

Furthering the Conversation: The Inevitability of Spirituality in Student Affairs Work



UC Davis Stay Day Conference

Wednesday, August 19, 2015

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Learning Outcomes



- ▶ Provided a definition of the term spirituality
- ▶ Explore spirituality within the context of Student Affairs work
- ▶ Highlight empirical research on the topic of spirituality in higher education
- ▶ Discuss the relevance of this work at UC Davis
- ▶ Resources for further development


Personal Interest





Many Names

- Spirituality
 - Meaning-Making
 - Authenticity
 - Inner life
 - Purpose
 - Non-Cognitive Development
- 



Religion & Spirituality

Religion

- ▶ The institutionalized system of beliefs, attitudes, and practices (Webster Dictionary, 2015)

Spirituality

- ▶ Dalton (2001) defined spirituality as the “universal instinct toward connection with others and discovery of our place in the larger web of life” (p.17).



Spirituality Defined

A longing for ways of speaking on the human experience of depth, meaning, mystery, moral purpose, transcendence, wholeness, intuition, vulnerability, tenderness, courage, the capacity to love, and the apprehension of spirit as the animating essence at the core of life. (Parks, 2000, p. 16)

According to Parks (2000), the “big questions” are:

- 1. Who am I?
- 2. What are my most deeply felt values?
- 3. What is my mission or purpose in life?
- 4. What sort of world do I want to create?
- 5. How will my life make a difference in the world? (p. 137)



Connection to Student Affairs Work

➤ Student Affairs Profession

- ❑ Student Personnel Point of View (1949)
- ❑ social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual
- ❑ foundation of holistic/whole student development

➤ Theoretical Underpinnings

- Chickering's 7 vectors (meaning, purpose, integrity)
- Baxter Magolda- Self-Authorship



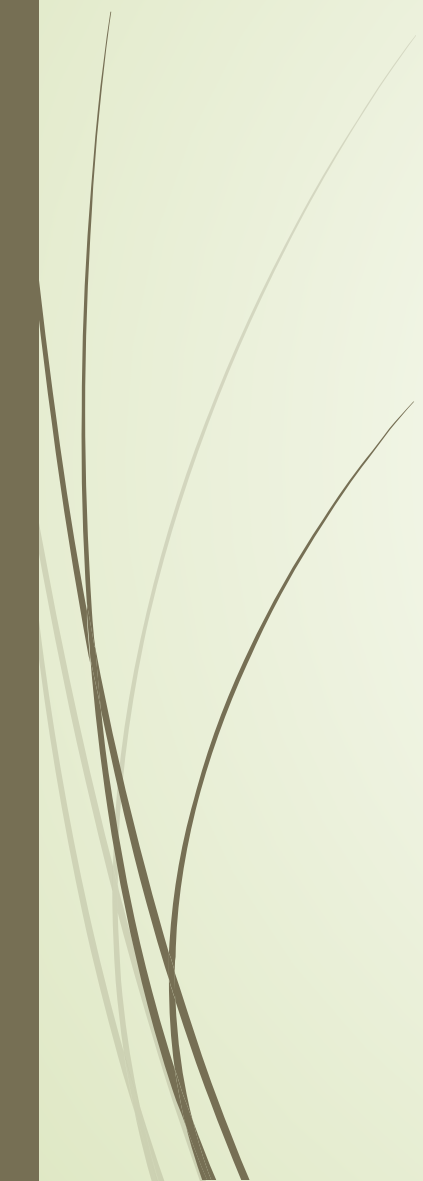
Research Studies



- ▶ Astin & Astin/HERI UCLA (2003)
 - ▶ 112,000 first year students/136 colleges/universities
 - ▶ 14,527 followed up in junior year
 - ▶ Role college played in facilitating their spiritual development
 - ▶ Engagement in inner work helps facilitate spiritual growth
 - ▶ Students engaged in spiritual explorations/received little support from professors and classroom engagement
 - ▶ Students interested in spiritual matters and expect to





Why does spirituality matter?

- It matters to students
 - Aspect of development
 - Aspect of identity
 - Religious and Secular Pluralism
 - Tools for change and transformation
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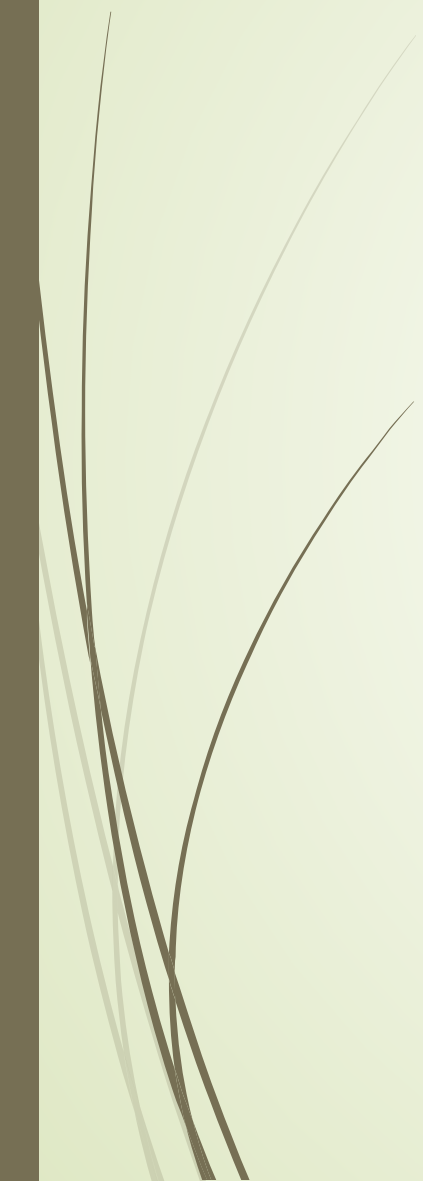
Why Else it matters?

- •A deep sense of the inter-connectedness of life.
- •They know intimately what it means to be part of or create community.
- They know themselves well and practice integrity, reflection, and collaboration.
- •They can suspend their own assumptions in order to truly listen to and understand the Other.
- •They know what they ultimately serve and are connected intimately with a higher power.

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- ▶ They operate from a sense of "I have to."
 - ▶ They do not depend only on themselves for the vision of the organization or the cause to which they are committed.
 - ▶ They use power ethically and can give it away without feeling a loss of self.
 - ▶ They do not project pain or addiction on others.
 - ▶ They create conditions that release human possibility and creativity.
 - ▶ They are life-giving.



Spiritual Growth Positively Impacts

- Leadership qualities
 - Psychological well-being
 - Intellectual self-esteem
 - Academic performance (GPA)
 - Satisfaction with college
 - Commitment to Diversity
- 



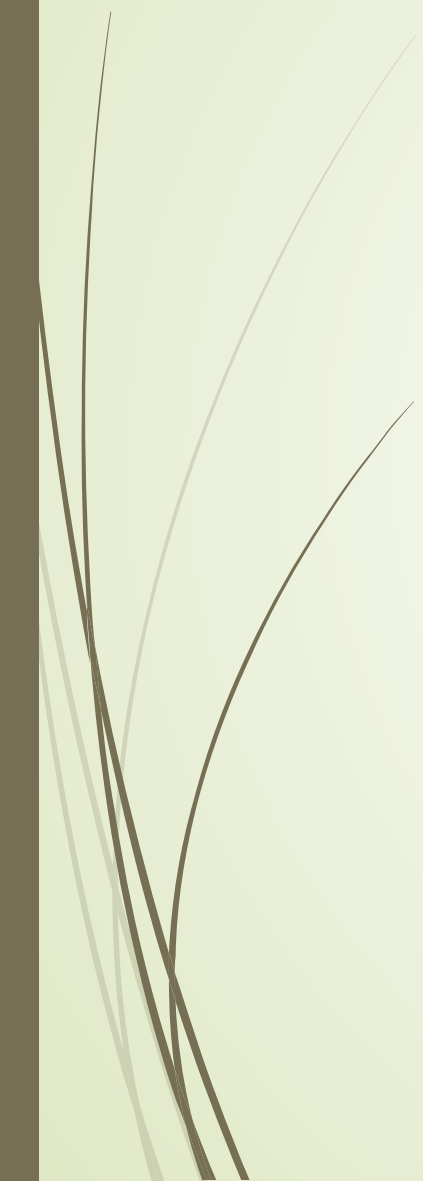
Group Discussion Questions



- ▶ What are your initial responses to what I've shared?
- ▶ Based on the definition of spirituality provided, experiences have you encountered with students that may reflect a search, quest, or longing?
- ▶ How is spirituality and/or the spiritual development of students perceived at UC Davis?
- ▶ How does the culture and practices at UC Davis support or encourage the spiritual development of students? What are specific examples?

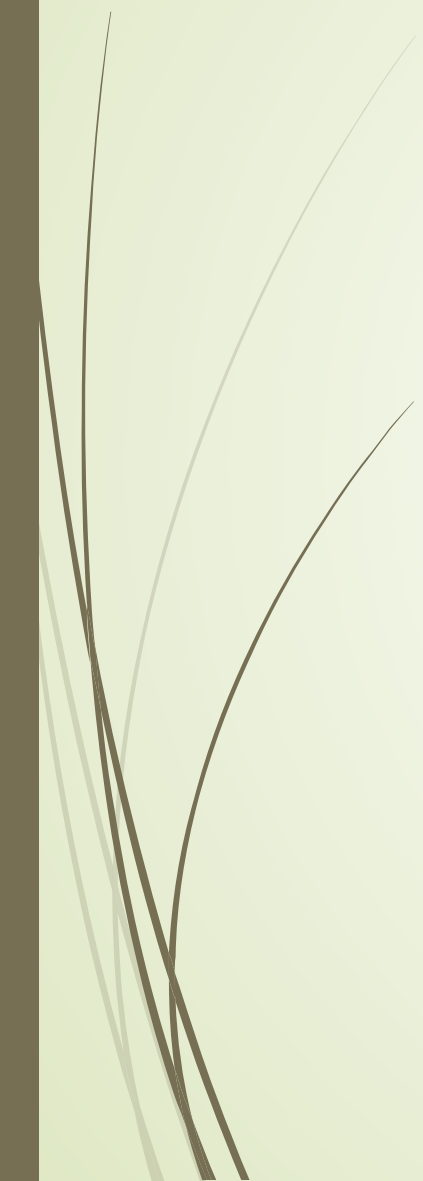


Recent Study

- Dissertation Summary:
 - Phenomenological Study
 - Lived experiences of the participants
 - 13 participants
 - Public institution in CA
 - This qualitative study explores how the spirituality of student affairs professionals' at a California public research university influences their responses to students' spiritual development and exploration of life's big questions
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Study Research Questions

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- 1) How do student affairs professionals define and describe spirituality?
 - 2) How do student affairs professionals describe the role of spiritual development within the larger mission of student affairs work?
 - 3) In what ways does the spirituality of student affairs professionals influence their approach to the spiritual development of students?



Study Findings



- The five major findings were:
- 1. Nearly all of the participants define spirituality as an “inner” and “personal” journey.
- 2. All of the participants indicated that spirituality is an important aspect of life.
- 3. All of the participants indicated that they leverage personal sharing as an approach to engaging students in meaningful dialogue about spiritual matters.
- 4. Most of the participants indicated they had experienced students grappling with what they perceived to be spiritual matters.
- 5. Most of participants connected spirituality to the social justice commitment in student affairs work.

Study Results

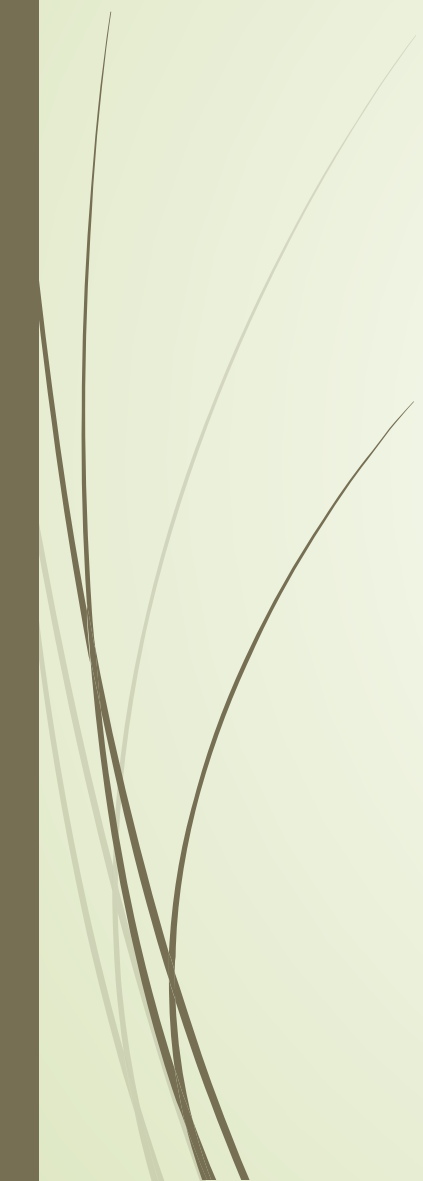

- (a) The spiritual development of students poses unique and difficult challenges for student affairs professionals seeking to practice whole student development.
- (b) Despite the lack of clarity about spirituality, student affairs professionals do engage in the spiritual development of students.
- (c) Spirituality is intricately connected to the work of student affairs professional through the student affairs social justice mission.
- (d) Ambiguity regarding the spiritual development of students may hamper student affairs professionals' effectiveness in providing whole student development.



Next Steps



- ▶ Not just about STUDENTS but about STUDENTAFFAIRS LEADERS AND PRACTITIONERS
- ▶ What do we value?
- ▶ How will this inform your leadership, practice, and work as a student affairs professional?
- ▶ How will this shape how you see students?
- ▶ How will our deepest meanings, values, purposes, and highest motivations fuel our work?



Great universities lost sight of the essential purpose of undergraduate education.... Which is to help students learn 'who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives, and to leave college as better human beings'.A college or university is not just for the transmission of knowledge but a forum for the exploration of life's mystery and meaning.....

► Lewis, 2007, p. xv



THANK YOU



Recommended Readings

- ▶ Palmer, P., Zajonc, A., & Scribner, M. (2010). *The heart of higher education: A call to renewal*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- ▶ Parks, S. D. (2000). *Big questions, worthy dreams: Mentoring young adults in their search for meaning, purpose, and faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- ▶ Nash, R., & Murray, M. C. (2010). *Helping college students find purpose*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



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- ▶ Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2001). Making their own way: Narratives for transforming higher education to promote self-development. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
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- ▶ Evans, K. (2014). The Influence of Student Affairs Professionals' Spirituality on the Development of College Students: A Phenomenological Study. (Dissertation)
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- ▶ Parks, S. D. (2000). Big questions, worthy dreams: Mentoring young adults in their search for meaning, purpose, and faith. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- ▶ Speck, B. W. (2005). What is spirituality? In S. A. Hoppe & B. W. Speck (Eds.), *Spirituality in higher education*. *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 104 (pp. 2-14). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass