

Student Transformation and Core Values at Bethel University:  
A Qualitative Study

Prepared for the Student Learning Committee  
of  
Bethel University  
by  
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## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of the study was to better understand, from a student perspective, the experience of growth and change, if any, Bethel University students experienced during their enrollment at Bethel. Of specific interest was transformation as it related to Bethel's core values and the mechanisms by which that change was facilitated. The primary research questions that guided this study were:

- How do students at Bethel University perceive their personal growth and transformation as it relates to Bethel's stated core values; and
- What specific experiences do students perceive influenced these aspects of growth and change?

The methodology chosen was a multicase study design that examined three cases: College of Arts and Sciences (CAS); College of Adult & Professional Studies and Graduate School (CAPS/GS); and Seminary, St. Paul (SEM), each of which represent a division within the shared context of Bethel University. Both descriptive and thematic findings are provided based on within-case and cross-case analysis.

Based on participant self-report, resonance with Bethel's core values emerged in rank-order as follows: 1) reconcilers; 2) Christ-followers; 3) truth-seekers; 4) character-builders and learners (tied); 5) world-changers; and 6) salt and light. The primary thematic finding was that, as a result of their Bethel University educational experience, participants perceived themselves as more open to and accepting of diverse perspectives. Relationships with faculty and peers and off-campus learning experiences emerged as the primary influencers of transformation.

## **Introduction**

The Bethel University Student Learning Committee, chaired by Joel Frederickson, Associate Dean of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation, commissioned this study. The purpose of the study was to better understand, from a student perspective, the experience of growth and change, if any, Bethel University students experienced during their enrollment at Bethel. Of specific interest was transformation as it related to Bethel's core values and the mechanisms by which that change was facilitated. It was anticipated the findings would be used, in conjunction with other assessment data, to assess current offerings and to inform and influence on-going development of curricular and co-curricular efforts designed to produce stated learner outcomes. The primary research questions that guided this study were:

- How do students at Bethel University perceive their personal growth and transformation as it relates to Bethel's stated core values; and
- What specific experiences do students perceive influenced these aspects of growth and change?

## **Methodology**

The choice of methodology for this study was informed by the interpretive stance implied by the research question and represented a mode of inquiry that emphasized understanding of experience and meaning. The methodology chosen was a multicase study design that examined three cases: College of Arts and Sciences (CAS); College of Adult & Professional Studies and Graduate School (CAPS/GS); and Seminary, St. Paul (SEM). Each case represents a division within the shared context of Bethel University. While a single case approach may have provided insight into the formation experience of Bethel University students as a whole, constructing the

study to examine multiple cases offered the potential of discovering commonalities and differences between cases. The case study approach allowed for the collection of qualitative, narrative accounts of the experience of growth and transformation and participant reflection on how that experience related to Bethel's core values. Analysis included both within-case-and cross-case methods. Knowledge, in the form of descriptive and thematic findings identified in the course of this study, emerged from the interpretation of experiences assigned meaning by the participants

### **Participants**

Recruitment announcements targeting all Bethel University graduating students were disseminated via Bethel University e-announcements, CAS residence hall bulletin board announcements, Seminary building bulletin board announcements, and CAPS/GS e-communication. All subsequent communication was facilitated via participant's Bethel student e-mail account. Interested students who responded and met the "final year of study" criteria as confirmed by their Bethel on-line directory status were sent a letter of solicitation (Appendix A) that delineated Bethel's core values, described the research question, purpose and goals; outlined what participants could expect; and, should they wish to participate, instructions for scheduling an interview. Potential participants were also sent a copy of the consent form (Appendix B) they would be asked to sign, should they choose to participate. If students responded to recruitment materials but did not meet the "final year of study" qualifier, they were thanked for their interest and received an explanation that they did not meet the criteria for this particular project. Interview appointment reminders were sent via e-mail 24 hours in advance of the scheduled interview.

This study utilized a convenience sample. The first potential participants who met the selection criteria, responded to the recruitment invitation, and scheduled and completed the interview process were included as study participants. In light of Stake’s (2006) guideline that, “two or three cases do not show enough of the interactivity between participants and their situations, whereas 15 or 30 cases provide more uniqueness of interactivity than the research team and readers can come to understand” (p. 22) I chose to set a maximum limit of 15 participants per case.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

| Demographic Category            | Number of Participants |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Gender                          |                        |
| Female                          | 26                     |
| Male                            | 10                     |
| Age                             |                        |
| 18-22 years                     | 10                     |
| 23-39 years                     | 20                     |
| 40-55 years                     | 5                      |
| 56+ years                       | 1                      |
| Ethnicity*                      |                        |
| African-American                | 5                      |
| Euro-American                   | 31                     |
| Hispanic/Latino                 | 1                      |
| American Indian/Alaska Native   | 1                      |
| No response                     | 1                      |
| Academic Division of BU         |                        |
| CAS                             | 11                     |
| CAP/GS                          | 10                     |
| SEM                             | 15                     |
| Approximate Grade Point Average |                        |
| Greater than 3.0                | 33                     |
| Between 2.0 and 3.0             | 2                      |
| No response                     | 1                      |

\*Participants invited to select all that applied

All adult participants were students currently enrolled in their final year of study at Bethel University in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), College of Adult & Professional

Studies and Graduate School (CAPS/GS), or Seminary St. Paul (SEM). A total of 36 graduating students participated in the study: 11 from CAS; 10 from CAPS/GS; and 15 from SEM. Table 1 summarizes demographic descriptors of the participants and Table 2 summarizes participants by degree and major.

Table 2

*Degree Programs Represented*

| Degree Program by Division                         | Number of Participants |
|--|------------------------|
| <b>College of Arts and Sciences</b>                |                        |
| Biology  | 2                      |
| Business   | 1                      |
| Elementary Education                               | 1                      |
| History  | 1                      |
| International Relations                            | 1                      |
| Journalism   | 1                      |
| Nursing  | 1                      |
| Social Work  | 1                      |
| Sociocultural Studies                              | 2                      |
| <b>College of Adult &amp; Professional Studies</b> |                        |
| Business Management                                | 1                      |
| Christian Ministries                               | 2                      |
| Communications                                     | 1                      |
| Nursing  | 1                      |
| Organizational Leadership                          | 1                      |
| <b>Graduate School</b>                             |                        |
| Gerontology  | 2                      |
| Business Administration                            | 1                      |
| Education (Ed.D.)                                  | 1                      |
| <b>Seminary*</b>                                   |                        |
| Global and Contextual Studies                      | 1                      |
| Marriage and Family Therapy                        | 6                      |
| Master of Divinity                                 | 7                      |
| Theological Studies                                | 2                      |
| Transformational Leadership                        | 1                      |

\*Two participants earned two degrees.

**Data Collection Methods**

Prior to the collection of any data, co-investigator interviewers utilized a consent process script (Appendix C) to review the purpose of the study, asked questions designed to assess the

participant's understanding of his/her participation in the research, reviewed the informed consent form, and elicited questions or clarification regarding the research. Following this process, participants were invited to sign the informed consent form. Data was gathered only after consent is obtained.

Data collection methods included a brief, written demographic survey (Appendix D) and semi-structured interviews guided by a protocol of open-ended questions (Appendix E) and participants were provided a list of Bethel's core values (Appendix F) to reference during the interview, if desired. Interviews were held in private, confidential spaces on the campus of Bethel University or one of its off-site facilities. CAS students were interviewed on the main CAS campus, CAP/GS students were interviewed at the Bethel Office Complex in Arden Hills, and SEM students were interviewed at the Seminary. Each interview was audio taped with the participant's knowledge and permission. Upon completion or termination of the interview, participants were presented with a \$25 Target gift card.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Descriptive data was gathered regarding growth or change reported by participants relative to each core value. Whether change was deemed to have occurred was determined by the researcher based on the provision of anecdotal examples provided by each participant. Significant evidence required at least one detailed example of growth or change related to a specific core value. Reports of movement toward a core value, away from a core value, or both toward and away from a core value were documented. Participants were identified as having experienced no change if they were unable to provide personal examples of transformation. Additionally, descriptive data was also gathered based on specific references to mechanisms influential to their process of growth and change within the context of the detailed examples.

Thematic findings emerged and were identified without consideration of the specific core value(s), if any, with which they may have been conceptually linked by the participant. The potential overlap between descriptive and thematic findings will be included in the discussion section. Three approaches described by van Manen (1997) and designed to discover themes were utilized to conduct the within-case thematic analysis. Using a holistic approach, I read each interview transcription in its entirety in order to gain a general sense of the whole, creating a phrase or statement that expressed the main significance of that interview. I read the interview documents again using the selective reading approach, highlighting statements or phrases that provide especially revealing insight into the experience of the participant. These phrases and statements served as the basis for theme analysis.

The next step in data analysis was the categorical aggregation of data in which “the researcher attempt[ed] to see processes and outcomes that occur across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (Miles and Huberman as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 195). This process included thematic analysis across cases for the purpose of identifying emerging patterns. I used a modified version of Stake’s (2006) Track II: Merging Case Findings worksheet as a way to organize themes and findings for analysis. The final case study report includes both within-case and cross-case findings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Precautions, including the scheduling of interviews in private, closed-door spaces, were taken to minimize the risk that others would hear information shared by the participant during his/her interview. Further ethical considerations included explicit permission to terminate the interview at any time, permission to have data removed from the study, and encouragement of

the participant by the trained interviewer to maintain personal boundaries as desired to minimize the risk of revelation of overly personal or sensitive material.

The records of this study are confidential. This report does not include information that will make it possible to identify participants in any way. Data did not become part of a participant's permanent record and no third parties were informed of anyone's participation in the study. Printed copies of transcriptions were stored in a locking file cabinet in the primary investigator's Bethel office. Digital copies of the interviews and electronic copies of the transcriptions were uploaded to a password-protected remote server. Participant identities were protected by use of a code known only to the investigators. A singular copy of a personal identification key to the codes, the demographic surveys, and the signed informed consent forms were stored in a locking filing cabinet in the primary investigators home office. The personal identification key and demographic surveys will be destroyed following completion and presentation of the final report. The expected date of destruction by shredding is no later than December 31, 2011. Electronic versions of summary demographic data and interview transcripts will be kept on the primary investigator's personal password-protected home computer for 5 years. The expected date of deletion is not later than December 31, 2016. A professional transcriptionist who is not an employee of Bethel University transcribed interviews verbatim. The transcriptionist was required to review applicable FERPA regulations in the company of the primary investigator and signed a statement of confidentiality regarding the content of the audiotapes. Neither the co-investigators nor the transcriptionist had access to the personal identification key.

## **Limitations**

Due to the exploratory nature of the research question and design, the findings of the study are descriptive but not prescriptive. While this is not a limitation of the methodology per se, it does recognize limitations in regard to the generalizability of the findings. Although multiple cases were considered, the process of selecting them all from one university, while appropriate for an interpretive study, does not support generalization to other educational institutions and may not even generalize to other students within this setting. Findings are also dependent on self-reported data. While it was expected that participants would portray accurate representations of their perceptions and experience, alternative perspectives regarding student transformation were not taken into consideration.

Use of a self-selecting convenience sample may have created a dynamic in which those who chose to participate may have had a higher awareness of their own process of transformation than those who chose not to. Personal experience with the primary investigator may also have played a role in the decision to participate.

## **Within-Case Findings**

### **College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)**

**Descriptive Findings:** Asked to reflect on how their experiences of transformation related to Bethel's core value statements, the following patterns emerged from CAS participant responses. First of all, the value for which they provided the strongest anecdotal evidence of change was movement toward being more committed *Christ-followers*. While participants consistently identified this as the greatest area of personal growth and change, many were also careful to clarify that the way they defined that growth was not necessarily represented by the

descriptors provided--orthodox, conversionist, and evangelical; rooted in the authority of Scripture.

The bold part [Christ-follower] I feel like I've kind of grown on, but the non-bold part is just like—well, I don't know if that's how I see it. Like, orthodox is not the first word I would put there. [But] I really want to be a Christ-follower. It's a commitment and a choice and a risk. I would say, for me, being a Christ follower means having faith in the midst of ambiguity; the certainty that orthodoxy tries to go for is not there [for me] but trusting in Christ in the midst of the fog and making a commitment to follow him is my idea of [being a Christ-follower].

I see [being a Christ-follower] very differently [than when I started at Bethel]. I grew up in a Christian family and had a very structured way of looking at what that was. And now I see it in a very different light—what it means to act like Christ and be like Christ to everyone; to present yourself in a way that shows Christ in what you say and do. It's not just going on a mission trip.

I don't really know what orthodox means, so I can't really speak to that....but I've grown a lot since I've been at Bethel [by] being encouraged by other people to read God's Word and study God's Word. I definitely got more rooted in Scripture and it's definitely transformed my beliefs on certain issues.

I really feel that a lot of my growth [from] not being such a lukewarm Christian, but really being on fire and understanding my relationship with God [occurred] through the encouragement of the Bethel community.

[Bethel's] way of being Christ-followers isn't the only way, but it's still legitimate. I feel like I have been able to question why I'm a Christ-follower and come to my own conclusions about that.

Table 3

*CAS Participant Responses related to Core Values*

| <b>Core Value</b>  | <b>Growth/Change*</b> | <b>No Change</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Christ-Followers   | 7                     | 4                |
| Character-Builders | 4                     | 7                |
| Truth-Seekers      | 4                     | 7                |
| Learners           | 2                     | 9                |
| Reconcilers        | 5                     | 6                |
| Salt and Light     | 4                     | 7                |
| World-Changers     | 3                     | 8                |

\*Growth/Change may have been described as toward, away from or both/and and required that participant provide anecdotal evidence of change.

Several students reported “no change” in regard to this value but none reported movement away from being a Christ-follower. See Table 3 for a complete breakdown of how participants described their change/growth in respect to each core value.

The most detailed narrative responses emerged in regard to the reconcilers core value statement. While not every student described growth in terms of his or her own capacity for reconciliation, each participant had something to say about this core value.

Reconcilers....that always kind of puts me off a little bit. I don't understand it. I feel like I'm a racist all the time when they talk about these things. I don't know a better way to go at 'cause I don't understand it.

I would say I understand a lot more about reconciliation which I didn't even know before I came to Bethel; some things I wouldn't have perceived as racist before I came here until I really got to hear different perspectives from people. [For me], reconciliation means being more understanding of different races—being more accepting of everyone.

I think I've grown in this [reconcilers] but more because of seeing reconciliation in a way that I don't think is God-honoring or biblical. I see that the point of reconciliation is not so people get along and people love each other; I don't think that's the point of true reconciliation. I think it's more supposed to be a focus on reconciliation between God and man. I definitely think I've grown as a reconciler because I've seen ways that I don't think it's been done right. I'm more of an advocate for reconciliation between God and man.

The way I've learned the most about reconciliation is by becoming very aware of how Bethel, as an institution, has really failed on being reconcilers. When I came here, I saw Bethel as a really good safe place where I could learn more about God and get a good education. Over time this environment [has emerged] where there's two main sides that are pretty well split [on issues like] white privilege. And I don't know--I feel like I don't really belong to either group. I'm hoping for reconciliation between the two.

This one [reconcilers] was difficult for me but one of my education professors helped me grow in my understanding of what it means to be a reconciler. He talked about diverse learners and that it's not just talking about people with different colors, but it's talking about people with learning disabilities, and it's talking about people who have mental disabilities, or people who come from different backgrounds. It's being willing to be humble enough to understand that our perspective is sometimes skewed and so trying to have an open mind and really being willing to dialogue with people and to find out where they are coming from.

I think I've moved closer to the reconcilers part of Bethel's core values. The talk about race bothered a lot of my friend group, but I actually thought about it and I was like, you know it's not necessarily bad that you talk about something a lot, especially if the school I'm going to thinks it's important. May I should take time to actually consider why this is important for me...I actually think that the more you talk about it, the more different perspectives you'll get from people and I can't imagine how that would ever be a bad thing, especially from people who don't think like me. I mean, that would be fantastic if I got a perspective that I had never considered before.

Finally, learner emerged as the least resonant core value, in terms of transformation, for CAS participants. Although almost all students affirmed their satisfaction with the academic rigor of Bethel and their specific degree programs and acknowledged that they had learned during their time at Bethel, they did not necessarily identify themselves as having grown or changed in terms of the importance they place on being a learner or how they think about the process of learning. The largest number of participants reported no change in regard to growth related to this core value.

I've always considered [learners committed to academic excellence] to be extremely valuable, so I don't know if going to Bethel has necessarily made me more aware. In that sense I would say there has been little to no change...because I've already placed such a high emphasis on having it in the first place.

[Learner] is pretty close to as I came in because, coming in, I really wanted to learn. Learning is just kind of in me.

It may be interpreted that students expected an environment committed to academic excellence within a community characterized by teaching, scholarship, and service when they chose to attend Bethel and that these expectations were met.

College of Arts and Sciences participants provided more limited evidence of personal growth or change in regard to the following core values: character-builders; truth-seekers; salt and light; and world-changers. Diverse potential explanations emerged for this finding. Based on participant responses, it is my interpretation that the categories of character-builders, salt and

light, and world-changers contained language with which students were unfamiliar and therefore less likely to identify.

We are character-builders—building the right person of God? When entering Bethel, you had to sign a covenant, which, personally I have stood by, and it really has shaped me to have to follow a set of rules through an entire four years at Bethel.

[Re: Salt and Light], there's a part of me that's apathetic about the pietistic denominational heritage. The whole heritage of the school has never really taken on a deeply personal meaning to me.

I don't know what irenic spirit means, but most of what I learned about being salt and light in a culturally relevant way came while I was in Uganda for a semester.

World-changers? I don't know. I'm not really sure what they mean by this. Do I really feel like I can change the world? I'm not really sure.

Some participants were skeptical or cynical about their ability to be a world-changer others don't see themselves ready to take positions of world-changing influence.

I've always been skeptical of that last one (world-changers). I don't know if I'm pessimistic or—I probably prefer to think of it as being realistic...I'm just one person. How can I change the events of the world or even the city where I live? It seems overwhelming to me.

I think world-changer is something that I still struggle with because I still wonder whether I can. How I could—just me—help change the world. I want to be a journalist but I don't really want to do Christian journalism. I don't know that I have necessarily grasped it yet or whether I ever will.

Others seemed to conceptually lump core value categories together making it difficult to tease out the specific meaning the participants assigned to their experience.

Salt and light goes back to character-building, because in order to show the salt and light I feel like you do need to be the character of God.

A lot of them [core value statements] tie into each other.

I can be the salt and light and really be a world-changer and go out and make a difference, even if it's in the life of one person.

Truth seeking and learner; these are character traits I've always had. I haven't really changed that much in my time at Bethel.

Finally, those who identified themselves as having grown as truth-seekers tended to be critical of Bethel's role in that growth.

I think that Bethel has definitely given me a platform to seek truth, but I think that they have a smaller sort of perimeter than is likely truly available in the world. I had a professor who was very helpful in this regard but I felt like he was still not able to provide actual insights that he had out of fear of reactions he might get from parents, students, or the administration.

Truth-seekers is an interesting one because I've become more interested almost despite Bethel in some senses and in different ways than what they mean. Like, I still consider myself an evangelical, but I'm willing to question [the inerrancy of Scripture] a little bit.

I think I've grown a lot in this [truth-seekers] because of Bethel, but not necessarily because Bethel is really focused on finding truth. I don't think they have its source in God's Word. I feel like there are some people here who interpret God's Word in a really unbiblical way. So I've been encouraged to seek truth because I've encountered opinions at Bethel from professors, students, and staff that I feel are unbiblical and not grounded in truth.

**Thematic findings.** Two broad themes related to transformation. The first is that participants report a greater comfort with ambiguity than they possessed prior to their Bethel educational experience. Specifically, they report greater capacities to hold apparent paradox and to engage in questing as well as increased humility about what they don't or can't know. The following quotes are illustrative of this thematic finding.

The environment has led me to ask a lot of questions. I realize that my theological system or framework didn't have all the clear-cut answers...and right now I'm in a place of a lot more humility about what I think I can know.

I feel I've made my faith my own. I learned to question my faith more, which kind of freaked me out [because] I felt like I was falling away from God, but I found out that's a really good thing, to question certain things, because then you're seeking. And I grew a lot from that.

Learning is much more listening now. There's a humility and a patience in it instead of a consumerist mindset where you go in the library and grab a bunch of books and just pull out the quotes and chomp down on it.

Being a scientist, but also a Christian, has sort of made me feel like reconciling those two viewpoints [faith vs. science dichotomy] is pretty important and pretty... doable.

The second general theme relates to contextualization. CAS participants reported having developed new and broader perspectives during their time at Bethel and having gained greater awareness of how contextual factors such as gender, national and ethnic culture, history, and theology impact how they and others see the world. Embracing a global perspective had transformative implications for many participants.

Learning about other cultures and their religions has been really helpful for me in trying to understand my own [and] I'm more educated about the world; more educated about how to relate to other people who are of different cultures and different religions.

One thing I would say is that I care more about people around me. I went to Cambodia last interim and seeing another country and helping people [changed me].

I definitely have matured a lot. My liberal arts education gave me a lot of different perspectives on all different issues. Being here and being challenged, even by people who I disagree with, helped me see all sides of an issue and have encouraged me to know where I stand and why I stand there.

I learned a lot from [other students] about coming from different backgrounds and how that shapes your view of the world around you and I had professors encourage me to look at things in new ways that really broadened my perspective on where I came from. [These experiences] really helped me to care more about people.

One participant's reflection represents an intersection of these themes:

I'm a history major. There's so much about history that we can pinpoint...but there are so many things that aren't just names or dates—the context of history is really complicated. One of the things that I've learned is that my perspective may be different from [others'] and not necessarily right or wrong. I can more critically think through and have become more willing to talk through issues that, freshman year, I was uncomfortable with.

**Influencers.** CAS participant growth narratives most frequently included references to ideas, relationships, and experiences that offered exposure to and engagement with new and broader perspectives than they had previously encountered. Course concepts and professors that challenged students to think and offered alternative conclusions, roommates and classmates

representing diverse backgrounds, and study abroad opportunities were most frequently mentioned.

Change almost always occurred in a relational context. Professors within a student's major appeared to have had the most significant influence, although positive references to Biblical and Theological Studies department faculty were also common regardless of major. Numerous references were made to how much student appreciated the availability of their professors. Peer relationships were also identified as playing an important role by providing a place for challenging and formative conversations to occur over the course of time. Idiosyncratic relationships, including but not limited to those with residence life and campus ministry personnel as well as non-Bethel related mentors and role-models, also emerged as influential in participant stories of transformation.

Finally, almost all CAS participants referenced an off-campus experience as an important part of their growth experience. For some it was a semester abroad or an international Interim course. For others it was an internship or student teaching. Others chronicled the transformational impact of living in the inner city. Regardless of the specific experience, the common thread was exposure to people, places, and experiences that would not have occurred in Arden Hills.

### **College of Adult & Professional Studies/Graduate School (CAPS/GS)**

**Descriptive Findings:** The core value with which CAPS/GS students most strongly resonated was learners. Table 4 contains a summary of the change movement demonstrated in this case. The stories of transformation focused on how these adult learners have come to see themselves as lifelong learners as well as a keen awareness of how much applicable knowledge they gained as a result of their educational experience.

They strive for excellence and that has made a significant change in my life. I'm knowledgeable. The things I never knew—now I know them! [I am] a better learner.

I definitely feel like I have more commitment to learning or even more desire to continue learning than I did before. Before, I didn't really want to learn at all—I just needed a degree. But it actually was a positive learning experience which prompts you to want to continue to learn.

From day one, the first class created this kind of energy or flow that propelled me to want to just learn and grow and be....The academic environment was just super enriching.

I started to realize maybe how much I didn't know and how much I enjoyed learning and understanding and figuring things out; new things that I hadn't been exposed to in the past.

Table 4

*CAPS/GS Participant Responses related to Core Values*

| <b>Core Value</b>  | <b>Growth/Change*</b> | <b>No Change</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Christ-Followers   | 0                     | 10               |
| Character-Builders | 4                     | 6                |
| Truth-Seekers      | 2                     | 8                |
| Learners           | 7                     | 3                |
| Reconcilers        | 4                     | 6                |
| Salt and Light     | 0                     | 10               |
| World-Changers     | 2                     | 8                |

\*Growth/Change may have been described as toward, away from or both/and and required that participant provide anecdotal evidence of change.

CAPS/GS participants consistently reported no change related to the Christ-followers core value. The response pattern that emerged was that either participants identified as Christ-followers prior to their enrollment and perceived themselves as equally committed to Christ upon graduation or they came to Bethel with another faith perspective and were not interested in becoming Christ-followers. This explanation may have impacted the limited resonance with truth-seekers found in this case as well.

I was really strong in the faith before I came to Bethel. I can say little change, because it has reinforced my faith.

I am Muslim and now I know more about Christianity. For me it was a plus and a plus. I learned about Christianity and gained an education. I would [incorporate] more about world religions. I would include Buddhism, and Islam, and Judaism, so when someone finishes at Bethel who just believes only Christianity, they will know more about the world.

I would say I've had neutral movement on the Christ-followers and truth-seekers core values. I don't attend church. I'm not really sure exactly where I stand on Christianity. It just hasn't come up that much. I think those have kind of stayed neutral.

Christ-followers—I don't think that I have moved a lot on this. What caused me to move at all was having formulate that faith statement and constantly be including it in my writing. Why didn't I move more? Because I'm stubborn.

Coming in I accepted this as an important value and leaving I accept it as an important value. I am who I am.

The meaning I give to not having moved on this core value is that sometimes you have the values and beliefs that you have that you cannot change. You feel that is right for you and there is nothing that can shake that.

I observe a strong conceptual link between the examples provided as evidence for growth related to the core values of character-builders and reconcilers. Becoming more tolerant of different views, different beliefs, and different values as well as learning to work with others in difficult situations were provided as examples of character and parallel the responses connected to reconcilers which include appreciation for the faith diversity of the cohort and growth related to navigating a diverse cohort.

We had a class on reconciliation and there were a lot of tense moments. Even when it's awkward, they encouraged us to approach any conflict from a biblical perspective, to talk directly to the person. I like that intentionality of being reconcilers and the valuing of others.

I grew in my character in tolerance and accepting different views and different cultures, and different beliefs.

I think part of the character building I see as building strong relationships with others. I think my ability to relate to and work with diverse individuals has increased.

I've experienced considerable change in being a reconciler. The group—the cohort—was very diverse. I learned to embrace everyone no matter what race or religion or lack thereof. We're all God's children.

Participants' lack of identification with the core values of salt and light and world-changers appears to have been impacted by the definition or a perception of irrelevance.

Irenic spirit? I haven't heard that word before. What does it mean?

Salt and light; relating to the world in and society in culturally relevant ways. I'm neutral on that. I really don't know.

We are salt and light. I don't disagree with that. I just really have no comment on that.

Salt and light and world-changers are probably the ones that are least, you know, pop or resonate in my mind. We'll see what people do after graduation.

**Thematic findings.** One overarching theme that emerged from CAPS/GS data was evidence of participant growth in terms of capacity to interact with people of diverse backgrounds. They report being more accepting of others and having learned to respond more successfully in difficult situations involving difference.

When I think about how I've changed, the first thing that came to mind was my involvement in group projects and working with a variety of people. I think that's one of the things I grown the most in. I appreciate that my cohort is made up of a variety of ages and backgrounds. It seems like a diverse group to me and the fact that I've been able to work with a lot of these people has increased my ability to relate to and work with diverse individuals.

I believe I am more open to other ideas; more accepting of others. I think perhaps how I personally changed was being more willing to see other views.

Being exposed to different individuals was a big learning for me. We had a lot of different individuals within my cohort from all different backgrounds: different ethnicities; different faith backgrounds or no faith background; a gay woman in a committed relationship. Very different than what I expected but the great thing is people got along great. We were able to still opening share about our faith without them feeling like we were trying convert or coerce them.

The best class I took was with [professor]. That was the best teacher I ever had in my entire life. [Professor] is a global person, somebody who knows social justice, somebody

who knows human beings, somebody who knows how to treat people...[Professor] took the whole class outside of a little box and it was like touring the world. [Professor] helped us understand the world globally and ethically.

There's been a common theme that's run throughout my program with each professor, each class—the Imago Dei. Everybody is created in the image of God, whether believers or non-believers, and just [experiencing] a lot of grace and mercy; being reconcilers. It's really softened my heart in a lot of ways. I've moved from being kind of legalistic in my faith to a lot more understanding and having a more holistic view of how I regard others.

A second general theme that merged was that CAPS/GS graduates were leaving their Bethel experience with a greater sense of confidence and self-efficacy. In some cases, this seemed to reflect having accomplished something and, in some cases, more than they thought possible. Others gained a sense of vocational clarity and confidence in their ability as they move into the workplace.

I have definitely grown in my confidence as a student and in participating with other people. I've actually learned more technology. I remember my first class when I didn't even know how to create a document. Later I had a class that was very difficult for me, but when I was able to understand the material and pass the class, I felt very confident that I was truly understanding.

Learning that I'm organized and disciplined enough to read and write papers was great.

I learned that people can be in different places in their spirituality and I learned how to approach them without being offensive. This is very helpful each time I talk to [my patients] in my profession.

A theme that emerged throughout our time in our program is the concept of story. A good story has a hero or heroine who overcomes a lot of obstacles and challenges to reach the goal they want. That was transformational for me. In the past, I've tended to run away. If the going got tough, I got going. I gave up rather than fighting through it. The whole concept of story has given me the strength and resolve, knowing that God is co-authoring my story, and these obstacles and challenges are for good. I've proven to myself that I can finish something, which is a really big deal to me.

I think I'm better able to say what I'm not interested in pursuing and where I want to focus for my career. I'm no longer pursuing or looking for opportunities that are outside of a focus on [my] market.

A transformational moment for me was the sheer accomplishment and pride in finishing my thesis and final defense. The hours of work and research and writing and tweaking

that it took; just the feeling that I actually did it and could finish all the work that went into that brought a lot of personal satisfaction.

**Influencers.** Overwhelming evidence pointed to the cohort as the single most influential factor in CAPS/GS participants' stories of transformation. These experiences were not always easy but provided relational contexts in which learners explored ideas and learned to accept and accommodate differences. They learned from members of their cohort members and members of their cohort supported their learning and processes. In addition to the relational support provided by the cohort, participants seemed to especially value the exposure to diverse perspectives that was an inherent part of the cohort experience and to identify his exposure to new or different perspectives as a catalyst for change.

Professors also had a significant impact on student growth. Students noted having benefited from professors who were knowledgeable in their field and from those who took time to encourage them toward success. Participants were especially appreciative of the ways that faculty communicated belief in their potential and the concrete ways were supported in the process of degree completion.

### **Seminary, St. Paul (SEM)**

**Descriptive Findings.** There were three core values with which Seminary participants most strongly identified. The most commonly named area of growth and change was reconcilers, followed closely by Christ-followers and truth-seekers. A common characteristic of the SEM responses was the numerous caveats participants provided to qualify their movement toward these core values.

While SEM participants overwhelmingly described themselves as having grown in terms of their capacity as, they also consistently identified systemic factors within the institution that had worked against that growth.

In language, the school seems to honor people who are different, but in practice, truly honoring the worth and dignity of people from all races and purposely seeking to create community would mean making community where they feel like they can be themselves. And that's hard to do in the middle of an upper class white environment. My movement towards desiring reconciliation and honoring people who are different hasn't come from this particular institution, but it comes from living in the city, where I'm surrounded by people who are different than me.

I've definitely experienced positive change in being a reconciler. I learned more about how to interact with other people and how to accept people where they were and who they are—not just what I perceived them to be. But I really found it difficult, the more that I was here, and especially the more that I started to become friends with students of color because I started hearing their experiences and their experiences were very different than mine. Hearing their stories of discrimination and the difficulties they've experienced really opened my eyes.

Coming from the rural background that I have and not having experience with inner city populations at all and holding stereotypes that I now find pretty repulsive and that I'm glad to be rid of...[to now working primarily with low-income African American moms [represents a big change]. They are no longer "the other"; someone I can just suppress or oppress and not think anything of it.

I think that before [my Seminary education] I thought reconciliation meant everybody agreeing, which is obviously not a correct understanding of the word. Now, for me, being reconciled with someone else does not require them to be reconciled with me. Whoever they are—whatever "the other" is, in order for me to be reconciled, I don't really get to put a requirement on them. As a Christ-follower, the requirement is on me to live in a state of reconciliation; it's an action.

I have definitely moved towards being more of a reconciler; really being aware of my cultural lens and cultural presuppositions that I bring. I took a "Culture and Ministry" class that [helped me see] I'm part of a dominant culture and there are really a lot of people who don't have a voice and how do we start bring them in. Bethel says they want to be embracing of all races but if you look at the diversity of faculty, there isn't a whole lot of diversity with women or people of color. It's a really hard place to get there.

I'm in SP700 now and reconciliation was a huge piece. There was a moment when a student made some racially charged comments and an African-American woman in the class cried and there was some other kind of heated response and it was very emotionally charged [in the classroom]. The professor handled it really well, having us write down our experience of what had happened and sharing it and processing as a group what just happened and how in our own ministries it might be avoided or how we might navigate it when it happens. That was worth the tuition for the whole course. Understanding that there's a difference between what the intention is in saying certain things and what the result is. They are two different realities.

Table 5

*SEM Participant Responses related to Core Values*

| <b>Core Value</b>  | <b>Growth/Change*</b> | <b>No Change</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Christ-Followers   | 11                    | 4                |
| Character-Builders | 8                     | 7                |
| Truth-Seekers      | 10                    | 5                |
| Learners           | 5                     | 10               |
| Reconcilers        | 12                    | 3                |
| Salt and Light     | 2                     | 13               |
| World-Changers     | 7                     | 8                |

\*Growth/Change may have been described as toward, away from or both/and and required that participant provide anecdotal evidence of change.

SEM participants also expressed strong movement in terms of their commitment to being Christ-followers but were very careful to clarify the ways in which their definition of being a Christ-follower did not match the definition provided.

I'm less committed to being a Christ-follower as it's defined here than I would have been when I first got here. When I think of evangelical, there are a lot of things I associate with it that I don't think I want to be associated with anymore. Being a Christ-follower to me means being incarnational—going out and living the values that I see in scripture, that I see Christ promoting. I'm more committed to living my life and letting my life be a reflection of who Christ is in me.

I am absolutely a Christ-follower, but in a different way than I ever expected. Orthodox? Conversionist? You know, I don't have a lot to say about that. It doesn't mean anything to me, quite frankly. I'm not comfortable identifying as an evangelical. I've learned more about what has been done to other people in the name of evangelicalism and I'm completely not okay with that. There's a dissonance.

Being a Christ-follower has become more important to me than it was the day I walked in here. But I'm no longer a conversionist. And I think Scripture's important, but when I read this [rooted in the authority of Scripture] I'm like, what do you mean by that.? What does that mean to you? A lot of the definitions make me nervous. But Christ-follower? That's really important.

Similarly, students resonated with the idea of growing as truth-seekers, but were less committed to the official definition.

I would say I've had some movement in understanding what it means to be a truth-seeker and to recognize in a more holistic sense. So, understanding that truth isn't limited to

scripture and the tradition of the church, and recognizing it in a fuller sense of creation and created beings.

I would rebel against the concept of truth and the way it seems like it's being proposed; that there is one truth and that we're seeking after that one truth. I'm not going so far as to say that everybody has their own truth, but there's more of an openness that I need to figure out what I believe about truth. [Saying], this is my truth, as best as I can understand it. This is what I believe about the Bible, as best as I can understand it. And I could be wrong. Leaving that open has changed me.

Truth-seekers stands out to me. I came from a very conservative, charismatic background, with thinking that, this is the right way, this is the only way to be a Christian, to live. If you're outside of this narrow description, then you're not a Christian. And that's just not the truth. Being in Seminary with a multitude of different denominations and traditions has been really good for me.

I think I understand that value [truth-seekers] differently. I've moved to a place where I'm definitely more comfortable in ambiguity but I don't feel like that is the same as saying there is not truth. But it still leaves space for the mysteries of God. [Truth] isn't certain answers I can rattle off.

About half of the respondents resonated with the character-builders value, but, interestingly, seemed to embrace the specifics of the definition more closely than the primary identifier. This may be because of the presence of the Center for Spiritual and Personal Formation within the Seminary structure and the more frequent use of the terms formation and whole and holy in the Seminary culture compared to the term character. Additionally, in light of common definitional usage, some students may equate the process of formation with being formed into the image and likeness of Christ and may have lumped their formation growth into the Christ-follower category.

I have experienced considerable change in the character-builder category in a positive way. There's been a lot of growth and development in my personal life and I recognize the value of that. I feel like more of a whole person and then I started; someone who does have what it takes to be in ministry.

It says development of whole and holy persons in character-builders so I feel I've grown in that. I'm more comfortable in who I am. I learned who I am and if that differs from my family's expectations, or my friend's expectations, or my church expectations, that's okay too.

I never considered wholeness and holiness in Christianity until I came here. I never knew it was a possibility. I didn't know there was something that could be actually embraced and then taught. And so my experience of transformation is understanding my vulnerabilities and embracing me just the way I am while also being sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The character-building piece—committed to developing whole and holy persons. I've definitely sensed movement toward that. I found it really helpful in focusing on me becoming, not just knowledge-rich, but developing into a whole and sanctified person.

One interpretation of the limited change reported in regard to learners could be that individuals who are pursuing a graduate degree may already have a fairly solid sense of themselves as learners and may not experience that as a growth area. Additionally, I observed that students tended to link truth-seekers and learners responses, which may indicate that the Seminary population identifies the search for truth as the primary task of learning. For those who did experience change in this area, one response seemed to indicate a bit of tension regarding how learning is delivered and defined, while others learned more than then expected.

I'm a natural learner and I love to learn and I'm a little obsessive about books and learning.

Being a learner is a tough one for me to define. In some ways I think I've moved in a positive direction on that one. Sometimes I have felt that my seminary experience has been more about, "Can you know these certain facts? Can you regurgitate and give exactly what the professor is looking for?" versus being allowed to explore and figure out for myself where I'm at on something. I feel like some classes have limited my growth because of assignments that have been given. And then there were exceptions like the change for me from a traditional teaching of Hebrew to an inductive method; a very positive change in my opinion. I actually felt really opened up—it opened the door for the language to become more relevant.

Early on, I was a little annoyed by some of the spiritual formation courses. I came in with more of a bent of toward right knowledge and the right information making you an effective pastor. [Now I see] there is more to ministry preparation than just academic and biblio-theological elements. That's maybe been the hallmark of my experience at Bethel; having more categories to explain developmental realities and sociological phenomenon I experience in ministry contexts.

I've definitely gone toward being a learner or embracing the learner in me. I think I've increased my understanding of me as a learner. Some of the professors allowed me to be the kind of learner I am. Whereas, other professors are very linear and systematic and I would work hard but it would almost be a detriment to my faith at that point. Other professors understood the diversity of how people learn and created assignments with more freedom so that you can best learn from it in your style.

Participants appear to give little import to the core values of salt and light and world-changers at a Seminary, as I expected they would represent underlying motivation for pursuit of a Seminary degree. It appears that this value may have suffered from a lack of understanding regarding corresponding definition and/or a lack of relevance for the current student.

Pietistic—I don't remember what the definition of that is. Irenic? It's been a long time since I've taken a church history class. I don't remember what those words mean. Denominational heritage, I mean, I get that. Swedish Baptist. Baptist General Conference. Converge Worldwide. That makes sense to me but in the sense that we're not—that just not entirely our niche. It's not like we just have BGC students here.

Salt and light—that one doesn't really resonate for me. And then world-changers—I actually think I'm much less. When I came in I wanted to change the whole world. I actually wanted to be like a speaker on Women of Faith so that I would travel nationally and speak at conferences or something.

The salt and light—I just find that interesting that they're informed by the pietistic denominational heritage. I feel like that isn't as much of the emphasis that I got through my experience here; it was much more progressive in thought than this denominational heritage. What's irenic?

I would say world-changers has been a challenge for me because I realize that the patriarchal system that I was raised in still informs some of my beliefs. As a world-changer, I do feel somewhat prepared but I need to be surrounded by women who are leadership roles so that I can grow in my understanding of what that might look like.

**Thematic Findings.** The general theme that emerged from SEM participant stories of transformation focused on relational change; change in how they view themselves and change in how they view and relate to others. For some, this included a change of program and/or clarification of call.

[One way that I have changed] has been really finding the ability to really look at myself and the ways in which I grow and develop in my spiritual formation and who I am as a

person; to dig at my own assumptions and my own belief systems. It really caused me to rethink some of those things that I came in with.

In so many ways, I feel like a completely different person than when I started the program. Specifically, the idea of self-differentiation; being able to hold my own and still be in relationship with others, has been a huge growth area.

Seminary started a journey of finding and owning my voice. While writing a final paper for my internship, I found myself reflecting on different things I've learned and realized that for the first time in my life, I can genuinely say I like myself.

I came into seminary thinking I was going to probably go into a pastoral role and not really wanting to do things related to counseling and pastoral care. I was very anxious about those things. I took a family systems class and that's where my world—in a positive sense—really started to get deconstructed. Understanding my own family system was the most helpful piece. I found God had really given me a gift for [counseling] and God really shaped me through my M.Div to be able to recognize and embrace that part of myself.

What has happened in my life being here has put me in many ways outside of the strictures of what's orthodox evangelicalism. And so that's the grief—the piece of knowing my homeland is unfamiliar now....I'm trying to figure out how to be as authentic and as good of a guest as I can be....I'm like a lot of folks who come here and there is space and so we grow. But now we've grown past where the system is okay with us growing. And that's been a really challenging and painful experience for me, personally, to both feel like the place that has fostered the greatest growth of my life also doesn't know what to do now that I grew.

I've changed a lot. I changed programs. I came in pursuing a Master's in Christian education and then, after a year, decided to pursue an M.Div. In the midst of all this, I had a change in understanding of what God is calling me to.

My understanding of humanity has grown. At the same time, I see how much I still have to learn, so it's a humble understanding of people. I feel like I have a greater ability to listen and just be with people and not be anxious.

I can describe a series of ways I've changed, but I guess I'd highlight the most beneficial. It's almost ironic to refer to one's humility, because it sounds arrogant to say that someone's been humbled by their experience. But I feel that undergoing this process has widened my horizon of ways to look at the world beyond how I look at it, acknowledging my own bias, being more aware of the other, and seeing how my biases can be damaging if I'm not aware of my own issues.

In regard to self and other, one of the sub-categories that emerged was evidence of significant shifts in identity and perspective related to gender.

I feel like the process that I've undergone has been very life changing in how I see the world, how I view myself, how I relate to the world. There were a lot of belief systems that I had coming in that were able to be transformed. At first, I didn't even think that seminary was a place for women and I was very intimidated. I remember distinctly being dropped off at the door and feeling like—I'm damned if I do and I'm damned if I don't. I felt like it came to a point of, I needed to do this. I needed to be here. I was here 2 or 3 years and something inside me had changed. I now see myself rising in a leadership role of teaching.

I was raised knowing that women could be in ministry but as a young adult I was involved in a more conservative Baptist context so I kind of hear that I didn't have that as an option, which was sort of a disconnect having grown up hearing that I had that option. So I was trying to wrestle through what I actually believed. I'm in a space now that I can come to terms with this call, comfortably, knowing that there are other people who desire God and are in the right place with God who sense this call as well that are women.

I see now a lot more of the struggle for women students coming into seminary, to graduate and try to figure out where they fit in a leadership model as pastors. Coming into seminary, [I was] really uncomfortable with the thought of women in pastoral leadership and now, graduating, [thinking] well why wouldn't they, why couldn't they. I've had to do some hermeneutical work to understand that. So that's where I've grown and changed—being able to realize that, contextually speaking, 2000 years ago and where we are today—we're in a very different place. But I hear things about women not always feeling like they're welcome to be at the table. I wouldn't have observed that before. [Now] that's just a no-brainer. Women are here and they're at the table. Give them space.

**Influencers.** It was clear that the process of being asked to examine one's assumptions and beliefs in conjunction with exposure to new perspectives was transforming for SEM participants. Although these experiences occurred throughout the curriculum, courses in spiritual and personal formation and the professors who taught them were most frequently cited as significant influencers in this process. The specific content areas that emerged as formative included systems thinking, including family of origin, and coursework that contributed to a deeper understanding of culture and context. A number of student mentioned taking advantage of counseling services provided by the Seminary as way to attend to the issues and invitations that emerged as they attended to their formation.

Relationships with faculty and staff members were critical to student growth and change. Participants cited the presence of female faculty as a vital component in their formation and also expressed significant concern regarding the limited presence of women role models in their educational experience. Student Life and Formation/Placement personnel were also frequently mentioned as important companions on the journey.

Finally, participants named off-site experiences such as coursework field experiences, clinical pastoral education, and supervised clinical experience as significant in their process of transformation. In these settings, they were able to put their reconciliation skills and convictions to the test and live out their understanding of what it means to be a Christ-follower. Encounter with and embrace of alterity proved to be formative for these students.

### **Cross-Case Findings**

**Descriptive Findings.** Using the core value rank-order that emerged for each divisional case and weighting each division equally, I arrived at the following conclusions regarding the relative relevance of the core values across Bethel University.

It would appear that, despite stories that included tension over the reconcilers value and what is actually lived out in the institution, it represents a value with which participants resonated and perceived they had grown. Across cases, an impression emerged that the wording of the value applied only to race and that participants believed it should include gender and other expressions of difference.

In two of the three cases, definitional issues emerged in regard to Christ-followers. On the one hand, there were participants who weren't sure what descriptors such as orthodox and conversionist meant. On the other hand, some participants understood the definition but indicated

Table 6

*Rank Ordered Responses related to Core Values Across Cases*

| <b>Rank Order</b> | <b>CAS*</b>   | <b>CAPS/GS*</b>                    | <b>SEM*</b>        | <b>Across Cases**</b>          |
|-------------------|---|------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1                 | Christ-Followers                                      | Learners                           | Reconcilers        | Reconcilers                    |
| 2                 | Reconcilers   | Reconcilers<br>Character-Builders  | Christ-Followers   | Christ-Followers               |
| 3                 | Character-Builders<br>Truth-Seekers<br>Salt and Light | Truth Seekers<br>World-Changers    | Truth-Seekers      | Truth Seekers                  |
| 4                 | World-Changers  | Christ-Followers<br>Salt and Light | Learners           | Character-Builders<br>Learners |
| 5                 | Learners  |                                    | Character-Builders | World-Changers                 |
| 6                 |   |                                    | World-Changers     | Salt and Light                 |
| 7                 |   |                                    | Salt and Light     |                                |

\*As determined by number of participant examples of anecdotal evidence of growth/change.

\*\*Results based on equal weighting of three cases.

a lack of identification with the descriptors. In both scenarios, the participants indicated their commitment to the primary value and a lack of commitment to the full definition provided.

It seems important to note that the position of *Learner* in the cross-case rank order may not be representative of its relative importance. The apparent dichotomy that emerged between CAS participant responses regarding their satisfaction with their academic experience at Bethel and the absence of anecdotal evidence of themselves as transformed learners may be attributed to a weakness in the interview protocol. As a result, it is recommended that this finding be regarded lightly.

One clear cross-case finding that emerged is the limited resonance of world-changers and salt and light. In both cases, it appears that the value and its corresponding definitions were not meaningful to these participants. In the case of salt and light, the denominational descriptors of piety and irenic spirit simply did not translate, especially when paired with the concept of

cultural relevance. And graduating students seemed to perceive that identifying themselves as a changer was, at the very least, audacious and, in the worst case scenario, arrogant.

**Thematic Findings.** It was challenging to identify meaningful themes across the institution, since many of the stories were situated in experiences specific to that case. Despite this difficulty, one thread that appeared in narratives across cases was that participants perceived themselves as more open to and accepting of diverse perspectives. According to their stories, this growth played out in a variety of ways. For some, it made them more willing to ask questions and explore new territory. Many also reported the capacity to be more comfortable with the ambiguity they encountered in the process of exploration and to tolerate the anxiety that occurred when others in their life were not supportive of their process.

I feel like I have the tools I need for ministry and a framework to explore theology—not just to have a set theology.

I'm better able to differentiate myself from others. I am able to recognize my faults but not let them overtake me.

I feel like I've changed so much. I've changed theologically. I was fairly narrow-minded and so being able to grow and being free to ask different theological questions and not get super-anxious about them is something I've really appreciated.

They [department faculty] really push you to step outside your boundaries. They put me in a field experience in one of the most chaotic places I've ever been. And it was really good. It helped me figure out what I was passionate about.

One way I've been changed is that my theological imagination has been greatly stretched and challenged through the classes that have been offered and through the interaction with my cohort.

For others, the awareness that emerged from exposure to new perspectives was parlayed into a greater capacity for contextualization. Encountering new perspectives not only made them more aware of their own assumptions, biases, and beliefs, but it opened up the possibility of understanding the perspective of others in more complex ways. This understanding, in turn,

enabled participants to respond to the differences they encountered with acceptance and humility.

The biggest way that I would say I've changed is being more open to other perspectives.

The whole system I had built up has been dismantled a little and I see more the importance of issues of social justice and practical, down-to-earth issues.

I took a missions class that gave me a lot of different perspectives on all different issues; just broadening my understanding of people in general and the different backgrounds they come from. I definitely have matured a lot.

Now, when someone tries to complement me saying, "How can you work with those people?" I want to say, "I am those people."

I've learned to understand multiple perspectives and to see them as situated in societal and historical contexts.

**Influencers.** Across cases, relationships with faculty and peers emerged as primary influencers in the change process. For CAS and SEM students, faculty appear to have the greatest impact while for CAPS/GS, their cohort of peers was cited with more frequency. In keeping with the thematic finding above, it was the capacity of faculty and peers to introduce students to new and challenging ideas and perspectives while being engaged with them as people that seemed to contribute most strongly to the relational impact on growth.

Off-campus opportunities were the other variable that was influential across cases. Anything that took students out of their normal educational routine and gave them an opportunity to encounter new contexts and/or apply their learning in a real-life situation seemed to play an important role in their transformation. Many of the examples provided were experiences required or sponsored by Bethel, but students also sought out living situations or volunteer opportunities that stimulated their growth.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the Bethel University student experience of transformation as it relates to Bethel's stated core values. For triangulation purposes, participant narratives were analyzed both in the context of the identified core value and across the interview without regard for identified core value. What emerged as an overarching theme across cases—that their Bethel University educational experience developed in them a capacity to be more open to and accepting of diverse perspectives—does not fit neatly into one of the seven core value statements. However, based on the narratives that contributed to this finding, it does appear to intersect with the core values of truth-seekers, learners, and reconcilers. Being open to diverse opinions and alternative explanations represents an important facet of academic scholarship, provides a greater likelihood that the learner will discover something truthful, and contributes to a disposition that is essential to reconciliation. With the caveat that learners may appear lower on the cross-case rank order list than would reflect actual student experience, this observation seems to provide support for the apparent relevance of reconcilers, truth-seekers, and learners. This embrace of diverse perspectives may also be a factor in the definitional qualifiers many students added to their identification with the Christ-follower value.

I also triangulated the CAS descriptive findings with results of the 2010 CAS Senior Survey which were provided by Joel Frederickson and found very little congruence. Most notable is the relative position of learner, previously commented on as having been impacted by limitations of the current research design. Of equal interest is the appearance of reconcilers much higher in the current study than in the previous year. While it must be emphasized that comparing these results is a bit like comparing apples and penguins, it raises my curiosity. It seems possible that events related to racial and other forms of reconciliation that were

highlighted on campus during the 2010-2011 school year may have impacted student response to this core value. A more meaningful comparison will be that of the 2010 and 2011 CAS Senior Survey results. The other observation of potential interest is the ranking of Christ-follower. It leads me to wonder if participants might be influenced by the presence of an interviewer and therefore more likely to identify with this core value than they would have been in an anonymous on-line context.

Table 6

*Comparison of results*

| <b>Rank Order</b> | <b>Current Core Values Study with 2011 CAS Seniors</b> | <b>2010 CAS Senior Survey Results</b> |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1                 | Christ-Followers                                       | Learners                              |
| 2                 | Reconcilers  | Truth-Seekers                         |
| 3                 | Character-Builders<br>Truth-Seekers<br>Salt and Light  | Character Builders                    |
| 4                 | World-Changers   | Christ-Followers                      |
| 5                 | Learners   | Salt and Light                        |
| 6                 |  | World-Changer                         |
| 7                 |  | Reconciler                            |

These were the only related research results I had available with which to make comparisons, but it is my recommendation that, as the USLC moves forward with the tasks with which it has been charged, that you utilize the wealth of knowledge that has been gathered across the university in regard to student transformation. In addition to the work coordinated by Joel Fredrickson in his role as Associate Dean of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation, Steve Sandage has more than 10 years of longitudinal data reflecting change over time among Seminary students and I believe Lori Jass and Ryan Gunderson have gathered data specific to

CAPS/GS. Additionally, many independent studies have been conducted in conjunction with self-study efforts that may provide important information regarding student learning.

Generally speaking, it appears that some of the descriptors associated with the core values may not be terribly relevant to students or may not reflect accurate outcome statements based on their experiences of transformation. Words and phrases that seemed particularly troublesome to or lacking in meaning for participants included: orthodox; conversionist; evangelical; character; pietistic denominational heritage; irenic spirit; and change the world. The cross-case thematic finding described above may also suggest that there is a learning outcome that is important to students that is not currently reflected fully in any one of the core values.

While I believe the cross-case theme that emerged is a powerful outcome representing significant personal transformation, its singularity illustrates the diversity that is present within Bethel University. Students come to the various divisions within Bethel University at different life stages, with very different experiences, motivations, goals, and expectations. The life experience and developmental needs represented by undergraduate CAS participants provided a considerable contrast to that of the adult learners enrolled in CAPS undergraduate degree programs. The seminary student participants training for pastoral ministry appeared to have a very different set of motivations and concerns than the adult learners in the Gerontology graduate school program. It became clear to me as I soaked in these narratives that each division within the University has a distinct history and culture and student demographics, and, as a result, differential educational experiences characterized by unique strengths have emerged. It is my recommendation that, as the University Learning Committee reviews these findings and ponders the implications they may have for the committee's agenda, these distinctives not be minimized.

## References

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- Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York: The Guildford Press.
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## APPENDIX A

### Solicitation Letter

Thank you for your interest in the **Student Transformation and Core Values at Bethel University** study. The purpose of this study is to better understand, from a student perspective, the experience of growth and change, if any, Bethel University students experience during their enrollment at Bethel as it relates to Bethel's core values and the mechanisms by which that change was facilitated. The findings will be used, in conjunction with other assessment data, to assess current offerings and to inform and influence on-going development of curricular and co-curricular efforts designed to produce stated learner outcomes. The primary research questions are:

- 1) How do students at Bethel University perceive their personal growth and transformation as it relates to Bethel's stated core values; and
- 2) What specific experiences do students perceive influenced these aspects of growth and change?

I am the primary investigator for this study and will employ four co-investigators to conduct the interviews. If you decide to participate, you will be scheduled to meet with one of my co-investigators. During that session, the co-investigator will review the purpose of the research with you, will solicit your consent to complete a brief survey and an interview, answer any questions you may have regarding the research, and will ask for your signature on this consent form. You will then be asked to complete a brief survey that will be used to categorize participants demographically and to engage in an interview with the co-investigator. The purpose of the interview will be to learn about your overall experience of growth and change at Bethel and the ways that you perceive it relates to Bethel's stated core values. You can expect the total process to take 45 minutes. At the conclusion of your scheduled appointment, you will receive a \$25 Target gift card as a token of appreciation for the time and energy required by your participation. For your review, a copy of the consent form and a list of Bethel's Core Values are attached to this e-mail.

If, after reviewing these documents, you still wish to participate, please respond affirmatively to this e-mail and **include some general days and times** (between May 2 and May 20) **that you are available to schedule an interview**. Interviews will be held on the main campus of the University, at the Bethel Office Complex, or at the Seminary. You will receive an e-mail response either from me or my research assistant, Krista Engebretson at [krista-engebretson@bethel.edu](mailto:krista-engebretson@bethel.edu) providing an assigned interview time, location, and co-investigator. Once you have scheduled an interview, you can expect to receive a 24-hour advance e-mail reminder of your appointment.

Thank you for your interest.

Mary L. Jensen, Ed.D.  
Primary Investigator  
[m-jensen@bethel.edu](mailto:m-jensen@bethel.edu)  
651.635.8661

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Consent Form**

#### **Background Information**

You are invited to participate in a study of Bethel student experiences of growth and change as related to Bethel's stated core values. I hope to learn which of the core values, if any, students perceive were most impacted during their enrollment at Bethel and what specific kinds of experiences were most influential in the growth and change that was experienced. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you responded to the invitation to participate and meet the criteria of being a student in his/her final year of study. This research study has been commissioned by the Bethel University Student Learning Committee and in collaboration with Bethel University's Office of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation.

#### **Protocol**

I, Mary L. Jensen, Ed.D., am the primary investigator for this study and will employ four co-investigators to conduct the interviews. Our names and contact information can be found below. If you decide to participate, you will be scheduled to meet with one of my co-investigators. During that session, the co-investigator will review the purpose of the research with you, will solicit your consent to complete a brief survey and an interview, answer any questions you may have regarding the research, and will ask for your signature on this consent form. You will then be asked to complete a brief survey that will be used to categorize participants demographically and to engage in an interview with the co-investigator. The purpose of the interview will be to learn about your overall experience of growth and change at Bethel and the ways that you perceive it relates to Bethel's stated core values. You can expect the total process to take 45 minutes. At the conclusion of your scheduled appointment, you will receive a \$25 Target gift card as a token of appreciation for the time and energy required by your participation.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

There are no known risks or direct benefits. Care will be taken to protect your privacy during the interview. The interview will be conducted in such a way that you will have full control over the nature of what you choose to disclose.

#### **Confidentiality**

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented. Data will not become part of a participant's permanent record and no third parties will be informed of anyone's participation in the study. Audiotapes and printed copies of transcriptions will be kept in a locking file cabinet in the primary investigator's Bethel office. Electronic copies of the transcriptions will be saved in a private server folder on a password-protected Bethel University computer. Participant identities will be protected by use of a code known only to the

investigators. A singular copy of a personal identification key to the codes, the demographic surveys, and the signed informed consent forms will be stored in a locking filing cabinet in the primary investigators home office. Audiotapes, personal identification key, and demographic surveys will be destroyed following completion and presentation of the final report. The expected date of destruction by deletion or shredding is no later than December 31, 2011. Electronic versions of summary demographic data and interview transcripts will be kept on the primary investigator's personal password-protected home computer for 5 years. The expected date of deletion is not later than December 31, 2016. A professional transcriptionist who is not an employee of Bethel University will transcribe interviews verbatim. The transcriptionist will be required to review applicable FERPA regulations in the company of the primary investigator and will sign a statement of confidentiality regarding the content of the audiotapes. Neither the co-investigators nor the transcriptionist will have access to the personal identification key.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Bethel University in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to continue participation at any time without affecting such relationships. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until the final report has been submitted to the University Student Learning Committee, approximately August 1, 2011. Should you decide to withdraw prior to that date, data collected about will be withdrawn and excluded from the study. You may decline to respond to any demographic survey question or to any interview question or probe.

### **Contacts and Questions**

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participant's rights or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact one of the following:

#### **Contact Person: Bethel University Institutional Review Board**

Peter Jankowski, Ph.D.

651.638.6901

[pjankows@bethel.edu](mailto:pjankows@bethel.edu)

#### **Principal Investigator**

Mary Jensen, Ed.D.

651.635.8661

[m-jensen@bethel.edu](mailto:m-jensen@bethel.edu)

#### **Co-investigators:**

- Ryan Gunderson, M.A., LAMFT

651.635.8030

[ryan-gunderson@bethel.edu](mailto:ryan-gunderson@bethel.edu)

- John Koester, B.A.  
651.235.0200  
[jmk53845@bethel.edu](mailto:jmk53845@bethel.edu)
- Jane McCampbell, M.A., LMFT  
612.414.0383  
[janemccampbell@msn.com](mailto:janemccampbell@msn.com)
- Karla Nelson, B.A.  
701.261.1515  
[karla-k-nelson@bethel.edu](mailto:karla-k-nelson@bethel.edu)

**You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.**

**Statement of Consent**

I understand that I am making a decision whether or not to participate. My signature indicates that I have read the information provided above, that my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and that I have decided to participate. I am at least 18 years of age. I give permission for the researcher to audio record this interview. I understand that I may withdraw at any time after signing this form without prejudice should I choose to discontinue participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Co-Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C

### Co-Investigator Consent Process Script

**1) Review purpose of the study:**

The purpose of this study is to better understand, from a student perspective, the experience of growth and change, if any, Bethel University students experience during their enrollment at Bethel as it relates to Bethel's core values and the mechanisms by which that change was facilitated. The findings will be used, in conjunction with other assessment data, to assess current offerings and to inform and influence on-going development of curricular and co-curricular efforts designed to produce stated learner outcomes. The primary research questions are:

- 3) How do students at Bethel University perceive their personal growth and transformation as it relates to Bethel's stated core values; and
- 4) What specific experiences do students perceive influenced these aspects of growth and change?

**2) Assessment of participant's understanding of his/her participation in this study:**

- How did you find out about this opportunity?
- What is your name (confirm participant identity) and what is your current status at Bethel University (confirm "final year of study" status)?
- Did you receive an electronic copy of the consent form prior to this interview? Have you read the form? (If not, allow time for review).
- What is your understanding of how this interview is related to your current enrollment and progress at Bethel University?
- What do you understand to be the purpose of this interview and how long to you expect it to last?
- What concerns, if any, do you have regarding your participation in this interview?
- Having read the consent form, do you have any questions regarding how your identify will be protected in this process?

**3) Secure signature on consent form.**

**4) Offer a copy to participant. Highlight identify of specific co-investigator.**

**5) Remind participant of their right to terminate participation at any time without penalty.**

**6) Provide demographic survey and ask participant to complete.**

**7) Add participant's name to coded personal identification form.**

**8) Turn on audio recording equipment and begin interview protocol.**

## APPENDIX D

### Demographic Survey

**Instructions:** Please respond as instructed to each of the six demographic categories below. If there are categories to which you choose not to respond, please leave them blank. **DO NOT** write your name on this form.

**1. Gender** (please select one)

Female

Male

**2. Age category** (please select one)

18-22 years

23-39 years

40-55 years

56 and over

**3. Race/Ethnicity** (please check all that apply)

Hispanic or Latino: a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin

American Indian or Alaska Native: a person having origins in any of the original people of North and South America (including Central America) who maintains a tribal affiliation of community involvement

Asian: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Black or African American: a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands

White: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

**4. Academic Division** (please select one)

- College of Arts and Sciences
- College of Adult and Professional Studies
- Graduate School (MA or Doctoral)
- Seminary

**5. Current Degree Program** (please select one and write-in specific major or degree program)

- Bachelor Degree \_\_\_\_\_ (Major)
- Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_ (Program)
- Doctoral Degree \_\_\_\_\_ (Program)

**6. General Academic Performance** (please select the one that most closely approximates your cumulative GPA)

- greater than 3.0
- between 2.0 and 3.0
- less than 2.0

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Protocol

**Set watch/timer for 30 minutes.**

**Turn on audio recording equipment.**

**Begin interview.**

**Identify interviewer (by name) and interviewee (by code)**

1. As you think back over your time as a student at Bethel University, can you describe ways in which, for better or worse, you believe you have changed?
  - Are there specific “transformational” moments or events that stand out in your mind? Describe.
  - Who or what were influential during these experiences? (i.e. people, activities/events, books, experiences, departments, etc.)
    - Internal to Bethel?
    - External to Bethel?
2. Please review this list of Bethel’s stated core values and reflect on your experience related to each of these areas.
  - In which of these areas, if any, do you perceive you have experienced considerable change, movement toward or away from, during your time at Bethel?
    - Which core value(s) and what is the nature of the change?
      - Toward?
      - Away from?
    - What factors did you experience as most influential in that process of change? (i.e. people, activities/events, books, experiences, departments, etc.)
    - Can you provide an example or a story that illustrates how this change has impacted you?
  - In which of these areas, if any, do you perceive you experienced little or no change during your time at Bethel?
    - What meaning do you give to the lack of movement in these areas?
3. Is there anything else you would like us to know regarding your experience as a student at Bethel related to Bethel’s core values?

**Thank you for your contribution.**

**Turn off audio recording information.**

**Provide participant with \$25 Target gift card as a token of thanks for their time and data.**

## APPENDIX F

### Bethel Core Values

**We are Christ-followers;** orthodox, conversionist, and evangelical; rooted in the authority of Scripture.

**We are character-builders** concerned with personal and spiritual formation and therefore committed to the development of whole and holy persons.

**We are truth-seekers** recognizing that all truth has its source in God as revealed in creation and Scripture, and personified in Christ.

**We are learners** committed to academic excellence within a community characterized by teaching, scholarship, and service.

**We are reconcilers** honoring the worth and dignity of people from all races and purposely seeking to create a community that reflects the diversity of the Body of Christ.

**We are salt and light** relating to the world and society in culturally relevant ways while being informed by our pietistic denominational heritage and characterized by an irenic spirit.

**We are world-changers** driven to prepare graduates who will shape and change the world through exemplary leadership in the church and throughout society.