

Copyright © 2016 William Warren Thompson

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF MARKET CHALLENGES ON
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AFFILIATED WITH
INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Theology

by
William Warren Thompson
December 2016

APPROVAL SHEET

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF MARKET CHALLENGES ON
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AFFILIATED WITH
INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

William Warren Thompson

Read and Approved by:

John David Trentham (Supervisor)

Date _____

I dedicate this thesis to the scholars of the Stone-Campbell Movement—
past, present, and future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vii
PREFACE.....	viii
Chapter	
1. RESEARCH CONCERN.....	1
Introduction to the Research Problem.....	1
Summary of Current Research.....	4
Purpose Statement.....	8
Research Questions	8
Delimitations.....	8
Terminology.....	9
Procedural Overview.....	10
Research Assumptions	12
2. PRECEDENT LITERATURE	13
Biblical Discussion of Stewardship	14
Higher Education in the Stone-Campbell Movement.....	17
Current Market Challenges	23
Keeping the Faith.....	27
Summary	31
3. METHODOLOGY.....	33

Chapter	Page
Research Questions	33
Design Overview.....	33
Population	36
Sample.....	36
Limits of Generalization	36
Research Procedures	37
Expert Review	37
Pilot Test	37
Ethical Procedures.....	38
Data Collection.....	38
Data Analysis	38
4. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS	40
Compilation Protocol	40
Findings and Displays.....	41
Description of Sample.....	42
Data Pertaining to the Research Questions	46
Data Related to the First Research Question.....	46
Data Related to the Second Research Question	51
Data Related to the Third Research Question	55
Additional Findings.....	57
Evaluation of the Research Design	58
5. CONCLUSIONS.....	59
Research Purpose and Questions	59
Research Findings and Implications	60
Research Question 1	61

	Page
Research Question 2.....	62
Research Question 3.....	63
Research Limitations.....	64
Recommendations for Further Research.....	64
Conclusion	65
 Appendix	
1. INSTITUTIONS INCLUDED IN THE POPULATION.....	66
2. EMAIL TO CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS	67
3. INFORMED CONSENT	68
4. PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	69
5. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY	71

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Codes and categories developed from interview transcripts.....	43
2. Chief academic officer priorities.....	44
3. Number of times each CAO mentioned a particular challenge.....	45

PREFACE

No thesis comes together without significant help from others. I would like to thank Dr. John David Trentham for serving as my thesis advisor. I would also like to thank Dr. James Estep of Lincoln Christian University for ensuring that this thesis is useful to the administrators of the Bible colleges and universities associated with the independent Christian churches. As always, I thank my wife, Tina, for her love and support during this project. Finally, I thank God for the opportunity to complete my master of theology degree.

Bill Thompson

Merritt Island, Florida

December 2016

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

According to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, there were approximately 900 accredited, religiously affiliated, degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States as of 2010.¹ Many of these church-affiliated schools are financially stressed.² Unfortunately, many of the colleges and universities affiliated with the independent Christian church branch of the Stone-Campbell Movement also fit this description.³ This thesis used a qualitative, descriptive, collective case study approach to assess some of the current market challenges facing colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches and to describe how some of these institutions are responding to these challenges.

Introduction to the Research Problem

As of August 2015, there were twenty-three accredited colleges and universities associated with the independent Christian church branch of the Stone-Campbell Movement (which also includes non-instrumental churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ) in the United States. Of these twenty-three schools, five have between 1,000 and 1,400 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, five have between 500 and

¹Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, "Profile of Post-Secondary Education," May 2010, accessed March 12, 2015, https://www.cccu.org/filefolder/Profile_US_Post-Secondary_Education-updated2010.pdf.

²Robert C. Andringa, "Keeping the Faith: Leadership Challenges Unique to Religiously Affiliated Colleges and Universities," in *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence*, ed. James Martin, James E. Samels, and associates (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2009), 168.

³Greg Swinney, "Six Stepped Down," *Christian Standard* (August 2014), accessed March 9, 2015, www.christianstandard.com; Gary Weedman, "21st-Century Challenges to Biblical Higher Education," *Christian Standard* (March 2012), accessed March 13, 2016, www.christianstandard.com.

999 FTE students, and the remaining thirteen have less than 300 FTE students.⁴

Anecdotal evidence indicates that most of these schools are tuition-driven.⁵ Additionally, according to indicators developed by James Martin and James E. Samels for higher education institutions in general, and applied by Robert C. Andringa to member schools of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities specifically, likely most of these schools can be classified as “stressed” or “fragile” institutions.⁶

For the purposes of their research, Martin and Samels define a stressed college or university as “an institution that is dependent on tuition or state appropriations, smaller than it should be and needs to be, and lacking in name-brand recognition.”⁷ They add that stressed institutions are often marked by flat enrollment and giving, as well as a tendency to focus planning efforts on subsistence measures rather than long-term growth.⁸

This situation appears similar to that faced by many schools in the independent Christian church branch of the Stone-Campbell Movement (SCM). In a recent article titled “Six Stepped Down,” five of six former presidents of these schools mentioned finances as their greatest challenge. Ronald Oakes of Central Christian College of the Bible states, “The foremost challenge is fiscal viability amid the changing demographic and declining economic social trends. Student expectations require hefty investments in technology and facilities that will strain the reallocation of college budgets.”⁹ Other former presidents mentioned additional challenges such as tensions between church

⁴“Christian Colleges, 2014-2015,” chart, *Christian Standard* (Aug 2015), 38-39.

⁵George Dehne and Christopher Small, “The Dilemma of the Tuition-Driven College,” *Trusteeship* (September/October 2006): 1.

⁶Andringa, “Keeping the Faith,” 168-84.

⁷James Martin and James E. Samels, “Defining Stressed Institutions and Leading Them Effectively,” in *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence*, ed. James Martin, James E. Samels, and associates (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2009), 3.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Swinney, “Six Stepped Down.”

priorities and academic excellence.¹⁰

The SCM has had a long and enduring association with Christian higher education. Since the founding of Bacon College in Georgetown, Kentucky in 1836, the three branches of the SCM have founded 215 Bible colleges and universities.¹¹ Most of these schools could be characterized as Bible colleges, with the majority of their students coming from SCM churches and preparing to enter some form of ministry.¹² Despite these beginnings, many of the surviving schools have broadened their curricular offerings to appeal to more students.¹³ Today, three of the independent Christian church colleges and universities with 1,000 or more students can be classified as liberal arts universities, with the percentage of students that come from an SCM heritage ranging between 8 to 30 percent.¹⁴ Additionally, the majority of undergraduate schools in this movement now follow one of following three models of Christian higher education: the Bible college model, which focuses primarily on preparing graduates for ministry-related vocations; the liberal arts model, which prepares graduates for a variety of vocations while integrating faith and learning; and a university model, which attempts to balance preparing a significant number of graduates for ministry vocations while providing a broad range of majors for students who do not wish to enter a ministry-related vocation.¹⁵ According to the August 2015 issue of *Christian Standard* magazine, thirteen of the undergraduate

¹⁰Swinney, "Six Stepped Down."

¹¹D. Duane Cummins, "Higher Education, Views of in the Movement," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 390.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Henry E. Webb, "Christian Churches/Churches of Christ," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 189.

¹⁴"Christian Colleges, 2014-2015."

¹⁵Johnson University proposes another model of higher education, one that combines the emphasis of the Bible college model on biblical and theological preparation for ministry with the broader flexibility of the university model. Gary Weedman, "A Third Way: Biblical Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century," Johnson Bible College (January 3, 2011), 11-12.

schools associated with the independent Christian churches identify themselves as Bible colleges, seven identify themselves as Christian universities, and three identify themselves as liberal arts colleges or universities (see appendix 1).¹⁶

Christian higher education within the SCM has certainly come a long way over the past 180 years thanks to God’s blessings and to the sacrifices of many pioneers, educators, and administrators over the years. Each era has undoubtedly seen its share of challenges. Yet what will the near future hold for these schools, many of which are struggling with market challenges such as depressed financial giving, increased tuition costs, evolving student expectations, and decreasing “denominational” loyalty?¹⁷

Summary of Current Research

Current research describes several challenges facing higher education institutions in the United States today. For example, George M. Marsden cites a book by Harry Lewis, the former academic dean of Harvard College, titled *Excellence without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education*. Marsden notes,

As a dean, one is constantly battered by conflicting and contradictory demands that make principled and coherent reform impossible. Basically . . . these are the demands of people shaped by . . . a consumerist society in which everyone is used to choosing their own lifestyle packages. Parents, students, faculty, alumni, other donors, and funding agencies all have their agendas.¹⁸

Marsden concludes by noting that if these are some of the pressures facing academic deans at premier institutions like Harvard, one can only imagine the challenges facing the majority of academic deans at more typical schools.¹⁹

¹⁶“Christian Colleges, 2014-2015.”

¹⁷Although the SCM was founded upon and still maintains a nondenominational emphasis, the term “denominational” will be used occasionally to refer to this brotherhood of believers when the context warrants the term.

¹⁸George M. Marsden, “*The Soul of the American University Revisited*,” in *Faith, Freedom, and Higher Education: Historical Analysis and Contemporary Reflections*, ed. P. C. Kemeny (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 3.

¹⁹Ibid.

Duane Litfin suggests a variety of current challenges facing Christian colleges and universities. Litfin focuses on what he considers to be core issues, such as defining the unique mission of Christian higher education schools as well as determining and maintaining a school's "bearings in the tumultuous intellectual seas of the twenty-first century."²⁰ While he does not address what he describes as "other, more practical, questions," Litfin does note that some of these factors include recruiting and retaining quality students, recruiting and leading quality faculty, keeping pace with technology, and providing an affordable education.²¹

For many smaller schools, finances are the leading source of institutional stress. In an interview with Martin and Samels, George Keller stated, "the number one reason institutions are stressed is for financial causes."²² Martin and Samels conducted a mixed-methods study to determine the top institutional stressors facing college and university presidents. Working from research by Dennis P. Jones in a 1985 report titled "Indicators of the Condition of Higher Education," Martin and Samels developed an updated list of twenty indicators that could be used to indicate the possible stressed nature of an institution. Ten of these factors addressed financial challenges and ten addressed issues such as enrollment size, student retention, faculty qualifications, and online education programs.²³

Using Martin and Samels' study, Andringa surveyed 54 presidents of CCCU schools. Andringa's data indicates that these presidents agreed that the following five factors from Martin and Samels' study are the best indicators of a stressed institution: the institution is on probation for financial reasons, short-term bridge financing has been

²⁰Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 3.

²¹Ibid.

²²George Keller, as cited by Martin and Samels, "Defining Stressed Institutions," 3.

²³Martins and Samels, "Defining Stressed Institutions," 9-19.

needed in the past five years, deferred maintenance is unfunded by at least 40 percent, the majority of faculty in these institutions do not hold terminal degrees, and debt service requires at least 10 percent of the annual budget.²⁴ Based upon his experience as a former president of the CCCU, Andringa believes that many of the 900 religiously affiliated colleges and universities in the United States are “sliding toward the brink” financially.²⁵

In addition to these factors, administrators of Christian colleges and universities must also deal with challenges that arise from the tension between academia and denominations or supporting churches. Anita Fitzgerald Henck notes that Christian colleges and universities are unique among institutions of higher education in that they are “deeply embedded and accountable to two worlds, each of which has a distinctive culture: the world of higher education and the church world.”²⁶ As American Christianity continues to trend away from denominationalism toward more of a “generic Christianity,”²⁷ Christian colleges and universities are enrolling fewer students from their own religious heritage. For example, Bobby Ross notes that enrollment of students from non-instrumental churches of Christ at eighteen institutions affiliated with this branch of the SCM dropped from 70 percent to 53 percent over a ten-year period.²⁸ Furthermore, the percentage of SCM-affiliated students attending accredited colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches ranges from 5 percent to 90 percent, with

²⁴Andringa, “Keeping the Faith,” 175.

²⁵Ibid., 169.

²⁶Anita Fitzgerald Henck, “Walking the Tightrope: Christian Colleges and Universities in a Time of Change,” *Christian Higher Education* 10, no. 3 (2011): 196, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15363759>.

²⁷Perry L. Glanzer, P. Jesse Rine, and Phil Davignon, “Assessing the Denominational Identity of American Evangelical Colleges and Universities, Part I: Denominational Patronage and Institutional Policy,” *Christian Higher Education* 12, no. 3 (2013): 182-83, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15363759>.

²⁸Bobby Ross, “Generic Christian U,” *Christianity Today*, January 14, 2011, accessed March 16, 2015, www.christianitytoday.com.

the average for the twenty-three institutions being 46 percent.²⁹

While some individuals associated with the non-denominational SCM might see reaching unaffiliated students as a good thing, Robert Benne observes that declining numbers of affiliated students historically has created recruiting and financial challenges for schools associated with more traditional denominations. He notes that a school's decision to broaden its appeal beyond its own denomination often comes with unintended consequences:

One of the most obvious characteristics of the colleges and universities that have moved toward pervasive secularization is their flight from what they called a "sectarian" identity and approach. Their fateful move toward openness in personnel, vision, and ethos was prompted by, among other things, a felt need to expand their appeal to many sorts of students Many [schools] also decided that students from their own tradition alone could not long make for a viable enterprise in a competitive environment, so they opened themselves to all comers.³⁰

Benne observes that as religious colleges and universities become more generic in an effort to attract students from outside their denominational affiliation in order to survive financially, discerning students decide to attend schools more specifically aligned with their denomination. Additionally, supporting churches wonder why they should continue to support less-specific institutions with students and financial resources. While these factors tend to create a spiral leading less-sectarian schools potentially toward secularization, schools that have maintained strong ties with their sponsoring denominations have been "providentially and amply supplied students from that heritage."³¹

Clearly, administrators of religious colleges and universities, in general, and of colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches, in particular, face a number of serious market challenges, including decreasing financial support,

²⁹"Christian Colleges, 2014-2015."

³⁰Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 21.

³¹Ibid.

increasing costs of tuition, changing student expectations, and potential church tensions. Benne observes, “It is easy to be scornful of what seems to be an appeasement of market dynamics. But is there any such thing as mere survival . . . [w]hen a college or university is in a fight for its life?”³² Demanding circumstances call for excellence and faithfulness from administrators entrusted with the resources and dreams of students, faculty, and churches alike.

Purpose Statement

The primary purpose for this study was to determine the current market challenges facing colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches and to determine how these institutions are responding to these challenges. A secondary purpose was to determine how these challenges and responses are impacting the Bible and ministry programs at these schools.

Research Questions

1. What are the primary market challenges facing colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches?
2. How are these institutions addressing these challenges?
3. How have these challenges impacted the Bible and ministry programs at these institutions?

Delimitations

1. This study was delimited to a purposeful sample of six of the twenty-three colleges and universities affiliated with the independent Christian church branch of the SCM in the United States.
2. This study was delimited to the undergraduate programs at these same institutions.
3. This study was delimited to the impressions and data provided by the chief academic officers (CAOs) of these institutions.

³²Benne, *Quality with Soul*, 24.

Terminology

Bible college: An institution of Christian higher education that provides undergraduate instruction in general education, Bible, theology, and ministry, with a primary emphasis on preparation for some sort of ministry or ministry-related vocation.³³

Chief academic officer: The primary academic administrator in a Christian college or university, sometimes known as the academic dean or provost.³⁴

Christian higher education: Post-secondary colleges and universities, not including graduate theological seminaries, within the Protestant tradition that emphasize a faith commitment to Jesus Christ for all students, faculty, and staff.³⁵

Christian liberal arts institution: A college or university whose curriculum is aimed broadly at increasing knowledge in general studies, such as humanities and science, as opposed to a professional or vocational curriculum, all while integrating faith and learning from a Christian worldview.³⁶

Christian university: A Christian institution of higher learning that offers both undergraduate and graduate education with an emphasis on both the transmission of and creation of knowledge.³⁷

Independent Christian churches: One of three religious groups associated with the Stone-Campbell Movement.³⁸ Independent Christian churches share the churches of

³³James B. North, "Bible College Movement," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 92-93.

³⁴Kathleen D. Billman, "Honoring Complexities, Celebrating Collegueship," in *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education*, ed. Kathleen D. Billman and Bruce C. Birch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 9.

³⁵Osmond Carraway Ingram, Jr., "The Conceptualization and Perception of Servant Leadership in Christian Higher Education" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 12.

³⁶Guenter E. Salter, "The Purpose and Benefit of a Christian Liberal Arts Education," accessed June 29, 2015, www.bjupress.com.

³⁷Todd C. Ream and Perry L. Glanzer, *The Idea of A Christian College: A Reexamination for Today's University* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 11.

³⁸Webb, "Christian Churches/Churches of Christ," 185.

Christ's emphasis on the Bible as the sole authority for Christians and the Disciples of Christ's emphasis on the unity of all Christians.

Market challenges: Financial, enrollment, tuition, technology, church relations, and other similar challenges that place stress on Christian colleges and universities.³⁹

Stone-Campbell Movement: A religious movement begun in the United States in the early nineteenth century, led initially by Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell, with the twin emphases of the unity of all Christians and the Bible as the sole authority for Christians.⁴⁰ While the SCM originated as a non-denominational reform movement, by the early twentieth century divisions led to three individual branches or streams: the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the churches of Christ (non-instrumental), and the independent Christian churches.

Stressed institutions: Colleges and universities that are relatively small, tuition-driven, lacking in name recognition, and generally struggling with enrollment and endowments.⁴¹

Tuition-driven: Colleges and universities that depend on tuition and enrollment to cover the majority of their annual operating expenses.⁴²

Procedural Overview

This thesis used a qualitative, descriptive, collective case study approach with purposeful sampling to interview the CAOs of six colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian Churches. The study was qualitative in that it used semi-structured

³⁹Martin and Samels, "Defining Stressed Institutions," 3.

⁴⁰ James B. North, *Union in Truth: An Interpretive History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1994), 6.

⁴¹Martin and Samels, "Defining Stressed Institutions," 3.

⁴²George Dehne and Christopher Small, "The Dilemma of the Tuition-Driven College," *Trusteeship* (September/October 2006), 1.

interviews with open-ended questions to understand the participants' experiences.⁴³ The research was descriptive in that it sought to describe the market challenges facing Christian colleges and universities affiliated with the independent Christian churches so that the presidents, CAOs, and trustees could make better decisions.⁴⁴ Because information was sought from six colleges and universities, the project was a collective case study.⁴⁵ To achieve maximum transparency, CAOs were assured that their schools' responses would remain completely anonymous.

Initially, I purposefully selected two Bible colleges, two Christian universities, and two liberal arts institutions from among the twenty-three accredited institutions of higher learning affiliated with the independent Christian Churches because these three models of education represent nearly all of these institutions.⁴⁶ The original goal was to conduct a multi-case study with the three pairs of schools. Ultimately, however, due to the small number of liberal arts institutions available to participate, I settled on two groupings, with three Bible colleges in one case study and two universities and one liberal arts school in the other group.

Purposeful sampling is valuable because it allows researchers to select people or institutions that meet the criteria of the project and who can provide "information-rich . . . depth" to the data.⁴⁷ Thirteen of these institutions identify themselves as Bible colleges, with all but one school having an enrollment of less than 300 students (the one standout school has an enrollment of 675 FTE students). Three of these schools identify

⁴³ John W. Cresswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008), 54-55, 225-27.

⁴⁴Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 30.

⁴⁵Ibid., 476-77.

⁴⁶"Christian Colleges, 2014-2015."

⁴⁷Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 83.

themselves as liberal arts institutions, each with an enrollment between 1,000 to 1,400 students. The remaining seven institutions identify themselves as Christian universities. Enrollment among these schools varies from a low of 172 to a high of 1,387, with an average enrollment of 812 students (see appendix 1). Schools were selected from the eastern, central, and western portions of the United States to provide geographical balance to the study.

I conducted phone-based interviews with the CAOs of each institution. After obtaining the informed consent of each participant, I then asked open-ended questions using a semi-structured protocol.⁴⁸ Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed for trends using a combination of coding and meaning condensation.⁴⁹

Research Assumptions

1. All participants would answer truthfully in a confidential effort to help Christian higher education within the SCM as a whole.
2. Most participants would likely wrestle with the Hawthorne Effect as they describe their own institutions. The Hawthorne Effect recognizes that participants who know they are being studied as part of a meaningful project may lose some objectivity.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015), 93, 156.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 129, 226-33.

⁵⁰Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 82.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE

Many of the private religious colleges and universities in the United States struggle with increasing tuition costs, reduced denominational or church giving, minimal endowments, and rising costs in areas such as technology, food services, and housing. As a result of these and other challenges, the administrators of these schools often face intense pressure to meet student, parent, and alumni demands while keeping tuition costs affordable. In fact, Anita Fitzgerald Henck reports that most of the 114 private colleges and universities placed on probation in 2009 for failing to meet the U.S. Department of Education's standards for financial responsibility are small religious schools.¹

Many of the colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian Churches face similar circumstances. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify some of the current market challenges facing the CAOs of six of these schools, to learn how the CAOs of these institutions are responding to them, and to determine what impact these challenges may be having on the Bible and ministry programs at these schools. The goal of this descriptive study was to provide trends and recommendations that senior administrators can use to respond to these market challenges.

This chapter provides a summary of some of the key precedent literature underlying this study. I conducted a careful review of the literature in four areas: biblical stewardship, higher education in the SCM, current market challenges facing private religious colleges and universities, and keeping the faith in Christian higher education.

¹Anita Fitzgerald Henck, "Walking the Tightrope: Christian Colleges and Universities in a Time of Change," *Christian Higher Education* 10, no. 3 (2011): 198, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15363759>.

Biblical Discussion of Stewardship

Given the pressures that college and university administrators face as well as the resources and goals for which these leaders are accountable to their students, faculty, and supporters, the presidents and CAOs of these institutions are stewards of a difficult but important mission. In fact, Julien C. H. Smith and T. Laine Scales contend that a Christian scholar is a steward (“one who holds in trust and cares for the property of another”) with allegiances both to the church and to academic learning.² As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, a steward must be faithful in the execution of his or her duties.

The Greek word for *steward* is *oikonomos*. In classical Greek, *oikonomos* and related words referred primarily to the head manager of a large household or estate who was responsible for overseeing the other servants in the home.³ Later, this term was used also to refer to the administration of various government offices. Members of this word group can mean *management*, *steward*, *administer*, or *plan*.⁴

In the Septuagint, *oikonomia* appears in Isaiah 22:19-21 where it refers to the administration of an office. *Oikonomos* appears several times in the related passages of Isaiah 36 and 2 Kings 18-19 to refer to the royal palace governor. In the New Testament, *oikonomia* and *oikonomos* appear nine and ten times, respectively. While *oikonomos* in the New Testament can refer either to the manager of a household or to a government official, *oikonomia* refers to being entrusted with the good news of salvation.⁵

The concept of stewardship as a trust appears several places in the Bible, including the creation account in Genesis 1-2, the stewardship parables in Matthew and

²Julien C. H. Smith and T. Laine Scales, “Stewardship: A Biblical Model for the Formation of Christian Scholars,” *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 17, no. 1 (2013): 79.

³Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoite, and Tremper Longman III, eds., “Authority, Human,” *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 59-60.

⁴Verylyn D. Verbrugge, ed., “*oikonomia*,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, abr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 403.

⁵*Ibid.*, 403-04.

Luke,⁶ Paul's defense of his ministry in 1 Corinthians 3-4, and Peter's and Paul's exhortations to church leaders in 1 Peter 4:10 and Titus 1:7.⁷ While Paul's ministry as a faithful steward in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 is not a perfect match for the responsibility faced by academic stewards, the emphasis on the faithfulness required of stewards makes it a good passage for a biblical discussion of stewardship.

At the time of Paul's writing, Corinth was a Roman colony in the southern portion of Greece consisting primarily of Roman freedmen, native Greeks, and various immigrants, including a sizable Jewish community.⁸ As such, Corinth possessed the culture of Rome, the philosophy of Greece, the mystery cults of Egypt, and—in some quarters—the monotheism of Israel.⁹ Partly because of these factors and partly because of its location as a seaport, Corinth was a wealthy city of status and privilege, filled with freedmen and merchants alike bent on climbing the social ladder of status and honor.¹⁰ Additionally, wealth, ambition, and opportunity led to vice and excess, with Gordon D. Fee suggesting that the Corinth of Paul's time was “the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world.”¹¹ David E. Garland believes that these factors, especially the focus on status and achievement with the resulting egotism, led to many of the authority struggles that Paul faced with the Corinthians.¹²

Paul's discussion of stewardship and faithfulness occurs toward the end of the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians. After a traditional introduction and expression of

⁶Smith and Scales, “Stewardship,” 79-80.

⁷Ryken, Wilhoite, and Longman, “Authority, Human,” 59-60.

⁸David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1-3.

⁹Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 2.

¹⁰Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 4.

¹¹Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2-3.

¹²Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 3-15.

thanksgiving (1 Cor 1:1-9), he devotes the majority of the first four chapters to dealing with dissension among the Corinthian Christians.¹³ Paul addresses at least four issues in these chapters. First, the Corinthians are arguing over points of theology and ecclesiology, using the authority of their various teachers (Paul, Peter, Apollos) as credibility for their positions (e.g., 1:10-12 and 3:3-9). Second, the Corinthians believed that these arguments demonstrated their superior wisdom. Third, the Corinthians' attitude was boastful and arrogant (1:29-31; 4:6-7). Finally, these issues worked together to undermine Paul's authority and ministry among the Corinthians (2:1—3:4; 4:1-21).¹⁴

Paul focuses on the issue of factions and dissension in chapters 3 and 4. Beginning in 1 Corinthians 3:3, he notes that God is the one who brings the increase; leaders like himself and Apollos are merely servants who plant the seed of the gospel and water it. They are co-workers who will be rewarded according to their effort (1 Cor 3:3-15). Thus, boasting about human leaders is not "wisdom" but foolishness (1 Cor 3:18-23).

In light of these facts, the Corinthians should consider Paul and Apollos as servants of Jesus Christ who have been entrusted with the *mystery* of the gospel (1 Cor 4:1). Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."¹⁵ Craig Blomberg notes that the phrase "those who have been given a trust" refers to an *oikonomos*, or steward, "the highest ranking servant of a wealthy landlord, who was in charge of the entire estate in his master's absence."¹⁶ By calling himself both a servant and a steward, Paul sends a strong message that while he and Apollos are the servants of God, they are also God's overseers with authority over

¹³Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 21.

¹⁴Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 48-49.

¹⁵All quotations of Scripture are from the New International Version.

¹⁶Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 88.

their fellow servants, the Corinthians.¹⁷ As Blomberg notes, “The key task of a steward is faithfulness to his master, not kowtowing to every demand of his underlings.”¹⁸ On the other hand, Paul’s commission does not give him the right to abuse his charges. Rather, he must be faithful in executing his task—the spread and nurture of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

Paul’s point is that those who preach, teach, and lead are accountable to God. At the end of time, the Lord will judge them according to the faithfulness of their ministry.¹⁹ As Blomberg further observes, “God does not require us to be successful, certainly not by worldly standards. . . . Rather he calls us to constant faithfulness regardless of external results.”²⁰

Paul’s discussion of stewardship and faithfulness in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 is not an exact analogy for the trust required of college and university administrators. For one, these administrators have trustees who are charged with holding them accountable for their results. Second, Paul is referring to the ministry of the gospel and not to the leadership of an academic organization. However, the gist of the analogy remains true—presidents and CAOs bear an awesome responsibility for training students in a Christ-centered academic community. While their ultimate “success” will be determined by God long after their time in office has passed, these administrators can take both confidence and warning that God will judge them according to their faithfulness to the task.

Higher Education in the Stone-Campbell Movement

The Stone-Campbell Movement is a relatively small religious organization based primarily in the United States. As of 2001, the independent Christian churches

¹⁷Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 88.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 164.

²⁰Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 93.

claimed 1,333,000 members in the United States and Canada,²¹ the non-instrumental churches of Christ reported 1,000,000 members in the U.S.,²² and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) claimed 807,000 members in the U.S.²³

The SCM has always been committed to higher education. For such a small organization, the SCM has founded 215 Bible colleges and universities since 1836,²⁴ with approximately one-third of these institutions started between 1900 and 1980.

Unfortunately, theological disagreements caused the SCM to spread its educational efforts too thin.²⁵ Approximately 60 of these schools still survive.²⁶

The loss of many of these schools can be attributed to issues that range from typical (e.g., financial difficulties) to tragic (i.e., the Civil War). However, perhaps the most identifiable challenge is the controversy between modernism and fundamentalism that reached the U.S. by the early twentieth century.²⁷ As more colleges in the United States transitioned into full universities toward the end of the nineteenth century, many members of the SCM became concerned with the quality of their schools. William R. Harper, then president of the University of Chicago, suggested that graduate students from the SCM establish an academic center under the auspices of the university's divinity school. Ultimately many of these ministers were exposed to biblical liberalism and

²¹Henry E. Webb, "Christian Churches/Churches of Christ," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 188.

²²Thomas H. Olbricht, "Churches of Christ," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 212.

²³Mark G. Toulouse, "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 182.

²⁴D. Duane Cummins, "Higher Education, Views of in the Movement," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 390.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 392-93.

²⁶"Universities and Colleges Affiliated with the Restoration Movement," accessed April 20, 2015, www.wikipedia.org.

²⁷James B. North, "Bible College Movement," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 93.

carried it back to their pulpits and classrooms.²⁸

The rising conflict between conservatives and liberals proved to be a major reason for the breach between the Disciples of Christ and the independent Christian churches in 1926 (the non-instrumental churches of Christ having separated from the other two branches in 1906).²⁹ Henry E. Webb notes,

Modernism became a decisive issue when retirements brought faculty changes in the major ministerial training institution, the College of the Bible, in Lexington, Kentucky. The new professors were charged with teachings that ran counter to biblical views held by the older faculty and many alumni. . . . Frustrated in their attempt to recover the College of the Bible, those who believed that the future of the [Movement] was threatened responded by establishing “faithful” Bible colleges as a means of providing ministers for churches that resisted the new theological trends.³⁰

Nearly all of the schools formed after 1920 were aligned with the two more conservative branches of the SCM, the independent Christian churches and the non-instrumental churches of Christ.³¹

At this point, readers may question how this resistance to biblical liberalism has affected scholarship within the independent Christian churches and the non-instrumental churches of Christ. In fact, some people outside the Movement assume that the early resistance to critical scholarship and the emphasis on Bible colleges must indicate that a large portion of the SCM is essentially anti-intellectual.³²

However, this perception is inaccurate for several reasons. First, scholarship in the independent Christian churches and the non-instrumental churches of Christ has always been marked by rigorous, rational inquiry.³³ The Stone-Campbell Movement was

²⁸James B. North, *Union in Truth: An Interpretative History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1994), 267-73.

²⁹Ibid., 299.

³⁰Webb, “Christian Churches/Churches of Christ,” 185.

³¹North, “Bible College Movement,” 93.

³²Richard T. Hughes, “What Can the Church of Christ Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education?,” in *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 405.

³³Ibid.

founded at the height of the Enlightenment and co-founder Alexander Campbell was known for his rational approach to faith as well.³⁴ Second, while many of the leaders of the movement in the early twentieth century rejected biblical liberalism, they did not reject biblical scholarship. Today, scholars from both conservative wings of the SCM regularly present papers at meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature and at the Evangelical Theological Society.³⁵ The majority of biblical and theological professors at colleges and universities within the SCM possess a Ph.D., with many scholars receiving their doctorates from prestigious schools such as Princeton, Vanderbilt, Duke, Harvard, Hebrew Union College, Notre Dame, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Yale.³⁶ Additionally, the SCM publishes two peer-reviewed academic journals, *Restoration Quarterly* and the *Stone-Campbell Journal*.

Higher education within the SCM is also marked by differences in curriculum models. James B. North describes this “tension . . . between training in the liberal arts from an openly Christian perspective, and vocational training for ministry.”³⁷ Before the spread of theological liberalism in the early twentieth century, most ministerial students trained at “Bible colleges” that functioned more as liberal arts colleges. After graduating with a baccalaureate degree, these ministers would often advance to seminary training, following a model similar to that of many mainline denominations today.³⁸ However, the crisis of biblical liberalism led to the launch of conservative Bible colleges to replace the more liberal seminaries. While the independent Christian churches focused on starting

³⁴Hughes, “What Can the Church of Christ Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education?,” 405.

³⁵William R. Baker, Paul J. Kissling, and Tony Springer, “Coming Full Circle: Biblical Scholarship in Christian Churches,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 165.

³⁶Mark W. Hamilton, “Transition and Continuity: Biblical Scholarship in Today’s Churches of Christ,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 191; Baker, “Coming Full Circle,” 171.

³⁷North, “Bible College Movement,” 92-93.

³⁸*Ibid.*

Bible colleges, the non-instrumental churches of Christ continued with the model of a blend of liberal arts and ministerial preparation.³⁹ Thus, the Disciples of Christ primarily have liberal arts schools with theological seminaries, the independent Christian churches primarily have Bible colleges with some seminaries and liberal arts universities, and the non-instrumental Churches of Christ primarily have universities that blend liberal arts studies with strong Bible and ministry programs. However, many of the schools affiliated with the independent Christian churches have broadened their liberal arts curricula and now function similarly to church of Christ schools.⁴⁰

The following descriptions taken from school catalogs provide an example of the three curriculum models followed among independent Christian Church colleges and universities. (None of these schools participated in this research project.) For example, Central Christian College of the Bible in Moberly, Missouri, describes itself as a “traditional undergraduate Bible college” that seeks to “equip students with a Bible-centered higher educational foundation within the context of a Christian worldview” for “vocational church leadership and volunteer positions.”⁴¹ The majority of degrees are in Bible, ministry, biblical research, preaching, religious leadership, counseling, worship, Christian education, and youth ministry.⁴² Cincinnati Christian University was originally founded as a Bible college and seminary in 1924 with the goal of preparing men and women “to meet the pressing leadership needs of independent local churches that were associated with the Restoration Movement fellowship.”⁴³ With the addition of the College of Adult Learning and Leadership in 2004, the school changed its name to from

³⁹North, “Bible College Movement,” 92-93.

⁴⁰Webb, “Christian Churches/Churches of Christ,” 189.

⁴¹Central Christian College of the Bible, *2013-2015 Academic Catalog*, 5.

⁴²Ibid., 48-77.

⁴³Cincinnati Christian University, *Academic Catalog 2015-2016*, 8.

Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary to Cincinnati Christian University.⁴⁴ The university offers undergraduate degrees in fields ranging from biblical studies, preaching, and youth ministry to business management, psychology, and early childhood education.⁴⁵ Finally, William Jessup University, in Rocklin, California, provides a Christ-centered liberal arts education for the purpose of preparing “Christians for leadership and service in church and society, through Christian higher education, spiritual formation, and directed experiences.”⁴⁶ Undergraduate degrees include biblical studies, biology, business management, creative arts, computer science, family ministry, pastoral ministry, mathematics, liberal studies, psychology, and public studies, among others.⁴⁷

Anecdotal evidence indicates that some administrators and professors serving at colleges and universities associated with independent Christian churches continue to have strong convictions for or against expanding Bible colleges into universities or liberal arts schools.⁴⁸ Rationale for the Bible college model includes retaining an emphasis on vocational ministry and strong Bible programs, while rationale for the university or liberal arts models generally emphasizes reaching more students by offering a broader array of majors.⁴⁹ However, supporters for these models sometimes find themselves defending their preference against perceptions. For example, Bible colleges are sometimes known for a “a dogmatic and indoctrinating pedagogy and an exclusivist spirit,” while liberal arts schools are sometimes thought of as reducing emphasis on biblical and ministerial preparation in order to provide for a greater number of vocational

⁴⁴Cincinnati Christian University, *Academic Catalog 2015-2016*, 8.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 21-23.

⁴⁶William Jessup University, *2015-2016 Academic Catalog*, 10.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 37-91.

⁴⁸This comment is based upon individual conversations I had with professors and administrators from four schools during the period of 2012 to 2014. See Gary Weedman, “A Third Way: Biblical Higher Education For the Twenty-first Century,” *Johnson Bible College* (January 3, 2011), 7-12.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

majors.⁵⁰

At least one school, Johnson University, attempts to bridge the gap between the models by proposing a Great Commission Mandate model. This approach combines the emphasis of the Bible college model on biblical and theological preparation with the flexibility of the majors offered by the liberal arts or university model by requiring all students to take a common core of thirty hours of Bible and theology.⁵¹

Despite its small numbers, the Stone-Campbell Movement has a strong commitment to undergraduate and graduate education.⁵² Colleges and universities affiliated with the more conservative wings of the movement, the independent Christian churches and the non-instrumental churches of Christ, are marked by a commitment to the biblical text, to rational inquiry, and to the Christian faith.⁵³ Although marred by a history of sectarianism and liberalism, these institutions remain committed to integrating faith and learning within the framework of evangelical Christianity.

Current Market Challenges

For the purpose of this study, current market challenges include tight finances, low enrollment, rising tuition costs, increasing student expectations, and strained church relationships. Martin and Samels define a stressed college or university as “an institution that is dependent on tuition or state appropriations, smaller than it should be and needs to be, and lacking in name-brand recognition. The school’s enrollment, endowment, and grants have been flat, at best, for several years.”⁵⁴ This section of the literature review

⁵⁰ Weedman, “A Third Way,” 7-10.

⁵¹ Ibid., 11-12.

⁵² Cummins, “Higher Education,” 390.

⁵³ Hughes, “The Church of Christ Tradition,” 405-11.

⁵⁴ James Martin and James E. Samels, “Defining Stressed Institutions and Leading Them Effectively,” in *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence*, ed. James Martin, James E. Samels, and associates (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2009), 3.

describes some of these challenges in greater detail.

As mentioned previously, many small religious colleges and universities are economically stressed, including the many institutions affiliated with the independent Christian churches of the SCM.⁵⁵ According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, 158 private colleges failed the U.S. Department of Education’s financial responsibility test in 2013, including three institutions affiliated with independent Christian churches.⁵⁶

The following list of financial factors may indicate that a college or university is economically stressed. First, discounting tuition more than 35 percent is generally recognized as a key indicator of financial vulnerability.⁵⁷ Standard and Poor’s report on non-profit colleges and universities states that as administrators try to offset decreasing revenues, “at some point inability to grow revenue could overwhelm management’s ability to cut administrative expenses.”⁵⁸ Second, depending at least 85 percent on tuition instead of gifts or endowments places a huge amount of stress on presidents to raise funds. James Martin and James E. Samels state that “when an administration has to ‘beat the bushes’ to balance the budget every spring . . . it is time to face the fact that the institution is at risk.”⁵⁹ Third, stressed institutions often have to resort to short-term bridge financing at the end of the fiscal year. As finances get tight, presidents turn to short-term loans to meet payroll expenses.⁶⁰ Fourth, rising costs of residential life,

⁵⁵Robert C. Andringa, “Keeping the Faith: Leadership Challenges Unique to Religiously Affiliated Colleges and Universities,” in *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence*, ed. James Martin, James E. Samels, and associates (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2009), 168.

⁵⁶Goldie Blumenstyk and Joshua Hatch, “180 Private Colleges Fail Education Dept’s Latest Financial-Responsibility Test,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 61, no. 27 (March 20, 2015), accessed April 21, 2015, www.ebscohost.com.

⁵⁷ Martin and Samels, “Defining Stressed Institutions,” 10.

⁵⁸Carolyn McLean, “U.S. Not-For-Profit Private Universities’ Fiscal 2013 Median Ratios: Despite An Improved Investment Environment, Budget Pressures Continue” (July 8, 2014): 2, accessed April 20, 2015, www.standardandpoors.com/ratingsdirect.

⁵⁹Martin and Samels, “Defining Stressed Institutions,” 10.

⁶⁰Martin and Samels, “Defining Stressed Institutions,” 13.

including technology, food costs, and building maintenance, place a great strain on many institutions. Andringa notes that amenities such as single rooms, full-service snack bars, top-quality Internet speeds, and excellent fitness facilities are evidence “that the student consumer now rules.”⁶¹ Finally, while nearly all colleges and universities maintain a backlog of deferred maintenance projects, Martin and Samels believe that a level of 40 percent or more unfunded deferred maintenance “is one of the most powerful indicators of institutional fragility.”⁶²

While financial difficulties may be the most obvious indicator of a stressed institution, three other stressors should be mentioned. First, Standard and Poor’s reports “flat to declining enrollment at many universities,” which they believe is related to increasing expectations among students and the highly competitive nature of admissions. Schools that do show an increase in enrollment usually do so by offsetting flat undergraduate numbers with increased figures for graduate and nontraditional programs.⁶³ Second, many small religious colleges remain small because of their rural location. While the founders of these schools sought a small-town setting in order to minimize temptation for their students, today’s students prefer larger suburban or urban settings that offer more activities and jobs.⁶⁴ Finally, Robert C. Andringa observes that the changing relationship between religious colleges and universities and their supporting churches and denominations puts financial and recruiting strains on religious schools. He notes that decreasing denominational giving as well as fewer students attending denominationally affiliated schools puts at-risk institutions in “lose-lose situations.”⁶⁵ He

⁶¹ Andringa, “Keeping the Faith,” 174.

⁶² Martin and Samels, “Defining Stressed Institutions,” 12.

⁶³ McLean, “U.S. Not-For-Profit Private Universities,” 11.

⁶⁴ Andringa, “Keeping the Faith,” 171.

⁶⁵ Andringa, “Keeping the Faith,” 172.

writes, “If they brand themselves as primarily denominational, many outside that denomination will understandably be less interested in . . . attending. If they deliberately move away from their denominational roots, the existing church support . . . [is] likely to dry up even faster.”⁶⁶ This situation is similar to what Robert Benne discusses in *Quality with Soul*, as described in chapter one of this thesis.⁶⁷

These challenges are similar to those faced by the trustees and administrators of many of the colleges and universities affiliated with the independent Christian churches. When asked about the biggest challenges they had faced or the current challenges facing their successors, several recently retired presidents from these universities stated that fiscal viability, depressed giving, increased student expectations concerning technology and dorm quality, and online education have been their most significant challenges.⁶⁸ Michael Sweeney, former president of Emmanuel Christian Seminary, believes that many of these smaller, financially stressed colleges will need to merge with larger universities within the SCM in order to survive.⁶⁹

Seasoned academic leaders offer some suggestions for facing these challenges successfully. First, Martin and Samels suggest that presidents put more priority on achieving their overall mission than their short-term admissions goals. Many presidents focus a great deal of effort on a weekly basis worrying about how to increase their enrollment figures. Instead, Martin and Samels believe that presidents, trustees, and other key administrators should step back from the daily efforts to refocus on the institution’s mission. Doing so may preclude chasing after the latest marketing fad, investing in ill-conceived new programs, or hiring too many faculty. If necessary, presidents must be

⁶⁶Andringa, “Keeping the Faith,” 172.

⁶⁷Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 21.

⁶⁸Swinney, “Six Stepped Down,” n.p.

⁶⁹Ibid.

willing to resize their institutions before economic factors force their hands.⁷⁰ Second, a corollary to the first point is to only spend money on what the mission calls for. In other words, rather than seeing the budget process as all consuming and the mission as something in the background, administrators should use the mission to shape the budgeting process. While this process may anger some faculty and alumni, this type of leadership is necessary in today's market to keep colleges and universities solvent.⁷¹ Finally, as alluded to earlier, too many religious colleges and universities live too close to what Michael Townsley refers to as the "at-risk" condition, or what might be informally referred to as "the margin." Townsley notes that most private institutions survive on "pluck and luck and help from alumni, the government, or windfalls at the last minute."⁷² This situation worsens during times of economic recession when giving typically drops and investments do poorly. Townsley suggests that administrators must do whatever is necessary to stop operating in an at-risk condition.⁷³

Keeping the Faith

The institutional stressors described above are both challenging and obvious. However, another less-visible challenge may be waiting in the wings as the colleges and universities of the independent Christian churches fight the more obvious battles. The history of higher education in the United States is replete with examples of schools that lost their religious "soul" while struggling to reach more students, to recruit better faculty, and to achieve higher name recognition. This section of the literature review outlines some of the challenges and correctives facing colleges and universities

⁷⁰Martin and Samels, "Defining Stressed Institutions," 21.

⁷¹Ibid., 21-22.

⁷²Michael Townsley, "Effective Financial Leadership of Stressed Colleges and Universities," in *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence*, ed. James Martin, James E. Samels, and associates (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2009), 123-25.

⁷³Ibid., 123-25.

struggling to keep the faith.

Michael Zigarelli tells a modern version of the parable of the four soils (Matt 13:1-22; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:1-15) as it might relate to religious colleges and universities today. He describes the schools on the path as secular institutions, while the schools among the rocks represent historically religious schools that now look like secular institutions. The schools among the thorns are Christian schools dealing with numerous challenges that threaten to choke their Christian mission. Zigarelli describes some of these “thorns”: “Fear that they will lose prospective students if they are *too* overtly Christian, faculty trained in secular schools who . . . will not teach from a Christian perspective, [and] open admissions policies that culminate in a highly secular student culture.”⁷⁴ He concludes by describing Christian colleges and universities that remain true to their calling and “are yielding a harvest 100 times what God sowed.”⁷⁵ Zigarelli agrees that the parable breaks down at the idea that only the fourth type of school bears any fruit. However, he reminds his readers “God cautions His schools to protect their roots and to circumvent the myriad thorns that can threaten or even thwart their distinctively Christian identity.”⁷⁶

There are a variety of reasons why historically religious colleges and universities either lose their faith entirely or see their faith distinctives minimized. For example, James Tunstead Burtchaell notes that the academic desires for excellence and acceptance are two reasons why many colleges have lost their moorings.⁷⁷ William P. Anderson suggests that many Christian institutions “desperately scramble for relevance

⁷⁴Michael Zigarelli, “Training, Transforming, and Transitioning: A Blueprint for the Christian University,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 21, no. 1 (2012): 62-63.

⁷⁵Ibid., 63.

⁷⁶Ibid., 63-64.

⁷⁷James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 820-27.

and market share as they face cultural, financial, and enrollment pressures. . . . The temptation is to become chameleon-like, to copy our rivals in higher education but baptize our programming with the label *Christian* and nothing more.”⁷⁸ William B. Adrian, Jr., notes that as colleges and universities shed some of their Christian distinctiveness for academic recognition, they typically end up attracting a broader mix of students, many of whom have no connection with the school’s religious tradition. He writes, “Our modern pluralistic culture poses a major challenge for the founding faith traditions. . . . One of the more troubling developments . . . is that the increasing diversity of students is driven as much or more by market forces as by design.”⁷⁹ Benne adds that when some colleges realized that they could not remain competitive by recruiting students primarily from their own tradition, they became less restrictive in whom they would admit. However, as the number of students from the sponsoring tradition dwindled, these administrators realized that students from other faith traditions (or from no tradition at all) were less inclined to behave in accordance with the school’s religious expectations.⁸⁰ Finally, Litfin observes that as schools evolve, they almost always become more liberal instead of more conservative. He attributes this drift toward the left to the drive for academic acceptance. Since Christian institutions often find themselves misunderstood by the larger secular academy, “the [implied] promise is enticing: jettison your specifics and we will respect you.”⁸¹

Clearly, not all religious schools are in danger of losing their moorings.

⁷⁸William P. Anderson, “How to Keep a Christian College Christian,” in *Faith, Freedom, and Higher Education: Historical Analysis and Contemporary Reflections*, ed. P. C. Kemeny (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 183.

⁷⁹William B. Adrian, Jr., “The Christian University: Maintaining Distinctions in a Pluralistic Culture,” in *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 447-48.

⁸⁰Benne, *Quality with Soul*, 9, 21.

⁸¹Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 239-39.

Hughes, Adrian, and Benne have written about the efforts that twenty schools have taken to maintain their faith. Additionally, Perry L. Glanzer, P. Jesse Rine, and Phil Davignon recently conducted a study of seventy-nine member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities to determine the factors that might indicate whether a school is losing its denominational distinctiveness. Their research sought to determine the amount of oversight and funding provided by the denominations, the extent to which these schools emphasized their denominational heritage, and the level of denominational affiliation expressed by each institution's faculty and students.⁸² They conclude that while the schools in the study have remained true to their denominational roots, there is "clear evidence that change is afoot in certain areas of institutional life, most notably in the area of student enrollment."⁸³

Again, experienced educational leaders offer suggestions to help presidents and CAOs guard their institutions against spiritual drift. Perhaps the most important factor is what Burtchaell refers to as the "primacy of the presidency."⁸⁴ He notes that in many situations, the key steps toward secularization were taken during the tenure of a single president. Burtchaell adds, "With very few exceptions, the presidents who have been strategists of religious alienation have been large souled, attractive, and trusted."⁸⁵ Trustees are responsible for hiring the right president and then for keeping a watchful eye on the school's direction. While a president may lead a school away from its moorings, Anderson notes that keeping a college or university true to its religious roots requires a commitment to maintaining "an intentionally Christian faculty, Christian curriculum, and Christian student life that go beyond words and pietistic catchphrases to deeper

⁸²Glanzer, Rine, and Davignon, "Assessing the Denominational Identity of American Evangelical Colleges and Universities, Part I," 183-84.

⁸³Ibid., 183-84, 201.

⁸⁴Burtchaell, *Dying of the Light*, 826.

⁸⁵Ibid., 826-27.

significance in our actions.”⁸⁶ Finally, Benne reinforces the need for institutions to keep members of the school’s religious heritage in key positions in the faculty, administration, and boards while striving to recruit a majority of students from churches affiliated with the school’s heritage.⁸⁷

The independent Christian church and the non-instrumental church of Christ portions of the Stone-Campbell Movement are known for conservative, evangelical beliefs,⁸⁸ a stance shared by most of their colleges and universities.⁸⁹ Therefore, I am hesitant to sound the alarm against a slide into secularism. However, Benne notes that many of the religious schools that have become more secular did so because they were economically vulnerable to current market challenges.⁹⁰ Additionally, although the Disciples of Christ are part of the SCM, their schools adopted the biblical liberalism of the early twentieth century. Therefore, while a departure into secularism may not be eminent for most schools affiliated with the independent Christian churches, a reminder to continue to resist the buffeting currents may be helpful.

Summary

This review describes some of the precedent literature associated with the current market forces facing colleges and universities affiliated with the independent Christian churches. The biblical study addressed the need for stewards to be found faithful. While Paul was addressing ministers of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, his emphasis on faithfulness is good encouragement for school administrators struggling to

⁸⁶Anderson, “How to Keep a Christian College Christian,” 184.

⁸⁷Benne, *Quality with Soul*, 8-9.

⁸⁸Webb, “Christian Churches/Churches of Christ,” 188-89; Olbricht, “Churches of Christ,” 213-14.

⁸⁹Hughes, “The Church of Christ Tradition,” 405.

⁹⁰Benne, *Soul*, 22.

stay faithful in their tasks. The review of higher education initiatives in the Stone-Campbell Movement highlighted the organization's historical commitment to Christian higher education. Although many of the schools started by SCM churches no longer exist and some existing schools are no longer conservative, the pioneers and educators of the movement can be rightfully proud of their efforts. Current market challenges facing private religious colleges and universities include finances, enrollment, student expectations, and church support. Colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches are struggling with all of these issues. Finally, while many historically religious colleges and universities have allowed desires or challenges to lead them into secularism, the majority of schools associated with the SCM remain biblically conservative.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the current market challenges facing colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches and to determine how a select number of these institutions are responding to these challenges. A secondary purpose was to determine how these challenges and responses are impacting the Bible and ministry programs at these schools. This chapter describes the methodology for this study. It includes a discussion of the research questions, design overview, population, sample, limits of generalization, and research procedures.

Research Questions

Three questions were selected to guide this study. The first question was designed to gather descriptive information about the primary market challenges facing the CAOs of these schools. The second question assesses how these institutions are responding to these challenges. The final question focuses the study more deeply to determine how these challenges have affected the Bible and ministry departments at the participating institutions.

1. What are the primary market challenges facing colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches?
2. How are these institutions addressing these challenges?
3. How have these challenges impacted the Bible and ministry programs at these institutions?

Design Overview

This study utilized a qualitative, descriptive, collective (or multiple) case study design with purposeful sampling and a semi-structured interview protocol. I used a

qualitative approach rather than a quantitative or mixed-methods design for two reasons. First, qualitative research uses methods such as individual and focus group interviews to gather information about relatively unexplored situations, whereas quantitative research seeks to determine the relationship between known variables.¹ Since the purpose of this study was to determine the nature of current market challenges facing administrators in Christian higher education and how those administrators are responding to these challenges, the study lent itself more to a qualitative approach. Second, the small number of participants in the study favored a qualitative methodology rather than a quantitative or mixed-methods design.

The study was descriptive because its purpose was to make other administrators aware of how a select group of colleges and universities are responding to current market forces. As Nancy Jean Vyhmeister states, “The purpose of descriptive research is to make reality known. On the basis of the description, conclusions may be reached and decisions made.”² I intend to share the findings of this study with the CAOs of all colleges and universities associated with the independent Christian churches to make them aware of how other CAOs are handling these challenges.

This project used a multiple case study approach to obtain information from the CAOs of six of the twenty-three colleges and universities affiliated with the independent Christian church wing of the SCM. John W. Creswell defines collective case studies as “case studies in which multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into an issue.”³ Case studies involve in-depth investigation into the dynamics and environment of a group or institution in order to better understand the organization being

¹John W. Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008), 46, 51.

²Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 30.

³Creswell, *Educational Research*, 637.

studied.⁴ The multiple case study method allows researchers to compare and contrast organizations in order to propose generalized trends.⁵

I used the collective case study approach to determine how six colleges and universities affiliated with the independent Christian churches were responding to current market forces. Additionally, I used purposeful sampling “to intentionally select individuals and sites to learn [and] understand the central phenomenon.”⁶ As Tim Sensing notes, “[T]he usefulness of purposeful sampling lies in selecting ‘information-rich’ cases that can provide depth to your data.”⁷

After initially selecting participant schools through purposeful sampling, I contacted the CAOs of these schools by sending an email (see appendix 2). Potential participants were asked to respond to the email within one week to indicate whether or not they were interested. Interested participants were asked to return a signed informed consent form as well as written answers to some pre-interview questions (see appendices 3 and 4).

I then conducted semi-structured interviews by phone with the CAOs of each school. After obtaining the informed consent of each CAO, I recorded each interview. I asked open-ended questions related to the three research questions and used follow-up questions as appropriate to understand the interviewee’s statements better (see appendix 5). After transcribing each interview, I coded and categorized the transcripts to search for trends and to develop conclusions.

⁴Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers*, 53.

⁵Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 8th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 135.

⁶Creswell, *Educational Research*, 225.

⁷Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 83.

Population

The population for this study consisted of the CAOs of twenty-three accredited colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian Churches within the United States.

Sample

In order to keep the study manageable, I purposefully selected six colleges and universities to participate in the study. As discussed previously, institutions of higher education affiliated with the independent Christian churches follow one of three curricula models: the Bible college model, which primarily provides undergraduate instruction in general education, Bible, theology, and ministry; the liberal arts model, which emphasizes general studies as opposed to a vocational curriculum; and the university model, which offers both undergraduate and graduate education in general studies, ministerial or biblical studies, and a variety of vocations. As discussed in chapter one, initially two institutions were selected from each category to gain a better understanding of how the CAOs of those educational models are responding to current market forces. Due to the low number of liberal arts schools in the population, however, I ultimately selected three Bible colleges to be in one group and two Christian universities and one liberal arts school to be in the other group. I balanced the regional representation of the study by selecting schools from the eastern, central, and western portions of the United States.

Limits of Generalization

Four factors limit the generalization of this study. First, because of the relatively small size of most colleges and universities affiliated with the independent Christian churches, this study is most suitable for other small, conservative institutions that follow a Bible college, a liberal arts college, or a university model of education. Second, because of the history and theology of churches affiliated with independent

Christian churches and the non-instrumental churches of Christ, this study is most generalizable to educational institutions associated with those two branches of the SCM. Third, because this study used a qualitative, multiple case study approach with a small sample as opposed to a mixed-methods study with a larger sample, the trends and conclusions may not be representative of all the educational institutions affiliated with the independent Christian churches, much less the broader array of private, religiously affiliated colleges and universities. Finally, without a review by a professional educators' association to confirm the results of this project, the findings must remain tentative.

Research Procedures

I conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions to gather data from the CAOs. The questions were designed to determine the CAOs' perceptions of the major market forces impacting their institutions, to determine how these CAOs and their institutions are responding to these challenges, and to assess the impact that these challenges are having on the Bible and ministry programs at these schools. Follow-up questions were used as necessary to prompt further responses, to clarify questions when needed, and to help participants develop their responses more fully.

Expert Review

Since the interview protocol was independently designed, I conducted an expert review before collecting data. My thesis adviser performed the expert review. After obtaining feedback from the expert review, I made the appropriate changes.

Pilot Test

Before interviewing the participants, I conducted a practice interview with the CAO of a university affiliated with the independent Christian Churches. The purpose of this interview was to establish face validity for the protocol and to assess the clarity of the

questions.⁸ After the interview, I made minor changes to the interview questions based upon the CAO's input.

Ethical Procedures

Each participant was informed of the confidential nature of the interview prior to participating in the interview. Participants were informed that their identity and their school's identity would remain anonymous, both in this thesis and in any potential publication deriving from this thesis. Additionally, each participant was also given an informed consent form to verify his willingness to participate in the study.⁹

Data Collection

I contacted each potential participant by email and phone call to describe the study and to elicit participation. Upon receipt of the informed consent form, I called each participant to set up a time to conduct an interview.¹⁰

I then conducted individual, phone-based, semi-structured interviews with each participant. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. I asked each participant open-ended questions designed to explore his perceptions of the impact of the current market forces upon his school and the steps they were taking to respond to these challenges.¹¹ The audio interview was digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

I used content analysis to identify major themes represented in each interview.

⁸Robert F. DeVellis, *Scale Development: Theory and Applications*, 3rd ed., ed. Leonard Bickman and Debra J. Rog (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 70-71.

⁹John David Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 134.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹ While some chief academic officer positions at schools affiliated with independent Christian churches are filled with females, the participants in this study were all male.

After identifying common themes, I then coded these themes to analyze the data, observe trends, and draw conclusions. For example, the number of times that each school mentioned a certain theme was counted in an attempt to give a quantitative sense to the strength of each trend. I then read through each transcript again, noting which challenges each CAO had stated were significant for his school as well as the priority that each CAO had placed on each challenge. The challenges were then ranked according to priority from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest priority and 5 being the highest priority. Upon quantifying the number of times each theme was mentioned as well as the priority of each theme, I then totaled the scores for the Bible colleges and the universities to develop a better feel for which challenges were the most significant for both groups of schools.

After performing this analysis, I checked these findings with the educator who performed the pilot test. This individual, who is considered an educational leader among CAOs in the independent Christian churches, confirmed that these findings matched his personal assessment. Additionally, after completing the analysis of RQ 1, I sent a copy of the CAO priorities and a summary of the findings for RQ 1 to each of the participating CAOs. All six participants confirmed that the summarized findings support their personal assessment as well.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the impact of current market challenges on Bible colleges, universities, and liberal arts schools associated with the independent Christian churches to determine how administrators at a select group of these schools are responding to these challenges. A secondary purpose was to determine the impact, if any, that these challenges are having on the Bible and ministry programs of the schools in the study.

This chapter reports the findings of this study. The findings are organized by research question and by grouping of case studies (i.e., Bible colleges versus universities and liberal arts school). Since I used a qualitative, interview-based approach to conduct the study, much of this chapter consists of a narrative analysis of the text-rich findings.¹

Compilation Protocol

I collected the data in three steps. First, the CAOs at all twenty-three schools associated with the independent Christian churches were contacted by email and asked to participate in the study (Appendix 2). Potential participants were provided with a brief description of the research study. Seven schools initially agreed to participate.

I then proceeded with the second step of the data collection process. The CAOs who volunteered to participate were asked to complete an informed consent form (Appendix 3) and to answer seven pre-interview questions dealing primarily with the school's current finances and enrollment figures (Appendix 4). The informed consent

¹Raul Martin Latoni Ramirez, "Pastoral Leadership Practices in Evangelical Multiethnic Congregations: A Multi-Case Study" (Ed.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 103.

form assured participants that their responses would remain anonymous. The pre-interview questions form also asked each CAO to identify his school as a Bible college, a Christian university, or a Christian liberal arts school based upon the definitions used in this thesis.² At this point, I realized that one of the institutions that had identified itself as a liberal arts school in the annual education issue of Christian Standard magazine was actually a university.³ When I clarified this point with the school's CAO, we agreed to drop the school from the study as I had too many universities at that point.

Suddenly, I was down to three Bible colleges, two universities, and one liberal arts college. Given the low number of liberal arts schools in the sample, I decided to proceed with two groupings of case studies – three Bible colleges in one group and two universities and one liberal arts school in the other group.

I then proceeded to the third step of data collection – the interview process. During this stage, I conducted a phone interview with each CAO. The CAOs were given the three research questions plus potential follow-on probes ahead of time, which helped the CAOs provide in-depth responses to the research questions.

Findings and Displays

Once the data was gathered, I had the interview recordings professionally transcribed. I initially read through each of the six transcripts several times to gain a sense of the findings.⁴ I then used ATLAS.ti Software for Mac to code the transcripts for meaning.⁵ This step resulted in twenty-seven codes, which I then condensed into seven

²While some chief academic officers at independent Christian church colleges and universities are women, the participants in this study are all men.

³“Christian Colleges, 2014-2015.”

⁴Svend Brinkmann and Steiner Kvale, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 226-27.

⁵*Ibid.*, 233.

categories (see Table 1 on p. 43).⁶

I ranked the categories based on the priorities placed on them by the CAOs of each school and by the number of times each CAO mentioned a certain theme or category (see tables 2 and 3 on pp. 44-45). I then totaled the scores for each Bible college and university/liberal arts school as well as the scores for both groups. By following these procedures, I was able to determine the primary challenges facing the CAOs of the schools participating in this study.

Description of Sample

The participants in this study were the CAOs at three Bible colleges, two universities, and one liberal arts school associated with the independent Christian churches in the continental United States. Three of the schools are located east of the Mississippi River and three of the schools are located west of it. Additionally, one school identified its setting as rural, two schools identified their setting as suburban, and three schools identified their setting as urban.

The institutions participating in this study ranged from small to moderate in size, with the smallest schools having an enrollment of 150 to 160 FTE students and the largest schools having an enrollment between 1,200 to 1,400 students. The Bible colleges in the study averaged 191 FTE students, which is representative of the average FTE enrollment of 179 students for the thirteen Bible colleges in the population. The two universities and one liberal arts school averaged 1,026 FTE students, which is also representative of the average FTE enrollment of 928 students for the seven universities and three liberal arts schools in the population.

⁶Brinkmann and Kvale, *InterViews*, 229.

Table 1. Codes and categories developed from interview transcripts

Category	Code
Tuition	Student debt
	Financial aid
Giving	Giving
	Alumni giving
	Economy's impact on giving
Enrollment	Enrollment
	Competition from other schools
	Recruiting
	Marketing
	Recruiting mission-matched students
Church Relations	Church relations
	Church-related giving
	Church-scholarships
	Recruiting from churches
	Mega churches
Increasing Student Expectations	Student expectations
	Expanding majors
	Facilities
	Food services
	Purpose of education
	Technology
Stone-Campbell Movement	Stone-Campbell Movement
	Stone-Campbell Movement faculty
	Student awareness of Stone-Campbell Movement
	Non-Stone-Campbell Movement students
Bible and Ministry	Changes in Bible and ministry faculty
	Changes in Bible and ministry hours

Table 2. Chief academic officer priorities (5 being highest)

Category	Code	Bible Colleges			Universities		
		A	B	C	A	B	C
Tuition	Student Debt		4		1	4	
	Financial Aid			4	3		
Giving	Giving		3				
	Alumni giving						
	Economy's impact on giving		1				
Enrollment	Enrollment	1					4
	Competition from other schools	5	5	3	2	5	
	Recruiting						
	Marketing						3
	Recruiting mission-matched students			5			
	Shrinking demographics						5
Church Relations	Church relations				5		
	Church-related giving	3		1	5		1
	Church scholarships						
	Recruiting from churches	4		1			
	Mega churches						
Student Expectations	Student expectations		2		4	3	
	Expanded majors	2		2			2
	Facilities		2	2	4	3	
	Food services						
	Purpose of education	2					
	Technology						
Stone-Campbell Movement	Stone-Campbell Movement						
	SCM faculty						
	Student awareness of SCM					2	
	Non-SCM students						
Bible and Ministry	Changes in Bible and ministry faculty						
	Changes in Bible and ministry hours						

Table 3. Number of times each CAO mentioned a particular challenge

Category	Code	Bible Colleges			Universities		
		A	B	C	A	B	C
Tuition	Student Debt		1	1	2	1	
	Financial Aid		1	1	1		
Giving	Giving	1	1				
	Alumni giving	1					2
	Economy's impact on giving				1		1
Enrollment	Enrollment		1	1			
	Competition from other schools	3	2	1	1	2	
	Recruiting			1			2
	Marketing						1
	Recruiting mission-matched students			1			
	Shrinking demographics	1					2
Church Relations	Church relations				1		1
	Church-related giving	1		1	2		2
	Church scholarships						
	Recruiting from churches	1		1	1	1	1
	Mega churches				1	2	1
Student Expectations	Student expectations		1		1		
	Expanded majors	3		1		1	1
	Facilities		1	1	2		1
	Food services						1
	Purpose of education	1					
	Technology		1				1
Stone-Campbell Movement	Stone-Campbell Movement					1	
	SCM faculty						
	Student awareness of SCM	2	1			2	
	Non-SCM students				2	1	
Bible and Ministry	Changes in Bible and ministry faculty						
	Changes in Bible and ministry hours						

Data Pertaining to the Research Questions

The data portrayed and analyzed in this portion of the chapter is arranged by both research question and by case study groupings.⁷ Following a brief recap of each research question, the data will be presented and analyzed for trends first for the Bible colleges and then for the universities and liberal arts school.

Data Related to the First Research Question

The first research question is, “What are the primary market challenges facing colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches?” This question gave the CAOs an opportunity to discuss their perceptions of some of the greatest challenges facing their schools.

Market challenges facing Bible colleges. All three Bible college administrators in this study named enrollment issues as their number one concern. For example, one CAO stated that recruiting mission-matched students was his school’s top concern.⁸ His school is located in an urban environment, somewhat distant from the majority of independent Christian churches in the region. Thus, it tends to attract students who want a Bible college education but who have little connection with independent Christian churches. While his school is thankful to be training students for the kingdom of God, school leaders wish they could make more of an impact on Stone-Campbell Movement churches.

The other two CAOs mentioned competition from other schools as their school’s top concern. For example, when asked about his school’s greatest market challenge, one CAO responded, “I would say pressure from community colleges and

⁷I am indebted to Raul Martin Latoni Ramirez’s dissertation for the general outline of this section (Latoni Ramirez, “Pastoral Leadership Practices,” 118.

⁸Interviewees’ names and school identities have been withheld to ensure confidentiality.

other schools for lower-cost education. Additionally, [our state] has lost a lot of people since the recession, so our possible target base has shrunk.” The other CAO also expressed concerns about competing with local colleges, especially state schools with lower tuition. He notes, “We see it in the state university, which is directly across the street from us. As their state dollars continue to be cut, they’re going after [the available] students that much more.” Given the increases in tuition and the shrinking pool of available students, small Bible colleges are finding themselves recruiting in a much more competitive market.

The second greatest market challenge facing these Bible colleges is increasing student expectations. All three CAOs indicated that they were experiencing difficulty in meeting a variety of these expectations. The two biggest challenges deal with outdated facilities and limited majors.

Two of the three CAOs mentioned that they struggle to recruit students who compare their outdated facilities with newer facilities at other schools. For example, one CAO stated, “I do believe that initial first impressions are one of the challenges that we have with students on campus, because they live in a very materialistic world marked by chronological snobbery. If something’s not new, it has no value in their minds.” This administrator’s school experiences a fair amount of pushback from students and parents over the age and quality of the campus dorms, yet the parents often seem more concerned with the quality of the dorms than do the students. He clarified, “I really think the kids get it more than their parents do. Their parents are a harder sell on several things, but so far, we’ve been able to still recruit some great kids that overcome it and come into our community.” The other CAO who mentioned challenges with student expectations concerning facilities indicated that these challenges developed from keeping too high of a deferred maintenance backlog.

A different two Bible college CAOs indicated that their greatest challenge with increasing student expectations is the need for expanding the number and variety of

student majors available. One CAO stated, “I would add the perception of what college is for. If there isn’t a lucrative job waiting at the end of the line, then students are less interested in it. So we’re getting pressure to expand program offerings in ways that we never have before.” While this school has added several non-ministry degrees to make themselves more marketable, the second CAO in this study indicated that adding new degrees is something they need to consider as well.

A third market challenge facing the Bible colleges in this study is declining relationships with churches in their region. While two of the schools mentioned “declining church relationships” as a significant market challenge, neither school indicated that their relationships with regional churches had deteriorated due to conflict or similar struggles. Rather, churches seem to be forgetting about the schools.

For example, the two most significant church-related issues for the Bible colleges in this study include declining giving from churches and declining numbers of students recruited from these schools. Concerning giving, one CAO indicated that their church-related giving has decreased to the point that it accounts for just 5 percent of income. The other CAO stated that his school’s church-related giving is increasing, largely due to the efforts of their relatively new president, as the previous president did not spend much time cultivating relationships with church leaders.

Concerning recruiting, one CAO commented, “We’re trying to find ways to reconnect with the churches. Christian higher education doesn’t seem to be as much of a priority for churches.” At least one CAO indicated that part of the challenge involves connecting with mega churches that do not seem to place as much emphasis on sending their students to a Bible college for an education. The other CAO stated that his school’s problem seems to be generated more by its location than by specific challenges with churches. Due to its urban setting, his school attracts fewer students from a Stone-Campbell church setting and more from a variety of denominational backgrounds.

Market challenges facing Christian universities and liberal arts schools.

The primary challenge facing the universities and liberal arts school in this study is competition with other schools for a shrinking pool of available students. Indeed, all three of the CAOs mentioned that this challenge is an issue for their schools. For example, one CAO noted, “Based on what students are telling us, they’re looking first at other Christian colleges, and then the second thing they’re looking at are the state schools. And we happen to be across the street from a very fine state school that’s about a third of the cost of our school.” In this situation, some parents and students begin questioning whether they can get their spiritual needs met some other way than Christian higher education. This school also faces competition from a number of quality Christian universities nearby. Another administrator stated that they must compete for students with the regional university in their area, the local community college, and regional universities associated with the independent Christian churches. He adds, “Probably twenty or thirty years ago, our admissions department would have said our biggest competitors are [two universities associated with the independent Christian churches]. Those schools wouldn’t even be in our top ten now.” Clearly, competition for students is a major concern.

The second greatest market challenge facing the universities and liberal arts school in this study is increasing student expectations, particularly concerning outdated facilities. Again, all three of the schools in this study registered this issue as a concern. One CAO described the challenge this way: “Most of our students have never shared a bedroom, never shared a bathroom. They go to schools that have climbing walls and spas and that kind of thing, and, honestly, it’s hard for a small school like us to keep up with those expectations.” Another CAO commented on the impact of “curb appeal” on potential recruits: “We’re in an aging facility . . . down the road from a couple of Christian schools that have state-of-the-art science buildings or business centers or theatres. So, we have to help [students and parents] understand that the student

experience here is not dependent upon the look of the campus.” The third CAO noted that they have been blessed with new buildings over the past few years. However, he adds, “We still have a couple of dorms that are very traditional, freshmen type dorms. A couple of them aren’t air-conditioned.” As other institutions have spent money on amenities such as a swimming pool and a climbing wall, this CAO’s school has been unable to keep up.

Finally, the third challenge facing the universities and liberal arts school in this study is declining church relations, including a decreasing number of recruits and a decrease in giving. One CAO described the relationship between his school and supporting churches this way: “We’ve found that our connection to the Stone-Campbell Movement churches is not what it used to be. . . . It seems like some churches would just as soon send their kids to a state university that has a good campus ministry, or to a Baptist college, rather than us.” Another CAO put it like this: “I think giving is affected somewhat by the economy short-term, but longer term it has to do with the trends in the American evangelical church.” The third CAO stated, “The number of churches that support us has dropped modestly over the last three to five years. This is not a matter of theology, nor is it a matter of economy. It is instead an aspect of really the emerging church movement and the way missions is done in the churches that are our strongest supporters.”

In addition to decreased giving, the universities and liberal arts school in this study have also experienced reduced numbers of students being recruited from supporting churches. For example, one CAO stated, “Thirty years ago, you could get one kid from one of our churches and then they would be kind of a bell-cow, and you’d get 30 more kids from that church. There’s really no loyalty like that anymore.” Another CAO offered this suggestion as to why this situation is occurring: “I think one of the factors is staff members and ministers at mega churches, particularly, are less likely to have attended one of our Christian church brotherhood’s institutions, and more likely to be

second career ministers who probably have a business degree from a state university, and then entered ministry later in life.” While none of the CAO’s responses to this situation were acrimonious, they clearly indicate a strong level of concern among the leaders of these schools.

Data Related to the Second Research Question

The second research question is, “How are these institutions handling these challenges?” This question gave the CAOs in this study an opportunity to share some of the techniques they are using to overcome the challenges their schools are facing.

Methods Bible colleges are using to meet the challenges. The primary way that Bible colleges in this study are handling the competition from other schools is by significantly improving the quality of their recruiting teams and by increasing the intensity of their recruiting efforts. For example, one CAO stated that when their current vice president of admissions took over several years ago, the admissions department went to six college fairs. Now their team visits over 100 college fairs a year. Additionally, the admissions department advertises on a Christian radio station that covers the entire state. Another CAO stated that his school president works closely with the state legislature to lobby for a need-based grant from the state for students with demonstrated financial need. The third CAO commented that their biggest changes have been hiring the right director of admissions and coming up with a strategic plan for recruiting.

In addition to competition for students, Bible college CAOs are facing pressure from students and parents to meet increased expectations, such as expanding the number and variety of majors that they offer. The schools in this study are seeing positive results from doing so. For example, one CAO stated, “We’ve added business and business non-profit majors in the last couple of years, as well as a TESOL minor to try to reach out to students that might have a more broad interest area.” This school is also partnering with

other schools in unique ways to bring unprecedented possibilities to their students, such as a partnership that allows them to offer an opportunity to learn urban missions in Australia.

The CAOs in this study are also under pressure to find ways to overcome the poor “curb appeal” of older, more traditional facilities. In some cases, the hard work of a school’s president to build relationships has paid off in large gifts. For example, one Bible college in this study recently received \$200,000 that they used to upgrade older dorms. In other cases, school administrators have had to become creative in how they influence students to come to their school. For example, one CAO believed that community and fellowship have helped overcome negative living conditions. He stated, “I do believe that affects us, and so we try to get students on campus and show them our community, and once they see the community, then they really love it.”

Declining church relations, especially in the areas of giving and of recruiting students, represents the third major challenge facing the Bible colleges in this study, with two of the three schools admitting challenges with church-related giving and recruiting. Yet while this problem may be ranked third overall among the schools, it shows the most creativity as far as school responses go.

For example, the Bible colleges in this study are taking several steps to increase the number of students recruited from SCM churches in their region. One step is to offer scholarships to students from SCM-affiliated churches. In one case, a college offered scholarship money to any student coming from an SCM church, whether that church actively supported the school financially or not. The CAO noted, “We did a special incentive this year. We contacted all of the churches that we connect with in any way in our area and offered free tuition scholarship for one student to come from their church, in an effort to rebuild those connections with the churches.” He added that his school received students from about 10 percent of the churches that they contacted with this offer, which led them to a number of students that would have probably gone

somewhere else. This school also offered “matching contribution” scholarships to students from SCM churches in which the school matched the tuition amount for anything that a supporting church gives a student who attends that college.

Another step that the Bible colleges in this study are taking to increase church-related recruiting is to offer classes on the church’s campus. One school in this study has partnered with several larger churches in their regions to offer classes for academic credit. Another school is partnering with larger churches to offer a series of seminars aimed at lay Christians who want to know more about the Bible but who are not yet ready to begin taking courses for credit. A third method of connecting with potential students is to partner with mega churches in the region that offer their own “institutes.” One CAO states, “We have a student whose church has partnered with us to do a two-year program. They already do an institute of their own, and so we’re taking some of those credits from that institute and folding them into our two-year degree that their students can complete in three semesters instead of four.”

Connecting with leaders from regional mega churches and other large churches is another way that Bible colleges are strengthening declining church relationships. In one case a school is offering successful church leaders an opportunity to teach classes on the college’s campus “where we can bring their staff on to campus to make that connection closer, so that when they do talk about higher education, they they’re already in conversation with us.” A second school depends primarily on their president to build and maintain relationships with megachurch leaders.

Two of the CAOs interviewed in this study noted that some of these steps had also led to increased giving from churches in their areas. For example, one CAO stated, “Definitely a lot of our efforts [to increase giving] are about connecting to churches, doing more outreach to the church, such as seminars.” Another CAO added that the biggest step they have done to improve giving is having their president actively connecting with the leaders of these churches. This CAO noted that their current

president has done a much better job of connecting with churches than had the previous president. Partly as a result of these efforts, their school recently received a gift of \$1.5 million.

Methods universities and liberal arts schools are using to meet these challenges. The universities and liberal arts school in this study are handling the competition from other schools in a variety of ways. For example, one CAO takes an analytical approach to help students see how it compares to other schools. He stated, “One of the things we try to do is sell students on what our data says about actual student experiences. We do benchmarked research using the national studies that show our students’ experiences compared to others, and we compare very favorable in every area, and are ahead in a couple.”

Another CAO’s school is taking a dual-pronged approach to meet its enrollment challenges. First, the school’s enrollment team has become much more intentional in its recruiting efforts as a way of dealing with the changing demographics of the market for potential students. For example, the recruiting team has begun to recruit more on the basis of affinity groups than simply geographical demographics. “Affinity group” refers to a distinguishable group of like-minded students, such as soccer players or musicians. Where recruiters used to be tasked according to geographical boundaries, now they recruit across the United States for potential students who have shown promise and passion for a particular area of college life. Second, this school has seen dividends in marketing, particularly through social media. The CAO stated, “We’ve worked very hard on our social media presence. We have a number of very active Facebook pages. . . . And we see these Facebook pages as our window to the world, or the world’s window in to us.” In addition to social media, the school has also seen success from more traditional marketing efforts, such as billboards, radio and newspaper ads, and maintaining a visible presence at the North American Christian Convention.

The second challenge that the universities and liberal arts school in this study are dealing with is outdated facilities. Here the schools seem to be struggling. For example, one school did not have a strategy for overcoming this challenge. Another school's CAO admitted that they had not found any "magic bullets" other than trying to help potential students realize that the overall experience is not determined by the look of some of the buildings. The third school has been able to renovate several buildings by raising the money, primarily from alumni.

The primary ways that the universities in this study are handling declining church relations include scholarships, serving, and building relationships. For example, the CAO of one school noted that they have offered special scholarships over the past two years to students from their top 100 supporting schools. He added that he has become more intentional about visiting specific supporting schools whenever he is going to be out of town.

The CAO of the second university acknowledged the need to build relationships with church leaders. He stated, "The other thing that we have to do really well and better than other people around us is we have to be connected to the churches in more significant ways than we have historically . . . because everybody's competing for the kids at my church." He also noted that relationships with the mega churches in his schools' region have been strained, partly because many of the megachurch leaders have created their own institutes of learning. Rather than fighting with these pastors for students, the president of this particular school has stated, "I want to support their efforts and go into their churches and partner with them to provide leadership training."

Data Related to the Third Research Question

The third research question is, "How have these challenges impacted the Bible and ministry programs at these institutions?" This question gave the CAOs an opportunity to reflect upon how the current market challenges as well as their schools'

responses to these challenges are affecting a core portion of the mission of Bible colleges and universities affiliated with the independent Christian churches. The average number of Bible and theology credit hours required by the Bible colleges ranges from 36 to 42, with an average of 38. The number of Bible and theology credit hours required by the universities and liberal arts school ranges from 9 to 24, with an average of 16.

Impact of these challenges on the Bible and ministry programs of Bible colleges. According to the Bible college CAOs in this study, neither the major challenges their schools are facing nor the efforts their schools are taking to meet these challenges have had a significant impact on their Bible and ministry programs. If anything, these programs have emerged slightly improved. For example, one CAO admitted that while the programs have not changed, the culture and expectations of incoming students has changed. He stated, “[There] was a sense of a cultural shift on campus because so many students were not from our supporting churches nor were they coming for vocational ministry. We were beginning to feel a real culture shift away from the importance of Bible and ministry.” To resolve this challenge while maintaining the integrity of their program, school leaders offered a major scholarship to one student from each of the school’s supporting churches, with the expectation that this move would begin to shift the campus culture back to ministry and Bible. The CAO reported that this step has worked well for his school.

Another CAO stated that the challenges of competition, increasing student expectations, and declining church support have not changed their Bible and ministry programs, either. While the number of faculty in each program and the number of Bible and ministry credit hours required of all students has remained the same, the school has reduced the number of ministry majors from six to one major called “Christian Ministry.” The impetus for this change was a recent curriculum review.

Impact of these challenges on the Bible and theology programs of universities and liberal arts schools. Of the two universities and one liberal arts school participating in this study, only one school noted that the current market challenges have had an effect on their Bible and ministry programs. This CAO stated that rather than requiring all students to have a double major in Bible and in their professional field, next year students will have an opportunity to take a reduced core of Bible classes instead. For those students who select to pursue the Bible core instead of the double major, the amount of required Bible and theology credits will drop from 24 hours to 12 hours.

Additional Findings

One additional finding should be noted. I asked each CAO in the pre-interview questionnaire to identify the percentage of students at their school who come from churches affiliated with the Stone-Campbell Movement. The purpose of this written question as well as the follow-on probes during the actual interviews was to determine to what extent these schools might be losing their distinctives or affiliation with the SCM. Only one of the CAOs mentioned that low numbers of SCM-affiliated students was a challenge for his school (in terms of recruiting mission-matched students). However, all of them noted that many students today seem unaware that they are attending an SCM-affiliated church. For example, one CAO stated, “I would guess maybe half are pretty unaware of the movement in general, and how the college and their church are connected to that movement.” Another CAO noted, “In the world these kids are coming from, there’s so much fluidity from church to church. Now, even very loyal Restoration Movement people will find a church that meets their family’s needs.” A third CAO added, “In most of our Christian churches, the folks in the congregation don’t even know that it’s part of a Stone-Campbell church.” Concerning the percentage of the SCM students at his school, another CAO commented, “But nonetheless, every year the percentage is going down. And that’s largely been due to the diversity of our programs,”

such as the addition of a football program. He added, “Football more than any other factor has diversified our student body, including lowering the percentage of our students who went to Stone Campbell churches and the percentage of our students who are Christians.” While the school administrators are thankful for every student, this CAO noted that the reduction in the percentage of SCM-affiliated students and of Christians in the student body has had a noticeable impact on the culture of the campus.

Evaluation of the Research Design

This study used a qualitative, descriptive, multiple case study methodology to assess the impact of market challenges on Bible colleges, universities, and liberal arts schools associated with the independent Christian churches. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three Bible colleges, two universities, and one liberal arts school, which represent 26 percent of the institutions of higher learning associated with the independent Christian churches in the United States.

The qualitative design was appropriate for the purpose of the study. The primary strength of the design was the ability to interview the CAOs of each school, asking them a combination of open-ended questions and follow-up probes. The primary weakness of the design was the lack of quantitative data, which may have resulted in a certain amount of subjectivity in the overall findings.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study identified and explored the relationships between three previously unknown factors among institutions of higher education affiliated with the independent Christian churches in the continental United States. These factors included determining the most significant market challenges facing the CAOs at these schools, identifying how the CAOs are responding to these challenges, and assessing to what extent, if any, these challenges have impacted the Bible and ministry programs at these schools over the past five years. Prior to conducting this study, I reviewed the most salient literature concerning market challenges facing small, private, religious colleges and universities in the United States. I also worked closely with a recognized educational leader within the independent Christian churches to ensure that the study accurately portrayed conditions facing these schools. The remainder of this chapter presents the conclusions from this study, as well as implications for current practice, limitations of the research, and suggestions for future research.¹

Research Purpose and Questions

The original intent of this study was to answer an informal question that I had heard expressed in various forms by several educators within the Bible colleges, universities, and liberal arts schools associated with the independent Christian churches. That question is simple in form but difficult in response: “Which educational model is

¹I am indebted to John David Trentham, “Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), for the general flow of the initial sections of this chapter.

more effective for institutions of higher education within the independent Christian churches – a Bible college model that trains students to be the ministers, professors, and church workers of tomorrow or a university model that trains students for a variety of employment positions while also offering a certain amount of Bible and theology education to these students?” Unfortunately, due to limitations that will be discussed later, this study was unable to answer this question fully.

This study was able to answer the research questions as developed, however.

These research questions are as follows:

1. What are the primary market challenges facing colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches?
2. How are these institutions addressing these challenges?
3. How have these challenges impacted the Bible and ministry programs at these institutions?

Research Findings and Implications

This section records the findings and implications of this study according to each of the three research questions. The findings suggest that while most institutions of higher education affiliated with the independent Christian churches are facing similar problems, responses to those challenges are varied. Additionally, while the findings do not suggest that these challenges are having an impact on the Bible and ministry programs at these schools, certain implications can be drawn from these findings.

The following list is a summary of the major findings by research question:

1. Both Bible colleges and Christian universities/liberal arts schools face similar market challenges, to include competition from other schools, increasing student expectations concerning outdated facilities, and the impact of declining church relations on giving and recruiting. The only significant difference in the problems facing the different types of schools is the addition of increased student expectations for a wider variety of majors in the Bible colleges.
2. Administrators at all three types of schools are reaching more students by targeting scholarships to SCM schools in their regions and by offering to teach classes and

seminars on mega church campuses. Beyond those two steps, administrators at the Bible colleges in this study appear to be focusing on increasing the size and efforts of their recruiting teams, while universities and the liberal arts school seem to be taking more unique approaches to finding students.

3. This study showed no noticeable impact of market challenges on the Bible and ministry programs at both types of schools.

The following list is a summary of possible implications by research question:

1. Bible college administrators may find it easier to attract students if they offer a wider variety of majors.
2. Administrators at all three types of schools may be able to reach more students at mega churches by using a “teaching church” model.²
3. While the findings seem to indicate that the difference in the Bible college model and the university or liberal arts model have had no impact on the Bible and ministry programs in these schools, the scope of this research question may have been too short to determine the long-term effects of previous decisions in these areas.

Research Question 1

The first research question focused on the primary market challenges facing the Bible colleges and universities participating in the study. “Market challenges” refers to the financial, enrollment, student expectations, church relations, and other similar challenges that place stress on Christian colleges and universities. These factors were developed from a review of the literature.³

The CAOs interviewed for this study described twenty-one challenges facing their schools.⁴ I then condensed these twenty-one challenges into five categories: tuition, giving, enrollment, church relations, and increasing student expectations. Based upon a simple algorithm described in Chapter 3, I identified the primary challenges facing the Bible colleges in this study to be competition from other schools, increasing student

²“Committed to Ministry: A New Way to Study Ministry,” Cincinnati Christian University (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Christian University), 1-4.

³James Martin and James E. Samels, “Defining Stressed Institutions and Leading Them Effectively,” in *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence*, ed. James Martin, James E. Samels, and associates (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2009), 3.

⁴See Table 1, codes “student debt” through “technology,” 43.

expectations concerning outdated facilities and the need to offer more majors, and the impact of declining church relations on giving and recruiting. The primary challenges facing the universities and liberal arts school in this study are increasing competition from other schools for a limited pool of students, increasing student expectations concerning outdated facilities, and the impact of declining church relations on giving and recruiting. In other words, *with the exception of increasing student expectations for a wider variety of majors*, the challenges facing the Bible colleges and the universities in this study are nearly identical.

Therefore, one possible implication from this study is that the Christian university or liberal arts model may be the way forward for some of the Bible colleges affiliated with the independent Christian churches. Students appear to be “voting with their feet,” attending larger schools that offer more choices. For example, while most of the Bible colleges interviewed for this study appear to be well led, the average full-time equivalent number of students at the Bible colleges in this branch of the Stone-Campbell Movement is 179 while the average full-time equivalent number of students at the universities and liberal arts schools in this branch is 928. If Martin and Samels’ description of an at-risk school as “smaller than it should be and needs to be,” perhaps some of the Bible colleges affiliated with the independent Christian churches should consider transitioning to a university model.⁵

Research Question 2

Research question 2 attempted to determine how the Bible colleges and universities in this study have responded to the market challenges of increased competition for a limited number of students, increasing student expectations concerning aging facilities, and the impact of declining church relationships on recruiting and giving.

⁵Martin and Samels, “Defining Stressed Institutions,” 3.

The responses to these challenges are as varied as the schools themselves.

In general, Bible college administrators seem to be taking three main approaches to improving recruiting: increasing their recruiting efforts, targeting SCM churches with additional scholarship money, and by offering new majors. For example, when asked, several CAOs mentioned that their recruiting officials had redoubled their efforts.⁶ Additionally, some Bible college CAOs expressed hope that expanding their number of majors will help with recruiting future classes. University CAOs, on the other hand, seem to be taking more unique approaches, such as recruiting along affinity groups and using benchmarked research for comparison purposes. Chief academic officers from both types of schools continue to emphasize the use of social media in recruiting.

Both Bible college and university CAOs struggle to overcome the challenge of aging facilities. Administrators from both camps find themselves searching for major donors who will help refurbish buildings while simultaneously attempting to persuade students of the unique “community” aspects of their school. Neither type of school seems to have found a long-term solution to declining facilities.

Chief academic officers from both Bible colleges and universities also admit to serious challenges connecting with churches in their regions, which has led to a decline in both giving and in student recruits. Both Bible colleges and universities offer scholarships to supporting churches. Both types of schools also attempt to offer courses on mega church campuses and to bring these leaders to their campuses to meet with students.

Research Question 3

The third research question attempted to determine what impact these market challenges, and the schools’ resulting responses to these challenges, have had on the

⁶Interviewees’ names and school identities have been withheld to ensure confidentiality.

Bible and ministry programs at the schools in this study. As the findings show, these challenges seem to have had little impact on these programs at either the Bible colleges or the universities and liberal arts school in this study. However, the scope of this question was too short to determine the long-term effects that these types of challenges might have on these programs.

Research Limitations

As mentioned previously, this study had at least two strengths – the ability of qualitative studies to identify and describe unknown variables and the relatively large percentage (26 percent) of schools participating in the study. On the other hand, this study faced weaknesses as well, including the lack of scope to interview other administrators at each school and the lack of a longitudinal factor to the study. Interviewing each school’s president as well as its CAO would have resulted in a richer set of data as each leader would have been able to focus more on challenges in his or her area of responsibility. Additionally, as mentioned under research question 3, the scope of this study was too short to determine what changes market challenges have had on the Bible and ministry programs at these schools.

Recommendations for Further Research

Bible colleges, universities, and liberal arts schools affiliated with the independent Christian churches could benefit from additional studies that focus on three areas. First, the findings of the research project could be strengthened by expanding the study to include school presidents along with the chief CAOs. Including the school presidents would lend more direct discussion of recruiting and financial challenges.

Second, several universities among the independent Christian churches have taken a unique step recently to improve their relationships with supporting mega churches. For example, in the fall of 2016, Cincinnati Christian University launched an innovative partnership known as the “Teaching Church” model. In this approach,

ministry students will be able to combine volunteer internships at regional mega-churches under the tutelage of teaching church staff members while pursuing the bulk of their studies with the university. During their senior year, students will complete a 20-hour-per-week paid internship with a local teaching church.⁷ A third possible study would be to expand this study to include the Teaching Church model as well as interviews with some of the senior pastors of the participating churches to assess their attitudes concerning whether or not this model improves the relationship between schools and supporting churches.

Finally, I was unable to determine whether the current set of market challenges is having any impact on the Bible and ministry programs at the schools in this study. As noted, this lack of findings is likely due to the brief length and the qualitative nature of the study. Adding a section that focuses on the history of these schools might better address this question, as many of the decisions that impact the current state of the Bible and ministry programs were likely made earlier in each school's history. Another possibility might be to adopt a mixed-methods design in which the current qualitative interview methodology is augmented by a quantitative survey of the beliefs and attitudes of the faculty members concerning the Bible and ministry programs at each school.

Conclusion

I have benefitted greatly from understanding some of the major challenges that schools affiliated with the independent Christian churches are facing as well as from learning some of the methods that the administrators of those schools are taking to overcome these challenges. I hope that sharing the results of this study will prove helpful to other educators across the Stone-Campbell Movement as well.

⁷“Committed to Ministry: A New Way to Study Ministry,” 1-4.

APPENDIX 1

INSTITUTIONS INCLUDED IN THE POPULATION¹

Bible Colleges

1. Boise Bible College, Boise, Idaho (166 FTE students)
2. Carolina Christian College, Winston-Salem, North Carolina (42 FTE students)
3. Central Christian College of the Bible, Moberly, Missouri (255 FTE students)
4. Colegio Biblico, Eagle Pass, Texas (60 FTE students)
5. Crossroads College, Rochester, Minnesota (104 FTE students)
6. Dallas Christian College, Dallas, Texas (256 FTE students)
7. Great Lakes Christian College, Lansing, Michigan (156 FTE students)
8. Manhattan Christian College, Manhattan, Kansas (267 FTE students)
9. Mid-South Christian College, Memphis, Tennessee (27 FTE students)
10. Nebraska Christian College, Papillion, Nebraska (135 FTE students)
11. Ozark Christian College, Joplin, Missouri (675 FTE students)
12. Saint Louis Christian College, Florissant, Missouri (150 FTE students)
13. Summit Christian College, Gering, Nebraska (32 FTE)

Christian Universities²

1. Cincinnati Christian University, Cincinnati, Ohio (773 FTE students)
2. Johnson University, Knoxville, Tennessee and Kissimmee, Florida (1245 FTE students)
3. Kentucky Christian University, Grayson, Kentucky (545 FTE students)
4. Lincoln Christian University, Lincoln, Illinois (916 FTE students)
5. Mid-Atlantic Christian University, Elizabeth City, North Carolina (172 FTE students)
6. Northwest Christian University, Eugene, Oregon (640 FTE students)
7. Hope International University, Fullerton, California (1,387 FTE students)

Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities

1. Milligan College and Emmanuel Christian Seminary, Johnson City, Tennessee (1,147 FTE students)
2. Point University, West Point, Georgia (1,311 FTE students)
3. William Jessup University, Rocklin, California (1,139 FTE students)

¹“Christian Colleges, 2014-15,” chart, *Christian Standard* (August 2015), 38-39.

²Where applicable, the number of FTE students for Christian colleges and universities and for Christian liberal arts colleges and universities includes both undergraduate and graduate students.

APPENDIX 2

EMAIL TO CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS

Dr. _____,

We haven't met before, but I am a fellow scholar in the independent Christian Church wing of the Stone-Campbell Movement. I am writing to request your participation in a qualitative research study that I believe will help the chief academic officers (CAOs), administrators, and trustees of our schools.

I am working on my master of theology degree in Christian education at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The title of my thesis is "Assessing the Impact of Current Market Challenges on Colleges and Universities Affiliated with Independent Christian Churches." I am interviewing the CAOs at two Bible colleges, two Christian universities, and two liberal arts colleges in our movement to determine what these CAOs believe to be the greatest challenges facing their schools and how they are responding to these challenges.

The primary purpose for this study is to determine the current market challenges facing colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches and to determine how these institutions are responding to these challenges. A secondary purpose is to determine how these challenges are impacting the Bible and ministry programs at these schools.

I hope that you will choose to be part of this study! Your time commitment will be about one hour for the interview and another thirty minutes to answer a few brief questions before the interview.

To help you decide whether or not to participate, I've attached a copy of the interview questions we will cover. I've also attached an informed consent form for you to sign and a set of seven questions to be answered in writing before the interview. *Please complete this form, sign it, and return it to me by Friday, August 21, at billth1983@outlook.com.*

I would like to conduct our video interview during the period of September 1-3. **If you are interested in participating in this research, please respond to this email by Wednesday, August 12.** If I don't hear from you first, I will follow up with you by phone.

Thanks!
Bill Thompson, D.Min.

APPENDIX 3

INFORMED CONSENT

Low Risk Informed Consent

Please take a moment to read this form. If you agree to participate in the interview process, please sign this form and return it to me at billth1983@outlook.com prior to our interview.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help determine the current market challenges facing colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches and to determine how some of these institutions are responding to these challenges. This research is being conducted by Dr. Bill Thompson for purposes of writing a thesis for his master of theology degree and for possible publication in the *Stone-Campbell Journal*. In this research, you will be asked a number of questions related to some of the market challenges your school is facing (including finances, enrollment, student expectations, church support, and faculty hiring) and how your school is responding to these challenges. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name or the name of your institution be reported, or your name or the name of your institution identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your signature below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Electronic signature

Date

APPENDIX 4

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please take a moment to complete the questions on this page as well as the informed consent form on the next page and return both pages to me prior to our interview. Unless otherwise noted, please base your answers on the 2014-2015 academic year. You can email them to me at billth1983@outlook.com.

General

1. Is your school predominantly:

- A Bible college?
- A Christian college or university?
- A Christian liberal arts institution?

Definitions:

Bible college: An institution of Christian higher education that provides undergraduate instruction in general education, Bible, theology, and ministry, with a primary emphasis on preparation for some sort of ministry or ministry-related vocation.

Christian liberal arts institution: A college or university whose curriculum is aimed broadly at increasing knowledge in general studies, such as humanities and science, as opposed to a professional or vocational curriculum, all while integrating learning with Christian faith.

Christian university: A Christian institution of higher learning that offers both undergraduate and graduate education with an emphasis on both the transmission of and creation of knowledge.

Finances

1. What percentage of your school's annual operating budget must be covered by tuition instead of giving or an endowment?
2. What percentage of the annual budget is covered by church-based giving?
3. What percentage of your deferred maintenance is unfunded?

Enrollment

1. What is your school's setting (rural, suburban, or urban)?
2. What was your full-time-equivalent enrollment of undergraduate students:
 - a. In 2014—2015?
 - b. In 2013—2014?
3. What percentage of your students come from the Stone-Campbell Movement?

APPENDIX 5

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions regarding the primary market challenges facing the colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches (RQ 1):

1. Primary question: What are some of the biggest market challenges facing your school?
2. Potential follow-on probes:
 - a. What impact has the economy had on your school?
 - b. How have changing student expectations impacted your ability to recruit and retain quality students?
 - c. What percentage of your students comes from a church affiliated with the Stone-Campbell Movement?

Questions regarding how these institutions are addressing these challenges (RQ 2):

1. Primary question: How is your school addressing these challenges?
2. Potential follow-on probes:
 - a. How is your school addressing financial challenges?
 - b. How is your school addressing enrollment challenges?
 - c. How does your school deal with students who are not affiliated with the Stone-Campbell Movement?

Questions regarding how these challenges have impacted the Bible and ministry programs at these schools (RQ 3):

1. Primary question: How have your initiatives to recruit and retain students impacted your Bible and ministry programs over the past five years?
2. Potential follow-on probes:
 - a. How has the number of full-time Bible and ministry faculty changed over the past five years?
 - b. How many hours of Bible and theology are your students required to take in order to graduate?
 - c. Has this number changed over the past five years?
 - d. What percentage of your faculty are required to be affiliated with the Stone-Campbell Movement?

Final question: Is there anything you would like to add?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Benne, Robert. *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with their Religious Traditions*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *1 Corinthians*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Brinkmann, Svend, and Steiner Kvale. *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage, 2015.
- Burtchaell, James Tunstead. *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Central Christian College of the Bible. *2013-2015 Academic Catalog*. Moberly, MO: Central Christian College of the Bible, 2013.
- Cincinnati Christian University. *Academic Catalog 2015-2016*. Cincinnati: Cincinnati Christian University, 2015.
- Creswell, John W. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008.
- DeVellis, Robert F. *Scale Development: Theory and Applications*, 3rd ed. Edited by Leonard Bickman and Debra J. Rog. Los Angeles: Sage, 2012.
- Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.
- Garland, David E. *1 Corinthians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Leedy, Paul D., and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod. *Practical Research: Planning and Design*. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004.
- Litfin, Duane. *Conceiving the Christian College*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- North, James B. *Union in Truth: An Interpretative History of the Restoration Movement*. Cincinnati: Standard, 1994.
- Ream, Todd C., and Perry L. Glanzer. *The Idea of a Christian College: A Reexamination for Today's University*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013.

Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011.

Verbrugge, Verlyn D., ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Abridged ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean. *Quality Research Papers*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

William Jessup University. *2015-2016 Academic Catalog*. Sacramento: William Jessup University, 2015.

Dissertations

Ingram, Osmond Carraway, Jr. "The Conceptualization and Perception of Servant Leadership in Christian Higher Education." Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003.

Latoni Ramirez, Raul Martin, "Pastoral Leadership Practices in Evangelical Multiethnic Congregations: A Multi-Case Study." Ed.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012.

Trentham, John David. "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme." Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012.

Articles

Adrian, William B., Jr. "The Christian University: Maintaining Distinctions in a Pluralistic Culture." In *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian, 445-55. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Anderson, William P. "How to Keep a Christian College Christian." In *Faith, Freedom, and Higher Education: Historical Analysis and Contemporary Reflections*, edited by P. C. Kemeny, 180-95. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013.

Andringa, Robert C. "Keeping the Faith: Leadership Challenges Unique to Religiously Affiliated Colleges and Universities." In *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence*, edited by James Martin, James E. Samels, and associates, 168-84. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2009.

Baker, William R., Paul J. Kissling, and Tony Springer. "Coming Full Circle: Biblical Scholarship in Christian Churches." *Stone-Campbell Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 165-91.

Billman, Kathleen D. "Honoring Complexities, Celebrating Collegueship." In *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education*, edited by Kathleen D. Billman and Bruce C. Birch, 3-19. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

- Blumenstyk, Goldie and Joshua Hatch. "180 Private Colleges Fail Education Dept's Latest Financial-Responsibility Test." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 61, no. 27 (March 20, 2015). Accessed April 21, 2015. www.ebscohost.com.
- "Christian Colleges, 2014-2015," chart. *Christian Standard* (August 2015). Accessed August 4, 2015. www.christianstandard.com.
- "Committed to Ministry: A New Way to Study Ministry." Cincinnati: Cincinnati Christian University, 2016.
- Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. "Profile of Post-Secondary Education," May 2010. Accessed March 12, 2015. <https://www.cccu.org>.
- Cummins, D. Duane. "Higher Education, Views of in the Movement." In *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by Douglas A. Foster, 390-94. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Dehne, George, and Christopher Small. "The Dilemma of the Tuition-Driven College," *Trusteeship* (September/October 2006): 1-6.
- Glanzer, Perry L., P. Jesse Rine, and Phil Davignon. "Assessing the Denominational Identity of American Evangelical Colleges and Universities, Part I: Denominational Patronage and Institutional Policy." *Christian Higher Education* 12, no. 3 (2013): 181-202. Accessed March 23, 2015. <http://ds.doi.org/10.1080/15363759>.
- Hamilton, Mark W. "Transition and Continuity: Biblical Scholarship in Today's Churches of Christ." *Stone-Campbell Journal* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 187-203.
- Henck, Anita Fitzgerald. "Walking the Tightrope: Christian Colleges and Universities in a Time of Change." *Christian Higher Education* 10, no. 3 (2011): 196-214. Accessed March 23, 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15363759>.
- Hughes, Richard T. "What Can the Church of Christ Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education?" In *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian, 402-11. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Marsden, George M. "The Soul of the American University Revisited." In *Faith, Freedom, and Higher Education: Historical Analysis and Contemporary Reflections*, edited by P. C. Kemeny, 1-13. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013.
- Martin, James and James E. Samels. "Defining Stressed Institutions and Leading Them Effectively." In *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence*, edited by James Martin, James E. Samels, and associates, 3-30. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2009.
- McLean, Carolyn. "U.S. Not-For-Profit Private Universities' Fiscal 2013 Median Ratios: Despite An Improved Investment Environment, Budget Pressures Continue" (July 8, 2014): 1-39. Accessed April 20, 2015. www.standardandpoors.com/ratingsdirect.
- North, James B. "Bible College Movement." In *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by Douglas A. Foster, 92-94. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

- Olbricht, Thomas H. "Churches of Christ." In *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by Douglas A. Foster, 212-20. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Ross, Bobby. "Generic Christian U." *Christianity Today* (January 14, 2011). Accessed March 16, 2015. www.christianitytoday.com.
- Ryken, Leland, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, III. "Authority, Human." *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Edited by Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, III, 59-63. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998.
- Salter, Guenter E. "The Purpose and Benefit of a Christian Liberal Arts Education." Accessed June 29, 2015. www.bjupress.com.
- Smith, Julien C. H., and T. Laine Scales. "Stewardship: A Biblical Model for the Formation of Christian Scholars." *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 17, no. 1 (2013): 79-97.
- Swinney, Greg. "Six Stepped Down." *Christian Standard* (August 2014). Accessed March 9, 2015. www.christianstandard.com.
- Toulouse, Mark G. "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)." In *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by Douglas A. Foster, 177-84. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Townsley, Michael. "Effective Financial Leadership of Stressed Colleges and Universities." In *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence*, edited by James Martin, James E. Samels, and associates, 123-43. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2009.
- Webb, Henry E. "Christian Churches/Churches of Christ." In *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by Douglas A. Foster, 185-89. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Weedman, Gary. "21st-Century Challenges to Biblical Higher Education." *Christian Standard* (March 2012). Accessed March 13, 2016. www.christianstandard.com.
- _____. "A Third Way: Biblical Higher Education For the Twenty-first Century." Johnson Bible College white paper (January 3, 2011).
- Zigarelli, Michael. "Training, Transforming, and Transitioning: A Blueprint for the Christian University." *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 21, no. 1 (2012): 62-79.

ABSTRACT

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF MARKET CHALLENGES ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AFFILIATED WITH INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

William Warren Thompson, Th.M.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. John David Trentham

This study used a qualitative, descriptive, collective case study approach to assess some of the current market challenges facing colleges and universities affiliated with independent Christian churches and to describe how some of these institutions are responding to these challenges. The chief academic officers (CAOs) for six of these schools were interviewed to determine their perceptions of the greatest market challenges facing their schools, the steps they were taking to meet these challenges, and the impact these challenges were having on the Bible and ministry programs at their schools. The findings seem to indicate that CAOs of Bible colleges, Christian universities, and liberal arts schools face similar problems, yet respond with various amounts of success based upon their model of education and their own abilities. The findings also seem to indicate that the Christian university and liberal arts school model may be the way forward for most Bible colleges affiliated with the independent Christian churches.

VITA

William Warren Thompson

EDUCATION

B.S., United States Military Academy, 1983
M.Div., Cincinnati Christian University, 2007
D.Min., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2014

PUBLICATIONS

“Preaching Isaiah’s Message Today.” *Asbury Journal* 70, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 100-14.
“Servant, Leader, or Both? A Fresh Look at Mark 10:35-45.” *Journal for Applied Christian Leadership* 9, no. 2 (October 2015): 54-65.

ORGANIZATIONS

Stone-Campbell Scholars Association

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Adjunct Faculty, Dallas Christian College, Dallas, Texas, 2013-2014
Adjunct Faculty, Ohio Christian University, Circleville, Ohio, 2015-

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Director of Adult Bible Fellowships, First Church of Christ, Burlington, Kentucky, 2005-2007
Senior Minister, Nicholson Christian Church, Independence, Kentucky, 2007-2012
Interim senior Minister, Harvest Pointe Christian Church, Goshen, Ohio, 2014-2015
Senior Minister, Discovery Christian Church, Cocoa, Florida, 2015-