

## **Perry Glanzer**

Educational Administration

### *College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose: What Role Does Student and Institutional Religious Identity Play?*

Former Harvard President Derek Bok (2011) recently wrote, "one of the least examined and yet most fundamental questions about undergraduate education" concerns "how students acquire the values and convictions that help to give meaning and purpose to their lives." The aim of this project is to address this lack of knowledge. Recent work on spirituality in higher education has found that most colleges and universities offer little support to students exploring issues of purpose and meaning (Astin, Astin and Lindholm 2011). Despite this reality, findings also suggest that the faith tradition of students, as well as the resources found at some faith-based colleges and universities, do impact the prevalence and character of students' quest for meaning and purpose (Astin, Astin, and Lindholm 2011; Braskamp, Trautvetter and Ward 2006; Smith and Snell 2009).

My colleague (Jonathan Hill from Calvin College) and I propose to undertake a mixed methods analysis that will seek to shed light upon the impact of student faith traditions and institutional identity on the quest for meaning and purpose. We will use survey and interview data from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) as well as additional student interview data collected from nine targeted colleges and universities from diverse religious and secular settings to explore how the faith identity of students and its associated theological or philosophical beliefs influence their views about the search for meaning and purpose. Moreover, we will seek to identify ways this quest is nurtured or inhibited by particular communities of discourse in the college or university environment (e.g., type of university or college, student group involvement, friends, faculty, majors, classes, religious affiliation, etc.). The findings from the study will be published in academic journal articles and a book similar to other related studies (e.g., Smith 2011; Freitas, 2008).

Jonathan has currently secured a Louisville Institute Grant, and the Templeton Foundation has also asked us to submit a full proposal that would fund this research. This URC grant would be used to complement this funding and demonstrate Baylor's support for the project.