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Project Title: Student Constructions of Religious Fit and Incongruence Narratives at a Faith-Based Institution of Higher Education

Abstract:

Although academic and demographic factors have been found to influence the likelihood of student attrition (Leveson, McNeil, & Joiner, 2013; Martinez, Sher, Krull, & Wood 2009) among the most common reasons that students drop out of college or transfer relate to student perceptions about the university and their sense of belonging (Lehmann, 2007; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). The reasons why students do not persist through their first year of college may be related to the relationship between institutional variables and students variables. A sense of fit is also related to a perception of congruence between a student’s values, beliefs and assumptions and those that are publicly or tacitly endorsed by their institution. Issues of fit may be particularly germane at institutions with a clear Christian faith orientation (Morris, Beck, & Smith, 2004; Morris, Smith, & Cejda, 2003; Patten & Rice, 2009).

In this study we will examine a group of first year students who have already indicated a lack of fit with a faith-based institution’s Christian environment. Using phenomenological approach we will seek to understand how participants assemble a sense of fit, what resources they draw upon in their evaluation, what situations count as evidence of their constructed view of the institution, and ultimately what factors are most important in their considerations of departure.