Assessing Student Engagement with Campus Chaplains: A Pilot Study from a Residential Liberal Arts College

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Abstract

This article examines student engagement with chaplaincy services through a pilot survey administered at a private liberal arts college (n=1043). Almost half of the respondents reported engagement with campus chaplains, which varied by religious tradition and race. Respondents who had engaged with chaplains were more likely to report integrating spirituality into daily life, feeling supported in wrestling with life's big questions, and experiencing spiritual growth. They were not more likely to feel they were resilient or could manage stress. The authors encourage researchers to build on the model and findings presented here to identify empirically how chaplaincy services affect students.

Mirroring recent scholarly interest in religion, spirituality, and higher education more broadly (Mayhew et al., 2016; Schmalzbauer and Mahoney 2018), a small but growing body of research examines the work of chaplains in American colleges and universities (e.g., Kowalski and Becker 2015; van Stee, Cadge, & Barton, 2021). Long present on both public and private campuses across the United States, chaplains provide spiritual and religious care for students outside of a traditional congregational or parish setting (Schmalzbauer and Mahoney 2018).[1] In the past two decades, descriptive studies have highlighted the diverse roles of campus chaplains (e.g. Barton, Cadge, & van Stee, 2020; Khoja-Moolji, 2011), the rise of multifaith chaplaincy models (e.g., Kazanjian, 2013; Schmalzbauer, 2018b), and the organizational contexts in which chaplains work (Grubbs, 2006; van Stee et al., 2021).

While this literature offers a rough sketch of who campus chaplains are and how they are institutionally situated, we know almost nothing about how their work impacts students, staff, or their institutions. And although the landmark UCLA study of spirituality in higher education examined the impact of spiritual and religious growth on psychological well-being and academic outcomes, it did not examine the role of chaplains and campus religious programming (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2010). Recent research in the sociology of religion has illuminated the religious beliefs of college students (e.g., Hill 2011; Small & Bowman, 2011) and how religiosity is related to students' behaviors and experiences in college (e.g., Kuh & Gonyea, 2006; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007) but has largely overlooked student engagement with campus chaplaincies (for a review, see Mayrl & Oeur, 2009). Finally, studies that identified

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[1] We recognize that there is no commonly agreed-upon definition of *chaplain*. For the purposes of this article, we define a chaplain as a "person who is appointed and/or approved by the college administration and responsible to it for campus religious work," following Seymour Smith's (1954, p. 7) usage in *The American College Chaplaincy*. Although some institutions of higher education confer the title of chaplain upon individuals employed by external organizations (e.g., parachurch groups, denominations), we include only those who are paid staff of a college or university.

college student outcomes related to religious involvement—including a handful that focused on participation in campus religious groups—have done little to fill this gap (Bryant, 2007; De Soto et al., 2009; Li & Murphy, 2018; Mooney, 2010; Park & Bowman, 2015). These studies relied on measures of engagement, attendance, and campus group participation that either did not involve chaplaincy services or were too broad to yield meaningful data on the specific impact of chaplains (as opposed to, for example, the effects of participating in a local congregation or a campus parachurch organization). This literature also provided no estimate of the proportion of students who engage with chaplains and chaplaincy programs.

In this article we employ Courtney Bender et al.'s (2013) approach to studying religion "on the edge" by examining the ways religion and spirituality are institutionally embedded in a secular liberal arts college through the work of its chaplaincy staff (Cadge & Konieczny, 2014). Bender and colleagues urged scholars to look beyond the traditional spheres of religious activity—parishes and congregations—to examine how religion is present in ostensibly non-religious spaces. In this vein, we argue that studying the presence of religion in non-religious organizations is crucial to understanding religion in 21st century higher education, where young adults are both increasingly religiously diverse and increasingly unaffiliated with religious institutions (Mayhew et al., 2016; Cooperman 2015).

As a first step toward identifying the effects of student engagement with campus chaplaincy services, we developed a pilot study to gather data on students' experiences with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life at a private, residential, women's college. We surveyed undergraduate students to identify who had contact with chaplains, what this contact looks like, and how contact with the chaplains may be related to various measures of student well-being. We hope that our preliminary findings will encourage others to build on the model and results

presented here. We encourage researchers to ask, for example, how contact with chaplains may shape students' attitudes concerning religious diversity and pluralism and particularly what impact it might have on mental health, a challenge on many campuses today.

This approach draws on research in the field of healthcare chaplaincy that links the work of chaplains to outcomes for patients, families, and staff (e.g. Fitchett, 2017; Johnson et al., 2014; Marin et al., 2015; Snowden & Telfer, 2017). This work suggests that patients who are visited by a chaplain are more satisfied with their hospital stays and that visits from chaplains may influence depression and anxiety among hospitalized patients (e.g. Bay et al., 2008; Iler, Obershain, & Camac, 2001; Pearce et al., 2012). Such an approach has not been present in research on college and university chaplaincy, which rarely connects the work of chaplains to outcomes for students, faculty, or staff (Aune, Guest, & Law, 2019). Descriptive studies have shown chaplains integrally involved in caring for students affected by personal and national tragedies, advocating for the needs of marginalized communities, and facilitating difficult conversations among different groups on campus (Barton et al., 2020; Schmalzbauer, 2018b), but the impact of their work in these areas has not been examined empirically. We know very little about the students who participate in activities led by chaplains, what this participation consists of, or any effects it may have.

Background

We approached this research curious about the changing religious landscape of higher education. Young adults are less likely than members of older generations to identify with a religious tradition or attend religious services (Cooperman, 2015). At the same time, college students are more religiously diverse than ever, and many expect institutions of higher education to create inclusive environments for students who identify with diverse religious and

nonreligious traditions (Kosmin & Keysar, 2013; Rockenbach et al., 2014). How, in these contexts, do chaplains address student needs and contribute to campus life? Who are the students who use chaplaincy services, and what does this contact with chaplains look like? What demographic factors predict engagement with chaplaincy services? Most importantly, how—if at all—do chaplains impact student experiences and outcomes?

Descriptive studies highlighted the diverse roles of campus chaplains, which vary across institutional contexts and among chaplains of different traditions (e.g. Davis, Dunn, & Davis, 2004; Schmalzbauer, 2014, 2018b). Among Christian chaplains surveyed in the National Study of Campus Ministries, the most common goals listed by respondents included "facilitate the spiritual formation of students," "provide worship or sacraments," "foster a commitment to social justice," and "create community that appreciates diversity" (Schmalzbauer, 2014). The relative importance of these goals varied across the types of colleges and universities represented in this study, suggesting that the work of chaplains may look different across institutional contexts. Chaplains employed by Catholic institutions, for example, were more likely to emphasize social justice than their counterparts at conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant, or other private institutions (Schmalzbauer, 2014). However, these studies did not look at how students perceived these goals or whether contact with chaplaincy programs was correlated with greater perceived spiritual growth or more appreciation for religious diversity among students.

The Changing Landscape of Campus Chaplaincy

While much of what we know about campus religious life is based on studies of Christian chaplains, campus ministers, and parachurch leaders (e.g., Cawthon & Jones, 2004; Schmalzbauer 2018a), there is growing attention to the presence of religious leaders from other traditions and how their work may differ from that of their Christian colleagues (e.g. Khoja-

Moolji, 2011; Kowalski & Becker, 2015). Rebecca Barton et al. (2020) for example, observed that chaplains from non-Christian traditions were involved in formal and informal efforts to support and advocate for students from underrepresented religious communities. Additionally, a few recent studies focused on the development of Muslim chaplaincy in higher education (Gilliat-Ray, 2013; Kowalski & Becker, 2015), illuminating the role Muslim chaplains play in "humanizing the Muslim experience" (Khoja-Moolji, 2011) and caring for students who encounter prejudice or discrimination (Barton et al., 2020).

Chaplains and other religious leaders from many traditions have been increasingly involved in initiatives centered around interfaith understanding and collaboration (Brodeur & Patel, 2006; Forster-Smith, 2013). On campuses with religious leaders from multiple traditions, Schmalzbauer (2018b) observed that chaplains have become "interfaith traffic directors," responsible for ensuring peaceful relations between diverse religious groups. Similarly, Barton et al. (2020) reported that chaplains from a variety of traditions described the process of "building bridges" between different communities on campus (including different religious groups) as a central contribution that chaplains make to campus life. While we know from the literature that many chaplains try to foster a respect for religious diversity, we do not know how this "bridge building" work affects students.

Chaplaincy positions in institutions of higher education were once almost exclusively held by White, male, Protestant clergy (Smith, 1954; Hammond, 1966). Today, these positions are increasingly filled by women and laypeople. Christian chaplains are still predominantly White, but this group has become slightly more diverse in recent years. One 2006 study, for example, found that 88% of the Christian chaplain respondents were White (Schmalzbauer, 2014:6). Moreover, since the late 1990s, Christian and Jewish chaplains have been joined by a

growing number of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Humanists (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018). While we suspect that chaplains from these traditions are more racially and ethnically diverse than their Christian counterparts, no data exist to provide a demographic sketch of these leaders.

Terminology for and definitions of chaplaincy vary widely across higher education. Although titles like *campus minister* and *affiliate* indicate that an individual has been sent to campus by an external religious organization, the titles of university-employed religious leaders—the focus of this study—are not consistent across (or even within) campuses. Some institutions refer to all spiritual and religious life staff as *chaplains*, while others employ titles like *Muslim advisor* or *coordinator for Hindu life*. In this article, we use the term *chaplain* when referring to staff in the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life (a pseudonym) at the college where the survey was administered (van Stee et al. 2021). We refer to the administrator who leads the center as the *dean of spiritual and religious life.* While college students may interact with a wide range of religious and spiritual leaders both on and off campus, this article looks specifically at students' interactions with the chaplains and dean.

Developing Meaningful Measures of Impact

We are aware of only one scholarly attempt to assess the impact of campus chaplaincy services. In the United Kingdom, Kristin Aune et al. (2019) collected interview and survey data from chaplains, students, administrators, and external religion and belief organizations associated with five types of British institutions of higher education. It is important to note that the scope of this research was broader than that of our study. Whereas our study focuses on chaplains employed by a college, Aune et al. (2019) also interviewed volunteer chaplains as well as religious leaders who receive funding from off-campus groups.

In the interviews, Aune et al. (2019) found that students from across institutions emphasized the importance of their conversations with chaplains, religious and social activities connected to the chaplaincy, and the physical space of the chaplaincy. The survey results from this study suggest that relatively few students in each university reported using chaplaincy services, but that those who did interact with the chaplains did so frequently. Among chaplaincy users, the most common forms of engagement included participating in a religious service, talking one-on-one with a chaplain, and socializing with friends in chaplaincy spaces. These data also shed light on who uses chaplaincy services in British universities. Aune et al. (2019) reported that students from ethnic minority backgrounds, non-heterosexual students, international students, and postgraduates made up a disproportionate number of chaplaincy users, supporting previous research that identified international and ethnic minority students as more likely to view chaplaincy as central to their university experience (Guest et al. 2013).

These findings both advance our understanding of how students experience chaplaincy services and underscore the need for further research. First, beyond measuring student satisfaction with chaplaincy services, researchers need to look for ways that contact with chaplains impacts social and academic outcomes. Our pilot study provides an opportunity to test different ways of measuring student well-being, such as self-reported feelings of resilience, spiritual growth, and ability to manage stress in college. Second, given the vast differences between the American and British religious landscapes (Berger, Davie, & Fokas, 2008; Evans, 2018) and the institutions of higher education in these two countries (Turner, 1960; Kerckhoff, 2001), we need empirical studies of American colleges and universities to better understand campus chaplaincy in the United States.

Methods

To begin to understand which students have contact with chaplains on college and university campuses in the United States and what effects, if any, this contact has on them, we conducted a pilot study at one residential liberal arts college. This institution is a selective, private, women's college that has no religious affiliation. Among the first institutions to develop a robust multifaith chaplaincy program, this college is characterized by a focus on student experience that includes spirituality, meaning, and purpose. At the time we administered our survey, religious and spiritual life had been fully integrated into student affairs for more than two years. We designed a ten-minute online survey instrument (delivered through Qualtrics) in which we asked 27 questions about student knowledge of and experience with spiritual and religious groups on and off campuses, the ways in which they have had contact with those groups, their feelings about a set of spiritual, religious and more broadly existential issues, and their well-being. We also included a set of demographic questions. The full instrument is included in the Appendix. We borrowed questions from existing instruments including the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen, the College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey, the Pew Religious Landscape Study, and the Student Well-Being Process Questionnaire whenever possible.[2]

The survey was sent by the dean of spiritual and religious life to all undergraduates enrolled at this college. Every student received an initial electronic invitation through the class list-serv during the last week of the 2018 fall semester, followed by weekly reminders over the next seven weeks. This period of time included the students' winter break, which afforded students the opportunity to complete the survey when they had time on their hands and emails

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[2] The survey instrument is included as an appendix. Questions 9 and 10 are from the UCLA 2007 College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey. Questions 12-18 are from the Student Well-Being Process Questionnaire. Questions 19-21 are from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen. Demographic questions are adapted from the Pew Religious Landscape Study.

slowed. Participation in the survey was incentivized by a weekly drawing for prizes for students who completed the survey. The final response rate was 1043 of 2350. Of the respondents, approximately 55% fully completed the survey. The respondents started the survey, but many did not finish due to the length and detail of the survey.

Institutional data on the religious composition of the student body indicate the following religious distribution: Christian (28%), None (26%), Spiritual but not Religious (14%), Atheist, Agnostic, or Humanist (12%), Jewish (6%), Muslim (4%), Hindu (4%), Other (2%), Buddhist (2%), and Multifaith (2%). While our survey used slightly different religious categories, these data provide useful context for evaluating the degree to which our sample reflects the broader student body. We saw, for example, that the share of Christian respondents (33%), and the share of those who identified as Atheist, Agnostic, or Humanist (16%) were both larger in our sample than in the general student population. Additionally, the share of students who selected more than one religion (our "mixed" category) was far larger at 19% than the "multifaith" category used by the university (2%)[3]. Our convenience sample also had a smaller share of students who identified as "spiritual but not religious" or "none," suggesting those who were more closely aligned with religious life on campus may have been more likely to complete the entire survey.

Institutional Context

The Center for Spiritual and Religious Life at this college employed a full-time dean and chaplains who served the Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Unitarian Universalist communities on campus. Additionally, a part-time Office Coordinator performed

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[3] However, this finding is likely the result of differences in the survey format and wording. Our "mixed" category was not listed as a stand-alone category on the survey instrument; rather, we created this category to describe students who selected multiple religious traditions.

administrative tasks. With the exception of the full-time Jewish chaplain, the chaplains were half-time employees. There were also about ten student religious groups on campus that were led either by students or representatives from off-campus organizations (i.e., congregations, denominations, or parachurch organizations). Because our study focuses on chaplains hired by the college, however, an in-depth analysis of these groups and their leaders is beyond the scope of this article.

The chaplains in the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life led weekly religious services for students of their respective traditions, as well as a variety of other programs including volunteer projects, communal meals, cultural events, alternative spring break trips, and retreats. Multifaith events and programs were common on this campus, and a multifaith student council met weekly with one of the chaplains or the dean. The Center also led a series of multifaith services that marked significant moments in the academic year. In the aftermath of national or global tragedies, the chaplains collaborated with students to organize vigils, marches, and, sometimes, protests. In the event of a student death, the Center worked closely with students to plan memorial services.

We present our descriptive findings below and then use logistic regression to explore the factors that were associated with contact with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life. We also begin to consider the effects that contact might have on a range of mental and spiritual health measures, acknowledging that causal arguments are beyond the scope of this analysis. We hope to gain insight into any relationships between university chaplaincy resources and measures of student well-being and provide the foundation for further studies that can be designed to address these questions using causal inference.

Findings

[Table 1 about here]

Tables 1 and 2 describe the demographics of individuals who completed the survey and the extent to which and ways in which they were involved in spiritual and religious life on campus. Table 1 shows that students across the four years (based on their years of birth) and from a range of racial and religious/spiritual groups completed the survey. Just under half of respondents (46%) were White and just under one-third (32.5%) were Christian.[4] Reflecting national trends among this generational cohort, 10% reported no religious or spiritual identity, and 16% said they were atheist, agnostic, or humanist (Pew Forum 2014). Nineteen percent reported being of mixed religions (the respondent selected more than one of the listed religious categories). The category of "other religion" includes those who identified as Bahai, Confucian, Jain, Pagan, Sikh, Unitarian Universalist, and "Other."

The religious and spiritual measures in Table 1 are based on a dummy variable for identifying as spiritual or religious (0 = Not spiritual/religious at all, 1 = slightly spiritual / religious, moderately spiritual / religious, and very spiritual / religious). More respondents identified as spiritual (88%) than religious (63%). Measures of religious attendance include four levels: (a) never/less than once a year (33.7%); (b) yearly (once a year / several times a year) (36.4%); (c) monthly (once a month / two to three times a month) (10.9%); and (d) weekly (nearly every week / every week / more than once a week) (19%). In the logistic regressions, we collapsed the monthly and weekly religious attendance categories to make three frequencies to simplify analysis and interpretation.

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[4] Approximately 1/3 of domestic students at this institution reported their race as non-Hispanic White, close to 20 % reported their race as Asian, and less than 10% reported their race as non-Hispanic Black.

To understand how students at this university are involved in spiritual and religious life, we asked a series of questions about their behaviors. Responses are summarized in the bottom of Table 1. We found that 44.4% of respondents were involved in on-campus spiritual and religious life through the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life. Fewer respondents reported being involved with on-campus student religious organizations (7.1%) or off-campus student religious groups (5.0%). Just under half (43.5%) were not involved in religious or spiritual life on or off campus.

[Table 2 about here]

We then narrowed our focus to those students involved in spiritual and religious life through the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life, as shown in Table 2. Of those involved with the Center, members of the largest group (79.5%) were sometimes or regularly involved with chaplaincy programs, which included a multifaith student council, fellowship gatherings, communal meals, service projects, alternative spring break trips, retreats, and other programs. A close second, 79.3% of those involved with the Center sometimes or regularly attended religious services led by the chaplains. Religious services included offerings such as Catholic Mass, meditation, Puja, Jum'ah, and Shabbat. Just over 20% connected with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life through one-on-one pastoral care or counseling, which we labeled as individual interaction.

[Table 3 about here]

To begin to understand what factors may lead some students, but not others, to be involved with activities offered through the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life, we conducted a series of logistic regressions shown in Table 3. Model 1 explores the predictors that are associated with involvement with any activities through the Center for Spiritual and

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Religious Life. Models 2 through 6 explore the predictors that led students to be involved in specific activities including religious services (model 2), programs (model 3), individual interactions (model 4), vigils (model 5) and protests (model 6).

The covariates in the models include birth year, race, religious affiliation, religious service attendance, and spiritual/religious. Each covariate is included because these demographic variables may have impacted religiosity and interaction with chaplains. Birth year is a continuous variable. Race is treated as a factor and includes White, Asian, Black, other, and multiracial. We created the multiracial variable for any respondent who identified with more than one racial group. Religious affiliation is also treated as a factor and includes Christian, Buddhist/Hindu/Jewish/Muslim, other religion, spiritual but not religious, none, Agnostic/Atheist/Humanist, and mixed. Religious service attendance was a factor with three levels: never/rarely, yearly, monthly+. Spiritual/Religious is a dummy variable for if a participant identifies as spiritual and/or religious.[5] We included only one variable for self-reported spirituality and religiosity in order to reduce collinearity in the model but still capture the impact of *identifying* as a spiritual or religious person, not just affiliating with a religion. The models treat White, Christian, never/rarely attending religious services, and not spiritual/religious as the reference groups. We did not include gender in the model because our pilot college is a women's college. Table 3 presents the outcome coefficients as odds.

Overall, model 1 suggests that Asian and Black students were less likely than their White peers to be involved with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life. Students from minority religious traditions (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim) were more likely than Christian students to be involved, as were those from mixed religious backgrounds. Those who attended

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[5] The coefficient for spiritual but not religious is so large in model 1 because there are no respondents who affiliated with this group who reported interfaith engagement.

religious services yearly and monthly were more likely than those who never/rarely attended services to be involved in the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life. Students who identified as religious and/or spiritual were, not surprisingly, more likely to be involved than those who did not.

The finding that Asian and Black students were less likely than White students to be involved in the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life remained when the outcome focused more narrowly on involvement in religious services (model 2), chaplaincy programs (model 3), or individual interactions with university chaplains (model 4). This finding was more consistent for Asian students than for Black students, perhaps because there was more heterogeneity in behavior for Black students or the sample size was too small to show significance across activities.

Likewise, the finding that religious minority students were more likely than Christian students to be involved with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life continued when that involvement was narrowed to religious services, chaplaincy programs, individual interactions, and vigils (model 5). Those from mixed religious backgrounds showed similar results, but they did not have a significant difference in odds of individual interactions with university chaplains. Similarly, respondents who attended religious services monthly were more likely than those who attended services never/rarely to attend chaplaincy events, excluding protests (model 6). The findings for yearly attendance parallel monthly attendance, except this group were not significantly different from those who never/rarely attended for individual interactions. We have similar findings when considering how being religious and/or spiritual influenced students' involvement in religious services or programs supported by the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life.

The models for attending a vigil or protest provide insight into participation in chaplaincy activities that were outside the realm of what is traditionally deemed religious. We found that year of birth was highly significant for attending a vigil, perhaps because the campus experienced a student death and hosted a vigil only during the tenure of the older students. The protest model reveals that students who identified as spiritual but not religious or "none" were more likely than their Christian counterparts to attend protests, as were those of mixed ethnicity.

Next, we used Monte Carlo simulation (n = 10,000) to estimate predicted probabilities (with confidence intervals) of spending time with university chaplains based on model 1. We used the median student in the data set—a White, Christian 20-year-old, who attended religious services yearly, and identified as spiritual—as our base for the predicted probability and then manipulated these variables to compare how religious affiliation, race, religious attendance, and spiritual/religious identification impacted the likelihood of spending time with university chaplains. We used these predicted probabilities to evaluate first differences based on the variables of interest.

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1 shows the predicted probability for the median student by religion (Christian, Buddhist/Hindu/Jewish/Muslim, and Atheist/Agnostic/Humanist). We referred to the Buddhist/Hindu/Jewish/Muslim category as non-Christian and Atheist/Agnostic/Humanist as no religion in the predicted probabilities to simplify the explanations. A Christian, White student who was 20 years old, attended services yearly, and identified as spiritual had a 67.8% predicted probability of spending time with a university chaplain. The median non-Christian student had a 84.5% predicted probability, and the median student of no religion had a 70.1% predicted probability. We gained a further understanding of how religion influences spending time with

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university chaplains by calculating the difference between the predicted probabilities. We found negative and significant differences between the Christian median student and their non-Christian counterparts, which signify that the former is less likely to spend time with university chaplains than the latter. The difference in the predicted probability between the Christian median student and the median student who affiliated as Atheist/Agnostic/Humanist was not statistically significant.

[Figure 2 about here]

Next, we separated the religious group along racial lines (Figure 2). The median Black Christian student had a 51.4% predicted probability of spending time with a chaplain, and the median Asian Christian student had a 48.4% predicted probability. Their White counterpart had a predicted probability of 67.8%. The median Black non-Christian student had a 72.9% predicted probability, the median Asian non-Christian student had a 70.7% predicted probability, and their White counterpart had a predicted probability of 84.5%. Similarly, the median Black student with no religion had a predicted probability of 54.1%, the median Asian student with no religion had a predicted probability of 51%, whereas their White counterpart had a predicted probability of 70%. The difference between the White median student and the median Black or Asian student was significant in each group.

[Figure 3 about here]

Figure 3 illustrates what happens when the median person switches frequency of religious service attendance within each religious group. We found that the predicted probabilities for those who attended yearly and monthly were significantly different than those who attended never/rarely across all three religious groups. When the median student switched from attending never/rarely to yearly there was an increase in predicted probability of 30.7% for the Christian,

24.7% for the non-Christian, and 29.4% for the version with no religion. When the student switched from never/rarely to monthly, the difference was very similar to the switch to yearly: an increase in predicted probability of 31.1% for the Christian, 24.6% for the non-Christian, and 29.1% for the student with no religion.

[Figures 4 about here]

When we compared a median student who identified as spiritual/religious to a version of this student that did not identify as spiritual/religious, we found that identifying as spiritual/religious played a significant role in spending time with a chaplain (Figure 4). A Christian, White student, who was 20 years old and attended services yearly and identified as spiritual/religious was 17.2% more likely to spend time with a chaplain than the student who did not identify as spiritual/religious. The difference was 12.3% for the non-Christian median student and 16.7% for the Atheist/Agnostic/Humanist median student.

[Table 4]

To complete these analyses, we examined the relationship between involvement with the Center for Spiritual and Religious life and six outcome measures related to student growth and well-being. We were aware that these data are cross-sectional and the challenges of reverse causality real. For example, it was possible that students who felt they had been able to integrate their spirituality into their daily lives would be more likely to seek out university chaplaincy resources (and not vice versa). There may also have been unobserved common causes for these outcomes and spending time with a chaplain. As such, we did not aim to draw a causal connection between spending time with university chaplains and the mental and spiritual health outcomes. With that in mind, we conducted preliminary analyses to explore the relationship between whether people had any contact with a chaplain and six outcome measures. Specifically,

whether they had engaged with those from other religions, whether their experience in college helped them integrate their spirituality, whether they found in college support for life's bigger questions, whether they felt they had grown spiritually at college, whether they felt they could manage stress, and whether they felt resilient. These analyses can be found in models 1 through 6 of Table 4. These models include the same covariates as Table 3 because it was plausible each of these demographic variables may have impacted the outcome variables.

Different stories emerged for each of these outcome measures. Respondents who spent time at the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life were more likely to have integrated their spirituality into their daily lives (model 2, $p = .008$), felt supported in wrestling with life's big questions (model 3, $p = .0005$), and experienced spiritual growth (model 4, $p = .038$). However, spending time with university chaplains did not have significant relationship with whether or not students engaged with students from other religions (model 1, $p = .066$), felt that they could manage their stress (model 5, $p = .806$), or if they felt resilient (model 5, $p = .969$).

Religious affiliation had dissimilar results between the models. Those in the Buddhist/Hindu/Jewish/Muslim category, those who were spiritual but not religious, and those of mixed religion were more likely to experience religious growth than the Christian students.[2] Atheist/Agnostic/Humanist students were more likely to feel supported in wrestling with life's bigger questions. Those who attended services monthly were more likely to have integrated spirituality (model 1), felt supported (model 3), experienced growth (model 4), and felt they are able to manage their stress (model 5).

We calculated the predicted probabilities of experiencing these outcomes for the median student based on whether the student spent time with the university chaplains. Figure 5 shows the predicted probability of engaging with those from other religions (Engage), whether their

experience in college helped them integrate their spirituality into their daily lives (Integrate), whether they found in college support for wrestling with life's bigger questions (Support), and whether they felt they had grown spiritually at college (Grown) based on if they spent time with university chaplains.

[Figure 5 about here]

Figure 5 compares those who spent time with the chaplains and those who did not. We found that the median student who spent time with university chaplains had a 10.2% higher predicted probability of feeling that college helped them integrate their spirituality into their daily lives, a 16.8% higher predicted probability of feeling supported in wrestling with life's bigger questions, and 9.4% higher predicted probability of reporting spiritual growth. There was not a significance difference in engaging with those from other religions. However, the predicted probabilities still could help us better understand why those who spent time with university chaplains did not have a significant difference in engaging with those of other religions, given that the Center organized interfaith activities. Both the median individual who spent time with university chaplains and their counterpart who did not had extremely high predicted probabilities of engaging with people of other religions, 99.1% and 98.5% respectively. These numbers suggest that engagement across religious and spiritual lines was common at the pilot university for students. When we repeated this exercise for the mental health outcomes—whether the median student felt they could manage stress, and whether they felt resilient—there were no significant differences due to spending time with university chaplains.

Discussion

This article presents one of the first detailed descriptions of how students on a single college or university campus engage with campus resources for spiritual and religious life. We

focused primarily on students' involvement with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life. The bifurcated nature of students' involvements—with 44.4% connected to the Center and 43.5% not connected to on- or off-campus spiritual and religious resources, as shown in Table 2—is not surprising given growing numbers of young people not affiliated with religious organizations (Cooperman 2015; Twenge et al. 2016).

Of those who did interact with on-campus chaplaincy resources (Table 2), the high percentage of students who sometimes or regularly were involved with religious services and chaplaincy programs surprised us. These students appear to have been deeply connected to the Center. It is possible that the high percentage of participation in Center-sponsored activities may have been an artifact of the characteristics of those who elected to take and complete the survey.

Engagement with Chaplaincy Services

Variation by Religious Tradition

The findings about how likely different groups of students were to be involved with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life offer a number of insights into the complex ways that students' religious and racial identities may shape their experiences with university chaplains. First, the fact that religious minority students (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim) were more likely than Christian students to be involved in the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life suggests that campus resources and leadership may have been effective in meeting the particular needs of students from these underrepresented religious groups through chaplaincy services. As Barton et al. (2020) suggest, offices like the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life may be important sources of support and community for students from minority traditions who feel that they do not fit in the campus social scene because of their religious commitments.

Additionally, many minority traditions focus largely on practice, which may partially explain why students from these traditions were more likely to be involved with the Center. For example, Judaism and Islam have daily and weekly obligations for prayer and dietary restrictions. As a result, students of these religions may have relied more on university chaplains to fulfill their religious needs than their Christian counterparts. There were also more Christian student groups on campus, some of whom did not involve university chaplaincy services; hence, Christian students had more options and may have accordingly interacted less with the Center. Indeed, the logistic regression for spending time with off-campus religious student groups that were not related to the Center reveals that Christian students were more likely to participate in these groups than their non-Christian counterparts. Last, the fact that students who identified with multiple traditions were more likely than others to be involved with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life suggests that the multifaith nature of the Center may have provided a more welcoming environment for these students than others on or off campus groups who comprised adherents of a single religious tradition. Students who identified with multiple traditions may encounter resistance to dual religious identities in other religious communities, resulting in higher rates of involvement with the Center (Katz Miller 2013; Sigalow 2016). These possibilities warrant further—particularly qualitative—examination.

Variation by Race

Second, the fact that Black and Asian students were less involved in the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life raises questions about the extent to which chaplaincy services at this college—and others—are meeting the needs of a student body that is racially—as well as religiously—diverse. These results are surprising because they stand in contrast to previous research on British chaplaincy that found that ethnic minority and international students were

particularly likely to report using chaplaincy services (Aune et al., 2019). The finding that Black

students were less involved with the Center is particularly unexpected, given that Black

millennials were found to be more religious than others in their generation across variety of

measures (Diamant & Mohamed, 2018). Our results are also surprising when considered

alongside those from the National Study of Youth and Religion, which found that Black

Protestants were more likely than White mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Jews (though less

likely than White evangelicals and Mormons) to participate in college-based religious groups

(Smith and Snell, 2009, 131). Although the National Study of Youth and Religion did not look at

participation in chaplaincy programs, we would have expected to see these students engaging

with the college chaplains at similarly high rates.

When we conducted a logistic regression for spending time with on-campus religious

student groups that were not related to the Center (variable from Table 1), we gained clarity

concerning these differential rates of engagement with the Center. We found that Black and

Asian students were more likely to participate in other religious student groups than their White

counterparts—suggesting that these students were not actually less involved in religious life but

that they were less likely to engage with university chaplains. This finding suggests that other

religious leaders may have been meeting the needs of Black and Asian students in ways that the

Center for Spiritual and Religious Life was not, raising important questions about racial and

theological diversity in chaplaincy offices.

We know that Christian chaplains tend to be less racially diverse than the students they

serve (Schmalzbauer 2014), and it is possible that Black and Asian students were less likely to be

involved with the Center because they did not see themselves represented among the chaplains.

It may be also have been the case that Black and Asian Christian students at this college found

more theological resonance with student-led or externally-supported evangelical groups than with the liberal Protestant ethos of the Center (Cooperman, 2015; Diamant and Mohamed, 2019; Kim, 2006; Pew Research Center, 2012; Shelton & Emerson, 2012). We also know that religious beliefs and practices vary by race within other traditions including Buddhism (Cadge, 2004) and Islam (Mohamed and Diamant, 2019), and it may be the case that these differences contribute to the lower rates of chaplaincy involvement among Black and Asian students from non-Christian traditions at this college. Researchers should ask whether the leadership of chaplaincy offices include people of color and what other—perhaps theological—barriers might be preventing certain students from accessing these resources. It would also be important to know whether these patterns of access mirrored those for other campus resources or were specific to spiritual and religious life.

Student Growth and Well-being

The finding that spending time with university chaplains did not have a significant relationship with stress management or resiliency may be surprising—even unsettling—to practitioners who perceive themselves contributing to these aspects of students' mental health. Since concern for psychological well-being is one of the main justifications chaplains give for their work (Soni, 2019), it is notable that we did not find such a correlation in the pilot survey. At the same time, we want to point out that our survey included few measures to assess psychological well-being and reiterate the cross-sectional and preliminary nature of these findings.

For example, it is possible that other measures of psychological well-being would yield different results. The UCLA study found that meditation, prayer, and reflection were associated with greater "equanimity," defined as the capacity to find meaning and purpose, peace, and

gratitude, and a sense of direction (Astin et al., 2010). Equanimity was correlated with greater psychological well-being. Although Astin et al. (2010) did not look at how meditation, prayer, or reflection relate to chaplaincy involvement, it is plausible that chaplains impact students' spiritual practices. We need further research on these and other measures of well-being to better understand how the work of chaplains can complement that of mental health providers on campus. Chaplains often interact with students in contexts of heightened emotional vulnerability, such as individual counseling sessions, funerals, and vigils, and it is especially important that we understand how, if at all, students are affected by the work of chaplains in these settings.

Finally, we are intrigued by the initial patterns we see concerning the relationship between aspects of students' lives and growth in college and their involvement with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life. We found that respondents who had spent time with chaplains were significantly more likely to report integrating spirituality into their daily lives, feeling supported in wrestling with life's big questions, and experiencing spiritual growth (Table 4, models 2-4). To the extent that future studies indicate causal relationships between chaplaincy services and these outcomes, researchers need to begin to think about how chaplains achieve these ends and what kind of education best prepares them to do so.

Limitations

The study has four main data limitations. First, the data were collected through a convenience sample. Although the survey was sent out to the entire undergraduate student body, 1043 of 2350 students completed the survey. Of those who participated, 55% completed the entire survey. Those who decided to take and complete the survey do not represent a random sample of the student body. As such, our findings may be biased towards those who were inclined to devote time to the topic or were influenced by other incentives (prizes). The second

limitation is that we were not able to include gender as a predictor for interaction with chaplains because the pilot university was predominately one gender. Other scholarship has demonstrated a relationship between gender identity, religion, and spirituality, so it may be an important piece of the puzzle for understanding the relationship between students and chaplains (Astin et al. 2011; Roth and Kroll 2007; Schnabel 2015).

Third, our findings are limited by the fact that our survey did not ask students their nationality status. Thus, although previous research in the U.K. suggests that international students are a population that tends to engage with university chaplains, we were unable to look for this pattern in our data (Aune et al., 2019). Additionally, because the institution where the survey was administered follows the reporting structure required by IPEDS, which requires institutions to report non-resident alien students in a single category, the fact that we did not ask students to report whether they were an international or domestic student makes it difficult to assess the extent to which our respondents reflect the demographic composition of the student body at this college.

The final—and most significant—limitation is that our data were cross-sectional and as such, we had to be careful regarding reverse causality. As discussed earlier in the article, it is possible that students who already had positive emotional and spiritual outcomes were likely to seek out university chaplaincy resources (and not vice versa). Future studies would benefit from longitudinal data which map students' engagement with chaplaincy resources over time and qualitative interviews and observations to supplement the data. Studies that could develop strategies to control for unobserved common causes for spiritual and emotional outcomes and spending time with a chaplain would be particularly fruitful.

Conclusion

We hope that others will build on the model and results presented here to further examine when and how students engage with chaplaincy services, and to identify the effects of their involvement. We found that respondents who had spent time with chaplains in the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life were significantly more likely to report integrating spirituality into their daily lives, feeling supported in wrestling with life's big questions, and experiencing spiritual growth. They were not, however, more likely to feel that they were resilient or could manage stress. These findings underscore the need for more—particularly longitudinal—data in order to understand how chaplaincy services affect student well-being. Additionally, we encourage researchers to investigate the relationship between these outcomes and traditional measures of postsecondary educational success such as GPA and retention.

We also found that engagement with chaplaincy services varies in patterned ways by race and religious tradition, with White and non-Christian students reporting higher rates of engagement than their Black, Asian, and Christian peers. These findings raise important questions about which students' needs are (or are not) being met by chaplaincy services, and why this is the case. We encourage others to explore these issues in future studies. In particular, qualitative research on students' experiences with chaplains may shed light on why some students are more likely to utilize chaplaincy services than others.

Future research should also consider how gender may be related to chaplaincy involvement on coeducational campuses. Sociologists have long observed gender differences across various measures of religiosity, and many have argued that women tend to be more religious than men (Roth and Kroll, 2007; Schnabel, 2015). In the context of higher education more specifically, Alexander Astin et al. (2010) observed gender differences in students' inclinations toward spiritual questioning and engagement at the start of college, as well as gender

differences in students' spiritual growth during college. However, we need further empirical research to understand how gender is related to chaplaincy involvement, experiences, and outcomes among college students.

It will be particularly important for researchers to pay attention to institutional context. Our pilot university was a selective, private, residential women's college with a staff model chaplaincy program (van Stee et al., 2021). Additional research on chaplaincy services at other types of institutions—for example, public universities or religiously-affiliated schools—is needed in order to understand the broader landscape of campus chaplaincy. While there is evidence that chaplaincy models vary across campuses in ways that are shaped by institutional characteristics including size, sector, and religious history (Grubbs, 2006; van Stee et al., 2021), social scientists have not examined how these differences impact student experiences with chaplains.

Studying the work of chaplains provides a window into how religion and spirituality are present in secular organizations—a sphere of religious activity that remains understudied by social scientists (Cadge & Konieczny, 2014). Moreover, the chaplains at the college where our survey was administered were not merely present but were rather an integral part of the fabric of the institution; as paid staff, these chaplains illustrated one way in which religion can be institutionally embedded in a non-religious institution (Bender et al., 2013). To the extent that college students are becoming increasingly disconnected from the traditional sites of spiritual and religious care—religious congregations—campus chaplains may become the only religious leaders with whom many students have contact (Cooperman, 2015; Twenge et al., 2016). Indeed, we found that only 5% of respondents were involved in off-campus religious communities, whereas 44% reported engagement with the Center for Spiritual and Religious Life. In order to

understand religion and spirituality in higher education today, scholars must pay attention to the ways students engage with campus chaplains and identify empirically how students are affected by the services that these chaplains provide.

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