

Assessment Update for Greenville College

February, 2004

What are we learning from Faithful Change?

The Faithful Change project sponsored by the CCCU and Templeton Foundation provided Greenville College with a format for implementing the Fowler Faith Development Interview as an institutional research tool for the measurement of change—transformation—in the lives of students on dimensions of faith that include moral judgment, social awareness, locus authority, logic, and symbolic function. In this process students serve as peer facilitators to interview students in COR 102 and 401. The interview was integrated into the General Education requirements for these courses in 2001. Responses from students who have been interviewed as well as those who have served as peer facilitators have been overwhelmingly positive. Preliminary outcome data suggests three emerging themes regarding how students change: through community, through openness to inquiry, and through off-campus experiences of “self-donation.” The following is based upon 2003 data comprised of 31 freshmen, 63 seniors.

Community

Senior interviews of males and females frequently contain reference to a deeper understanding of the significance of *community as a context for growth and worship*. Many seniors are in the process of determining the first steps of their vocational pathway and in doing so realize that they must be able to create a support network to offset the friends and faculty they will be leaving behind. While this is frightening for some, most seniors interviewed described a sense of hope regarding the manner in which GC prepared them to be community builders, living out their faith with those around them. Even more significant is the finding that **over 93 of the seniors interviewed describe a vital Christian community**. The following examples from the current senior data set describe this commitment: “each day I see Jesus in those around me;” “I just try to be like Jesus, that is what is most important;” “God woke me up with problems in ...I believe in discernment, God jumps in when I don’t have it;” “Christ before me, Christ after me—being molded like clay—the walkabout started a process of realization, it has been a two year breakthrough;” “impacting others for Christ and developing relationships with people in order to do that is what makes life meaningful;” In reviewing the freshman and senior interviews of the same student through the longitudinal tracking that this project allows, it is evident that a majority of these students grow to internalize their faith in a way that directly informs their vocational choice: they have questioned, experienced, studied scripture, analyzed the traditions around them, and selected a worship style and supportive context for which they have personal ownership.

Open Inquiry

Within the interview are questions having to do with making decisions, working through difficult challenges, and coping with relational crises. Many students describe conflicts with parents, conflicts with roommates, and struggles with a sense of isolation. However, the majority of students, even those from extremely difficult family backgrounds, relate that they find GC a place where students, faculty, and staff will take an interest in and actually explore with them what questions they have about faith, the meaning of life, and their direction in the future. GC seems to be *a place where it is safe to ask the hard questions*. Some students have described faculty members going out of their way to provide learning experiences in the field, or within a home context that allow students the chance to live out a vocational option and say, “no, I don’t think this is right for me.” Seniors describe the freedom to explore a question of doctrinal uncertainty or an aspect of worship ritual that served as a stumbling block and through the discovery come to a new understanding of faith and commitment.

Self-Donation

By far, the greatest predictor of transformation in Greenville College students is their willingness to undertake challenging, sometimes cross-cultural, experiences that require more of themselves than they thought they could give. These experiences are not always part of the curriculum or co-curriculum offerings but are selected by students who are *questing*, or taking intentional risks based upon faith. They test the meaning and reality of the gospel message by living and learning in an unfamiliar context. Through self-sacrifice and witnessing the sacrifice of others, they grow to appreciate life as precious gift from the Creator. Their spiritual awareness grows with humble appreciation of the diverse manner in which God calls others to be His own.

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