

**Proposal to create the
Office of Faith Research
Pepperdine University
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Rationale

We envision the creation of an *Office of Faith Research* as a component of the existing Center for Faith and Learning. This affiliation has the blessing of Dr. Gary Selby, the current director of the Center for Faith and Learning, who is eager to have us continue to work with him on existing and new projects on faith development. The goal of this new center is to gather, analyze, and disseminate research findings on the nature of faith and vocation in order to empower faculty and students in higher education to use their God-given gifts and talents in serving others and pursuing their life purpose.

Many popular higher education papers and books speak of the bad things happening within the academy today. For example, the recent monographs by Derek Bok (*Our Underachieving Colleges*) as well as Barrett Seaman (*Binge*), woefully describe all that is wrong with the college environment and with college students. We approach the academy from a different perspective by endorsing a positive viewpoint. Our focus is on what is good, healthy, and growth-oriented about college students and faculty. Accordingly, our center desires to provide exemplars of best practice and best outcomes for students and faculty who hope to discover and live out their faith and calling in the academy and beyond.

The creation of such a center will also play a critical role in addressing a significant gap in higher education research. The highly successful UCLA-based Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) is the world leader in conducting and disseminating research on critical issues about student and faculty development. HERI has developed and administered a number of student and faculty surveys nationwide, including instruments focusing on spirituality. Their research has concluded that the academy should be searching for ways to incorporate spiritual and religious issues into the academic experience of college students and faculty members. We agree.

However, our interests lie with aspects of spirituality based on faith in, and obedience to, a transcendent God, whereas the UCLA research initiative addresses broader and more diffuse issues relating to spirit in the most general sense. Thus, we see an unmet need for continued research in the area of faith development, faith-based spiritual formation, and life purpose from a religious perspective. The urgency for us to move in this direction is now greater than ever, because the UCLA spirituality initiative has recently come to an end, partly because of the end of funding from the Templeton Foundation and because of the retirement of Helen and Sandy Astin as leaders of this important project. Furthermore, these issues are of great interest not only to the missions of colleges and universities grounded in the Christian faith, but also to many student and faculty groups in non-religiously affiliated colleges and universities. Therefore, the timing of our center is more crucial than ever.

Pepperdine is well prepared to address the need for research on faith issues in higher education. From 2001-2009, Pepperdine, along with some 150 other colleges and universities, received funding from the Lilly Endowment to support the "Theological Exploration of Vocation" with faculty, staff, and students. Through this funding initiative, several Pepperdine faculty and staff have become leaders in examining and understanding several aspects of life purpose, faith, and

service among both students and faculty. An *Office of Faith Research* would provide a centralized point of reference to systematically share and disseminate, within the larger academic community, what Pepperdine and other universities are learning.

We seek to create an *Office of Faith Research* in order to conduct and disseminate best practice research on faith and life purpose development that informs the larger Christian and non-Christian academic world. Accordingly we envision several components for this process, allowing us to serve as a national clearinghouse/gathering point for research being conducted on faith, life purpose discernment/development, and spiritual formation among college students, faculty, staff, and alumni. We wish to share our and others' findings in these areas, in the form of published reports, books, and scholarly journal articles; hosted research conferences; research consulting to empower other schools to understand their own spiritual cultures; and conducting workshops on curriculum development, mentoring, and discernment.

Our Approach

Our foci are twofold. First, we wish to continue to learn how faith and life purpose develop in the context of the academy among students, faculty, staff, and alumni, as this development contributes to personal growth in a number of areas including identity, commitment to service, and personal sense of vocation, among others. Second, we wish to systematically identify the various factors and experiences that are critical to these developmental processes. That is, we want to know which activities most enhance and improve faith and life purpose development.

Since 2001, we have carried out a number of research projects on faith development including both students and faculty, resulting in the creation and use of a number of instruments and methodologies. Furthermore, we have contributed our findings both internally, for the benefit of our institution, as well as externally, for the benefit of the broader higher education community.

Specifically, for students, we have developed and implemented survey and interview instruments that measure longitudinal changes in identity, faith, life-purpose, emotional intelligence as a function of time, gender, and major life events, including international program participation. These research projects have been applied to over 4000 students, spanning nine years of analysis. For faculty, we have gathered both survey and autobiographical data from over 200 faculty members in three different university settings, on their vocational discernment, vocational application, and faith journey development.

We have presented our findings at more than 20 national conferences and workshops and have published several journal articles on our findings, with more presentations and publications in the works. Please refer to our curriculum vitae:

http://seaver.pepperdine.edu/socialscience/facultystaff/member.htm?facid=cindy_perrin
<http://dt.pepperdine.edu/resume.htm> for greater detail on our work to date.

Our Vision

Our research has been based on a theoretical framework which holds that the development of a sense of meaning or life purpose lies at the intersection of one's faith development and one's identity development. Our research has provided rich data to demonstrate the truth of this model for students and faculty members alike. Furthermore, we have been able to demonstrate that gender plays a significant role in contributing to the sense of life purpose among men vs. women. Thus, we wish to continue to pursue research projects to expand our understanding of the role of gender in faith and life purpose development. Furthermore, we wish to expand our work to

incorporate an additional theme that has recurred in our research. Many of our findings demonstrate that without a **challenge** of some kind, the gains in faith maturity and vocational discernment are less significant. Thus, we plan to more intentionally evaluate the ways that challenges from within and without can bring about a deeper faith and life purpose journey. In particular, the areas of challenge we hope to examine include such things as an experience of suffering, a personal sacrifice, or time spent living and studying/working in a foreign culture.

In addition to pursuing existing and newly formed theoretical constructs for faith development, we are eager to continue to share our work both internally and externally. Internally, we are particularly interested in determining the systems and programs that are best able to facilitate faith development on our campus. Thus, we are interested in examining such activities as mentoring between faculty and students, academic courses, undergraduate research programs, internships, convocation programming, spiritual life events, and service learning activities. In addition, because of the university's popular and successful international program offerings, we wish to continue with our work evaluating the ways that an international program experience enhances students' faith, life purpose, and emotional development. Externally, we desire to become national leaders in these areas, because of our research experience on these topics and the clear vacuum that exists at present in the academy in these areas.

Specifically, we wish to focus on several initiatives, including national level faculty development workshops, conference presentations, published articles, and a research fellow program, both for faculty and student scholars interested in researching issues of faith and vocation. Accordingly, we hope to continue with these activities as well as conduct a national conference on faith development to be hosted on our campus in the next three years.

The following skeleton budget provides a starting point for discussion of funding our proposed center. We are pleased to be able to provide greater detail, as needed:

Budget

Here is a sample budget for the next three academic years:

FY11

\$40000 for Student, Staff, Faculty Stipends, Travel, and Supplies

FY12

\$85000 for Student and Professional Staff, Faculty Stipends, Workshops and Conference Hosting, Travel, and Supplies

FY13

\$95000 for Student and Professional Staff, Faculty Stipends, Workshops and Conference Hosting, Travel, and Supplies

\$220000 Three Year Total