Being Spiritual at Baylor

“Engage in Spiritual Formation”
By Burt Burleson

Introduction

There are a number of directions this session can go and class activities will, of course, depend on which resources you use. The various written materials for this week invite our students to consider spiritual values, practices, and dispositions as integral to a successful academic journey. Our aim, in addition to helping them succeed academically, is to take down the wall between what they perceive as spiritual and unspiritual. This shift is central to our mission and one all of us need to be nurturing. The dualism between what is academic and what is spiritual is very limiting. Everything is spiritual.

Activity One

Flowing from one of the essays or perhaps your own story as someone in academic life, the following activity can be used to underline this central message that a serious academic life is a profoundly spiritual endeavor. Using the list below, ask your group to reflect, perhaps in small groups first, on how these various aspects of academic life may also be occasions and means for spiritual growth. Another approach would be to have them pick one of these aspects and, after a period of reflection, ask them to share with a partner how they see it as potentially spiritually formative.

1. Being forced to work with a group on a group project.
2. Taking subjects and courses in which you have little interest.
3. Avoiding distractions.
4. Planning a day or a week so that time isn’t wasted.
5. Overcoming anxiety about a subject.
6. Getting comfortable with speaking to professors.
7. Failing.
8. Encountering new perspectives, opinions, and teachings.
9. Responding to perspectives, opinions, and teachings with which you disagree.
10. Helping a fellow student learn.
11. Seeking help.
12. Getting rest and good nutrition.
13. Setting goals.
15. Choosing or changing a major.
16. Taking advantage of service learning opportunities.
17. Getting involved in research.
18. Risking sharing an opinion in class.
19. Enjoying and limiting co-curricular experiences.
20. Doing academic work with integrity.
This list could go on and you will likely come up with other aspects of an academic journey that can be spiritually formative. Take care with this direction. The conversation, with regards to spiritual impact, could easily be reduced to simple responses like, “God wants us to do our best,” or “Jesus wants us to care about others.” Your own reflections, prior to this session will be important. YOU MAY HAVE TO NUDGE, IF NOT PUSH THEM. If they are blocked from making these connections, go ahead and make them knowing that there is some learning they can’t get to yet.

We’ve offered these simple reflections, which correspond to the list above, to prompt your own thinking:
1. Healthy spirituality will always move us towards thoughtful listening to and consideration of others. Those with tendencies towards isolation will need to give themselves to practices, which pull them beyond the self.
2. Developing a love for all truth is spiritual. Being humble about what is needed to truly be educated is spiritual. Being disciplined with those things we do not enjoy is a mark of spiritual growth and creates capacities in us to endure what we do not choose.
3. Learning to control the wandering, meandering mind, to interrupt mechanical thinking and passive imagination, and learn instead to be present is a central aim of every spiritual tradition.
4. Developing the capacity to be intentional about big things begins with intending small things. Thinking about the time we’re given and being intentional with it is an example of the spiritual practice of stewardship.
5. Meditation has a significant impact on anxious states. Naming our fears and perhaps gaining insight as to why something scares us, is important spiritual work. Willingness to walk through life with all that scares us is an act of trust in what or who is beyond us.
6. Letting yourself be mentored, asking questions about another person, seeking friendship, all of these are means to nudge us beyond self-centeredness.
7. You are not God. You are human. Falling is important and without it we cannot know grace. Failure has much more to teach us than does success. Failure can be a great awakening. Failure is a mirror, keeping us honest. It keeps an ego in check.
8. In order to seek Truth I must loosen my grip on my own “truth.” Coming to know, that I can’t know, what I don’t know, takes great spiritual maturity. In order to truly hear another I must love them... or listen charitably.
9. Learning spiritual hospitality requires that I both know who I am and, at the same time, care about the other person. This capacity, to be clear about what I believe but to communicate that in ways that honor others is a sign of spiritual progress.
10. Mature spirituality always leads to a concern for the other. Christian students, in particular, must care about the learning of others in a class.
11. Letting go of pride is a requirement for academic success.
12. Sabbath theology is about realizing our limits, our needs, and what it means to be human.
13. Human beings have uniquely been given the capacity to dream, to imagine, to envision, to hope. A healthy spiritual anthropology understands this longing for more to be a gift and a gift that sends us on a journey. Desire and ambition, while they can become destructive, are doorways that set us on a path, our pilgrimage.
14. What we do over and over and over, forms us deeply. Developing this capacity, to commit something, anything, to memory is working a spiritual muscle that will be used throughout the lifetime.

15. Discerning who we are, what we love, the gifts in our keeping, and how we are being called is the essence of spiritual work and is often manifested in the struggle to choose a major.

16. Doing is important to our knowing. Ancient wisdom ways of knowing understand that involving all of who we are changes (and changes in significant ways) what we're able to comprehend. Applying classroom learning in service to others underscores our value that our learning has a higher purpose. Our education is for the world.

17. We are made to know... made to seek... to discover. A Christian research university embodies this as we work to name what is. As Genesis says, human kind is to “subdue the earth” and “name the animals.”

18. Surrender is the central spiritual task to learn. As one teacher says, “it’s the soul’s core gesture.” When we risk anything, we’re always surrendering something.

19. Being involved and limiting involvement is a practice that must be learned to live a healthy life. The call to move out must be balanced with the call to pull back. It’s not merely that we need to be involved to enjoy life and to limit involvement so we're not worn out. (Though this is critical to a happy college experience). We are also trying to manifest and participate in deeper truth. We belong to others, we can’t become without them. We really are only persons in community. And yet... we are unique... we are individuals... we different and must know ourselves a part from the identity of a group or community or nation.

20. The soul is wounded where secrets abound. The soul is stunted by duplicity. The soul longs for congruence, integrity, and honesty.

Wrapping it Up

Remember, the learning aim here is for them to understand that when it comes to spiritual work and academic life they are “killing two birds with one stone.” While consciousness of these connections is not essential to their efficacy, efforts at spiritual formation and academic progress will be enriched by their own awareness.

Activity Two

Another fruitful focus in this session would be to raise students’ awareness of our religious and denominational diversity and their calling to be a part of this community in ways that are thoughtful and gracious with regards to that diversity.
Exploring Our Religious and Denominational Literacy

I. Baylor’s Religious Breakdown

Approximately, what percent of the incoming class will be Baptist?

- 65%
- 55%
- 50%
- 30%

The answer is approximately 30% (or insert this year’s exact figure)

So, Baptists are a minority. In recent history, generally our percentages look like this:

- Baptists – 30%
- Catholic – 15%
- Non-Denominational – 15%
- Mainline – 20% (Lutherans, Methodist, Presbyterians, Episcopalians)
- Other Christian – 16.5%
- Other major religions – 3%
- Atheist - .5%

It might be helpful here to offer the actual numbers in response to the question: “What is your religious tradition or denominational heritage?” or “Would anyone mind sharing what their tradition is?” In response, you can share the actual numbers from that tradition.

After this exercise, you can simply ask, “What do you make of what you’re hearing?” Perhaps you’ll hear them saying that they are surprised about that. You might ask too, “How are you experiencing those differences?” Be listening for differences in piety, communication, ways of worshiping, positions on social issues, theological convictions, etc.

II. Being Religious at Baylor

The following quiz might be a fun way to get at their awareness or lack of awareness regarding the various traditions on the campus.

Religious and Denominational Literacy Quiz

1. Who are the Wesleyans?
2. Who might refer to a “second Baptism?”
3. Who might be more likely to call their theology “reformed?”
4. Whose approach to the life of faith is sacramental?
5. Who might be more likely to talk about an inner light?
6. Who might not use musical instruments in worship?
7. Who will teach that the purpose of life is to end suffering?
8. Who will be burning incense on Sunday and worship standing up?
9. Who has historically been associated with religious liberty?
10. Who are the Anglicans?
11. Who might be fasting in January?
12. Who might miss every Baylor home football game?
13. Who would likely hold their worship services in a home growing up?
14. Who might be meditating tonight?

**Possible Answers:** Church of Christ, Jews or 7th Day Adventists, Presbyterians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, Orthodox, Episcopalians and Anglicans, Quakers, Assembly of God.

**Answers:**
1. Methodists
2. Assembly of God
3. Presbyterians
4. Catholics
5. Quakers
6. Church of Christ
7. Buddhists
8. Orthodox
9. Baptists
10. Episcopalians (or Anglicans)
11. Muslims
12. Jews or 7th Day Adventists
13. Hindus
14. All of the above

**Conclusion**
You might consider pointing out that their spiritual formation in these years will be impacted significantly by those they come to know and love and learn from who are different.