (2013) "[The Effects of Study Abroad on Student Identity, Faith, Global Citizenship, and Emotional Awareness](#)". NetVUE. March 14.

We are now on our second cohort, which will measure the same variables, spanning the fall of 2013 through fall 2015. At present, we have some 900 subjects in this second group. We plan to coalesce two cohort data sets and publish our findings in 2016.

- **Undergraduate Life Purpose Survey**

Since 2002, we have annually surveyed the undergraduate student body on life purpose, faith formation, and ego-identity in the spring of each year. We continue to gather and analyze data from this process, with approximately 1400 respondents in the spring of 2014, and the same number anticipated for spring 2015.

- **New Faculty Retreat Autobiographies and Surveys**

Since 2002 we have been gathering survey data and spiritual autobiographies from faculty - new and mid-career - that we continue to assemble each year. We now have some 200 autobiographies and several years of survey data. As a result, we sent a team consisting of Jay Brewster, Gary Selby, Sara Barton, Don Thompson, & Cindy Miller-Perrin to the Lilly Endowment NetVUE Conference in St. Louis in March 2015 to report on several activities of the Center for Faith & Learning including a summary of the International Program Retreats taken new and mid-career faculty, results from our annual surveys to these same constituents, and highlights of the Chaplain's Chapel activities over the last 12 months. Here is our [presentation](#).

- **Board of Regents**

Because of the success of this presentation, we are scheduled to meet with the Religious Standards Committee of the Board of Regents on September 22, 2015 provide a summary of the work we did in St. Louis.

2. Alumni Project

Annual Funding

President Benton - \$8000

Project Goals:

- Connect with the 30 Alumni Groups across the country in their home areas.
- Partner with the work of the Alumni Leadership Council, strengthening their work and energizing alumni around the country.
- Help alumni reflect on their life journey and the impact of their Pepperdine experience, thereby allowing them to reconnect with their alma mater and its mission.

Research:

- Gather feedback via focus groups from 30-40 year old alumni on their development of faith, identity, and life purpose since leaving Pepperdine University. This will include barriers to living out their life purpose and faith development as well as critical mentoring relationships and peak experiences that they have participated in over the last 10-15 years. In particular, we will be able to see how these issues evolve through the college years and beyond into middle adulthood.
- Collect alumni recommendations on how the Pepperdine University experience can more greatly enhance preparation for life after college in terms of faith and life purpose pursuit. Suggestions and ideas from alumni will be shared with the five school deans, Provost Tippens, and President Benton.
- Invite participants to submit short autobiographical essays online, describing their life purpose journey, following focus group discussions on this topic. With their permission, we then hope to compile these reflective writings and publish them for broader dissemination.

Method:

We convene groups of 12-15 alumni in various regional settings (Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Arizona, Dallas, Chicago, Miami, etc.) by gathering for dinner and discussion at major hotels in these regional hubs.

Event Format:

In preparation, we plan to send out a brief survey to alumni in each region in order to gather preliminary data and provide them with a context and invitation to meet with us. We will then gather in these city centers to discuss their experiences and provide them with some background on our research findings.

Schedule:

Fall 2013 Plan and contact first alumni groups in preparation for both Spring and Summer 2014.

Phase 1:

Fall 2013-Spring 2018: Hold Three Events per year (Fall, Spring, Summer) in order to convene events in major alumni hubs across the nation and annually report our findings to these groups, alumni at large, and the senior administration. This phase will allow us to work with 15 alumni chapters. We propose a total budget of \$40,000 over the five-year Phase I span.

Phase 2:

Fall 2018-Spring 2023: Pending the success of Phase I, we propose continuing to meet with three groups each year, allowing us to complete our connection with the existing 30 alumni chapters. (Budget to be determined.)

Research Team:

Drs. Miller-Perrin & Thompson will work with talented junior and senior undergraduate researchers and the Alumni Association to design each event, select and invite participants, coordinate event logistics, communicate with alumni chapters, analyze and disseminate findings.

Our results are still being assembled based on meetings we have held in Malibu, Seattle, Westlake Village, Dallas, San Diego, and Orange County. Our work spans 5 years, having begun in the spring of 2014. Student Researchers Lexi Howerton and Danielle Shilling are preparing an article for publication summarizing our findings to date.

3. Graduate and Professional Schools Project

In conjunction with the Provost (\$10000 per year), we are building data gathering instruments to measure life purpose in students from our graduate and professional schools. Last year we conducted 6 focus groups at the School of Law. We are launching a longitudinal study of law students this fall.

Over these last 12 years we have engaged in designing, implementing, and analyzing the results of an annual survey of Seaver College students which measures longitudinal development in faith, character development, and vocational calling or life purpose.

The next logical step in this research program is to engage in longitudinal research on life purpose and spiritual development in each of the other four student populations at Pepperdine's graduate and professional schools. This is of value to these schools in terms of their own mission fulfillment and self-understanding. Moreover, it is also valuable as a means of providing indices that can inform the Pepperdine 2020 Boundless Horizons Strategic Plan. In particular, our work can help provide data to inform the achievement of the Plan's "institutional values and practices," including

- Ethics and honorable conduct
- Global perspective on learning, service, and civic obligation
- Affirmation of individual worth and dignity
- Spiritual and intellectual formation
- Respect for creation

In turn, these flow into a number of the strategic goals and subgoals, such as those found in the first two goals of the plan, which call for our institution to *ADVANCE STUDENT LEARNING AND SUPERIOR SCHOLARSHIP* and *STRENGTHEN OUR COMMITMENT TO THE FAITH MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY*. Ultimately, we hope to develop ways to measure these indices in order to inform the faculty and administration of each professional school, the Central Administration, and the Board of Regents.

What We Learned

During the Summer of 2014 we conducted interviews and discussion meetings with the deans of three of Pepperdine's professional schools* in order to determine what and how they wish to measure institutional values and practices in their student populations. We met with Dean Tascha of the Law School, Dean Margaret Weber of the Graduate School of Education and Psychology, and David Smith, Interim Dean of the Graduate School of Business.

Based on these conversations, we identified the following general constructs that we will measure during subsequent phases of our research:

School of Law

- Integration of personal values and professional skills
- Integration of faith and professional skills
- Ethical decision-making
- Mentoring and professional modeling experiences
- Involvement in, and commitment to, service

Graduate School of Professional Psychology

- Integration of personal values and professional skills
- Ethical decision-making
- Involvement in, and commitment to, service
- Sense of life purpose

Graduate School of Business

- Reflection on personal values
- Integration of personal values and professional skills
- Ethical decision-making
- Involvement in, and commitment to, service

*At this phase of our research, we elected not to include the School of Public Policy due to its limited enrollment.

Next Steps

We view our work as encompassing three additional phases including development of measures, implementation of measures, and analysis and reporting.

Development of Measures

During the initial planning phase discussions with the Deans of the professional schools, we were able to identify several key faculty and staff members with whom to collaborate in order to design appropriate assessment instruments and their implementation and to establish faculty support of the assessment. During the Fall and Spring of 2014/2015, we will develop and test the tools that meet the needs of each of the three professional schools.

Implementation

Fall 2015 & Fall 2016: Site test and implement our instruments at each of the three professional schools.

Analysis and Reporting

Summer 2016 & Summer 2017: Carry out statistical analysis of our work and report our findings to the central administration and the deans of the three professional schools.

Research & Presentation Outcome Highlights

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. (2003). [Understanding vocation: Discerning and responding to God's call](#). *Leaven: A Journal of Christian Ministry*, 11(1), 48-53.

Krumrei, E., Miller-Perrin, C.L., & Thompson, D. "Influence of identity development on faith maturity among college students. Presented at the Western Psychological Association Convention, Phoenix, Arizona, April, 2004.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "Vocational discernment and action among university professors." Paper presented at the Faith in the Academy conference, Messiah College, Pennsylvania, October, 2004.

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. "Vocation as calling: The role of gender in vocational discernment and action among first-year college students. Paper presented at the 3rd Annual Mid-Year Research Conference on Religion and Spirituality, Columbia, MD, April, 2005.

Andrews, E., Sessions, M., Miller-Perrin, C.L., & Thompson, D. "A life dedicated to service: Faith and commitment to service in college students." Paper presented at the Western Psychological Association Convention, Portland, OR, April, 2005.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "Personal Stories of Faith." Workshop presented to Messiah College Social Science and Education Faculty, Grantham, PA, August 24, 2005.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "Personal stories of calling among university professors." Paper Presented at Cultivating a Culture of Calling: Mennonite Perspectives on Vocation Conference, Goshen, IN, October 20-22, 2005.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "Peak experiences in personal stories of calling among university Professors." Paper presented at Faith, Hope, and Work Conference, San Diego, CA, February 9-11, 2006.

Krumrei, E., Miller-Perrin, C.L., & Thompson, D. (2006). "Crisis and commitment: Applying concepts of identity development to faith maturity." Submitted to *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*.

Krumrei, E., Miller-Perrin, C.L., & Thompson, D. (2006). "The relationship between identity status and strength of faith: A quantitative study of college students." Submitted to Journal of Psychology and Theology.

Miller-Perrin, C.L., Byron, K., Guthrie, W., & Thompson, D. "Bridges and Barriers in the Development of Faith, Life Purpose, and Leadership in College Students." Presented at the Association of Christians in Student Development Annual Conference, Marion, IN, June 8, 2006.

Byron, K., Guthrie, W., Miller-Perrin, C.L., & Thompson, D. "Bridges and Barriers in the Development of Faith, Identity, and Life Purpose in College Seniors." Presented at the Pepperdine University Board of Regents Meeting, Malibu, CA, June 13, 2006.

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. "[The Theological Exploration of Vocation among Students.](#)" Presented at the Lilly Endowment's Program for the Theological Exploration of Vocation, Final Conference, Indianapolis, IN, February 9, 2007.

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. "[The Development of Faith and Life Purpose Among College Students: The Role of an International Living and Learning Experience.](#)" Presented at the Association of Christians in Student Development Annual Conference, St. Paul, MN, June 5, 2007.

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. "[The Development of Life Purpose in Pepperdine University Undergraduates.](#)" Presented at the Pepperdine University Faculty Conference, Malibu, CA., October 5, 2007.

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. "[What will I become? Exploring vocation and calling.](#)" Presented at the Christian Heritage Series, Pepperdine University, October 29, 2008.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "Gender differences in the understanding and pursuit of life purpose among university faculty." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Jacksonville, FL, November 8, 2008.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "[Vocational discernment and action: an exploratory study of male and female university professors](#)". Review of Religious Research, Volume 48, December 2008.

Thompson, D., Miller-Perrin, C.L., Jones, T., & Tippens, D. "[Vocational Development of Students and Faculty: High Impact Programs at Pepperdine University](#)". Presented at the Council of Independent Colleges, NetVUE Conference. Indianapolis, March 14, 2009.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "Personal Stories of Faith and Vocation." Workshop presented to faculty and staff of North Park University, Chicago, IL, August 17, 2009.

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. "[What will I become? Exploring vocation and calling](#)". Presented at the Christian Heritage Series, Pepperdine University, September 15, 2009.

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. "The development of life purpose in college students: A preliminary study on the effects of an international living and learning experience." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Vancouver, B.C., November 7, 2009. <[Presentation](#)>, <[Paper](#)>.

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. "The Impact of Study Abroad on College Student Spiritual Development". Presented at the Institute on College Student Values, Florida State University, February 4, 2010. <[Presentation Slides](#)>

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "The Role of Gender and Age in Vocational Calling Among University Professors". Presented at the Division 36 Mid-Year Conference of Psychology and Religion, March 27, 2010. <[Presentation Slides](#)>

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. "[The Development of Vocational Calling, Identity and Faith in College Students: A Preliminary Study of the Impact of Study Abroad](#)". Frontiers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad. Volume XIX. Fall 2010.

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. "[What will I become? Exploring my life purpose](#)". Presented at the Christian Heritage Series, Pepperdine University, September 14, 2010.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "[Gender Does Matter: Barriers for Women Living Out Their Vocational Calling in the Academy](#)". Under Revision.

Thompson, D., Miller-Perrin, C.L., Tippens, D., Selby, G., & Krumrei, E. "[Mentoring Sophomore Students in Vocational Discernment: The Role of Faculty](#)". Presented at the Council of Independent Colleges, NetVUE Conference. Indianapolis, March 11, 2011.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "[Spiritual Development in Seaver College Students](#)". Spiritual Life Forum. March 18, 2011. Pepperdine University.

Thompson, D., Miller-Perrin, C.L., Tippens, D., Selby, G., & Krumrei, E. "Mentoring Sophomore Students in Vocational Discernment: The Role of Faculty". Presented at the Council of Independent Colleges, NetVUE Conference. Indianapolis, March 11, 2011.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. "[Spiritual Development at Seaver College](#)". Presented to the Religious Standards Committee of the Pepperdine University Board of Regents. December 4, 2012.

Jiang, W & Thompson, D. [The Impact of International Programs on Student Mental Development](#). Undergraduate Research Conference, April 2013, Pepperdine University.

Purcar, E. & Thompson, D. [College Student Identity and Emotional Intelligence](#). Undergraduate Research Conference, April 2013, Pepperdine University.

Purcar, E., Miller-Perrin, C.L., & Thompson, D. "[College Student Identity and Emotional Intelligence](#)". 27th National Conference on Undergraduate Research. April 11-13, 2013.

Thompson, D. & Miller-Perrin, C.L. (2013) "[The Effects of Study Abroad on Student Identity, Faith, Global Citizenship, and Emotional Awareness](#)". NetVUE. March 14.

Stone, S., Miller-Perrin, C.L., & Thompson, D. (2014). [Identity Development as a Mediator of General Life Purpose and Perceived Well-Being Among University Students](#), 94th Annual Convention of the Western Psychological Association, Portland, OR, April 24-27.

Gutierrez, N., Miller-Perrin, C.L., & Thompson D. (2014). [Spiritual Struggles and Life Purpose Barriers as Mediators of General Life Purpose and Well-being Among College Students](#). 94th Annual Convention of the Western Psychological Association, Portland, OR, April 24-27.

Webb, J., David, G., Miller-Perrin, C.L., & Thompson, D. (2014). [Life Purpose Development Among University Faculty](#), 94th Annual Convention of the Western Psychological Association, Portland, OR, April 24-27, 2014.

Miller-Perrin, C.L. & Thompson, D. (2014). [Outcomes of Global Education: External and Internal Change Associated with Study Abroad](#). In Ann Highum (Ed.) Undergraduate Global Education: Issues for Faculty, Staff, and Students: New Directions for Student Services, Number 146, Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

Barton, S., Brewster, J., Miller-Perrin, C.L., Selby, G., & Thompson, D. (2015). [Vocational Discernment and Action: Building Mentoring Communities for Students, Faculty, and Staff](#)

[through International Retreats and Faith Conversation.](#) NetVUE Conference, St. Louis, March 27, 2015.