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**CULTIVATING COMPASSION IN UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE  
STUDENTS:  
RHETORIC OR REALITY?**

by

Michael Lovette-Colyer

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2013

Dissertation Committee

Fred J. Galloway, Ed.D.  
Robert Donmoyer, Ph.D.  
Thomas G. Plante, Ph.D.

University of San Diego

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## **Abstract**

While American colleges and universities are unparalleled in their ability to produce disciplinary-based knowledge through research and scholarship, their ability to encourage students to use the information and methods about which they are learning to create positive social change has lagged. Aware of the magnitude of today's global issues and dissatisfied with the current disparity between the world's reality and university curricula, scholars have begun to re-imagine the role of higher education in forming the leaders who will face our most pressing problems.

Founded to provide education integrated with the formation of values, a significant number of Catholic colleges and universities claim the cultivation of compassion as a primary purpose. The mission statements of such institutions frequently reference goals such as "preparing leaders dedicated to compassionate service" (University of San Diego, 2004). The ambition of such statements, however, is unmatched by a rigorous examination of the reality of those objectives. Despite the massive amounts of research conducted on the impact of college on students, almost no empirical work has been done on whether students grow in compassion. Therefore, this explanatory sequential mixed methods study investigated whether University of San Diego undergraduates demonstrated change in compassion across their first two years of study.

This study found that the majority of USD students do change in compassion during their first two undergraduate years, but not all in the preferred direction. While half of the students demonstrated an increase in compassion, 35% decreased in compassion and another 15% remained unchanged. Regression analyses established that



community service and immersion trips were associated with an increase in compassion while Greek life and community service-learning were associated with a decrease in compassion. Student interviews revealed the importance of, among other facets of university life, campus involvement, community service experience, peer influences, financial pressures, and disorientating experiences.

These results extend the work already done on how college affects students by focusing on a heretofore under-examined construct – compassion. This research also contributes to an improved understanding of how universities might better structure their co-curricular offerings in order to achieve their goal of cultivating compassion in their students.

### **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the people of Tijuana, Mexico. Thank you for teaching me what it means to be compassionate and showing me how to be fully alive. May this work be worthy of all you have so generously shared with me.

## **Acknowledgements**

It is axiomatic that where we stand determines what we see. It is equally true that the questions we ask, the meanings we make, and the persons we become depend on the people by whom we are surrounded, the communities in which we are embedded, and the love in which we live and move and have our being. This work, which has unfolded over many years, is much less the result of my own effort than an attempted synthesis of the extraordinary generosity and wisdom of those who have stood with me, supporting, encouraging and loving me along the way, helping me to see. While I will not be able to thank all the people who deserve to be named for their contributions to this research, I would like to especially mention the following individuals who were instrumental in the completion of this work and who are particularly important in my life.

Most immediately, I offer abundant thanks to my dissertation committee. In addition to being an expert committee chair, helping me navigate adroitly every aspect of the dissertation, Fred Galloway, Ed.D. has been an invaluable guide and an enthusiastic supporter – not only of my scholarly work but of my overall well-being, especially my transition into fatherhood. My academic advisor since I began this Ph.D. journey, I’ve had the privilege of being with Fred in the classroom on four different occasions. In each class session and during every advising appointment, Fred has humbly and unconditionally shared his prodigious gifts and talents. On many occasions, his belief in me has surpassed my own, providing the confidence necessary to continue. I have learned a tremendous amount from and with you Fred; thank you for being such an outstanding educator, scholar, mentor, and role model.

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This work on compassion would not have been imagined much less accomplished without the inspiration and guidance I received from Tom. During our time as colleagues at Santa Clara University, he ignited my curiosity with his ground-breaking research into the topic, helped me appreciate some of the questions that needed to be asked, and assisted me in articulating which of those questions I wanted to investigate. Despite my leaving Santa Clara more than five years ago, Tom has continued to be extraordinarily generous with his counsel, offering regular guidance and helpful direction. In spite of his many obligations, Tom always responded to my questions with promptness and patience. It is my great hope that this research on compassion will complement his important and outstanding work on the topic. Thank you, Tom, for showing me the way and – more importantly – for your witness of a life committed both to serious scholarship as well as to the service of faith that does justice.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Ours is an unjustly suffering world. Almost half of the world's population – more than three billion people – survives on less than \$2.50 per day. Another 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty, making due with less than \$1.25 per day, and thus go without the minimum food consumption necessary to sustain life (Ballard, 2006; Collier, 2007). Unable to meet basic needs for survival, more than eight million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive. As Sachs wrote in 2005, “Every morning, newspapers could report, ‘More than 20,000 people perished yesterday of extreme poverty.’” (p. 1). All this is true despite the fact that there is enough food in the world to provide every individual with 3,500 calories a day (Lappe, Collins, & Rosset, 1998, p. 8; Seabrook, 2007, p.36).

While entirely preventable and treatable, AIDS continues to kill more than 1.5 million people each year – about one person every 20 seconds. Many of those are children. Despite the fact that it is preventable with bed nets that cost approximately \$3 per person and treatable with medicines which cost less than \$1, close to a million people die each year from malaria (Sachs, 2005, p. 7). At the dawn of the twenty-first century, nearly a billion people were unable to read a book or sign their name – even while less than one per cent of what the world spends each year on weapons would put every child on earth in school (Bellamy, 1999).

As a result of incredible breakthroughs in science and technology over the past twenty-five years, we are capable of solving these and other enduring problems. While more than a billion people continue to live in societies that are falling behind and falling

apart (Collier, 2007, p. 3), however, we remain at an impasse, unable or unwilling to accomplish that which is in our reach. We are disinclined to make the sacrifices necessary for a more just, humane, and sustainable world.

In our own nation – the world’s wealthiest, and the wealthiest is the history of the world – fifteen per cent of the population lives in poverty and the total number of people in poverty in 2010 – 46.2 million – was the largest it has been in the fifty-two years that the United States Census Bureau has published poverty estimates (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2011, p. 14). The year 2010 also marked another record: the share of Americans whose families made less than half of the poverty line (and were thus categorized as in “deep poverty”) hit the all-time high of 6.7 percent of the population, or 1 in 15 Americans (Tough, 2012, p.31). While precise measurements of poverty are elusive, approximately 32% of the U.S. population had at least one episode of poverty lasting two or more months during the four year period from 2004 to 2007 and 52% of all Americans will experience poverty at some point before the age of 65 (DeNavas-Walt et. al, 2011, p. 4). Nearly one in four American children grow up in a household that struggles to put food on the table (Beckmann, 2010, p. 24). Approximately 700,000 people live on the streets of our cities (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2007, p. 24). All this is true despite the fact that the U.S. now has more millionaires – 3.1 million – than ever before with an unprecedented combined net wealth of \$11.6 trillion (Frank, 2011). Exacerbating the economic inequality that characterizes our country, we are an increasingly polarized society, unable to dialogue about our most pressing issues. Public discourse about debts and deficits, education or health care

reform, immigration, and poverty lacks clarity and civility. Collaboration to craft fresh solutions to these problems seems beyond our capacity.

In addition to suffering, our world is marked by paradox. Chief among these is the fact that we are simultaneously more divided and more connected than ever before. The hyper-connectivity enabled by technological advances and the diffusion of social media makes suffering – at home and abroad – available in high definition via the high-speed devices in our pockets. Access to statistics about global poverty and the poor in our own cities is now matched by the ability to see directly the reality of such poverty and, in some cases, to hear in their own voices personal accounts of those who endure that stark reality. As the Dali Lama (2010) has suggested,

The world is becoming smaller and smaller – and more and more interdependent – as a result of rapid technological advances and international trade as well as increasing trans-national relations. Furthermore, the pace of exchange in ideas and people – both tourists and refugees – has created unprecedented contact and closeness among the world’s many cultures. Swiftly, the effects of what happens in one part of the world are felt everywhere else. Nowhere is immune. The challenge before us – much more urgent than in the past – in this era of nuclear weapons, international terrorism, financial uncertainty and ecological crisis, is simply peaceful coexistence. This challenge of peaceful coexistence, I believe, will define the task of humanity in the twenty-first century. (p. x)

By offering unprecedented contact with unfamiliar people in difficult circumstances, our connectivity has the possibility of fostering an increased appreciation for all that unites us. Contact with those who suffer has the potential to generate a sense



of solidarity with them and an understanding of how our lives are inherently interconnected. Despite our greater connectivity and the subsequent increased awareness, however, the world's suffering continues.

To be sure, there are moments when the global community pours forth compassion. In the wake of the 2004 South Asian tsunami, for example, the extensive distress of those in unfamiliar places moved vast numbers of people and governments to pledge their assistance. When hundreds of thousands of people needed assistance in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, more than 115 countries offered aid to the United States and the Red Cross received \$2.2 billion in donations from individuals, foundations, and corporations (Sachs, 2005). A similarly generous response occurred after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The reaction to these tragedies suggests that the global community is capable of remarkable compassion. The question remains, however, as to why that capacity is so infrequently activated.

These three paradoxes – between the promise of technological advances and the wealth they have generated alongside the vast suffering of so many, between our division and our connection, and between moments of great concern and cold indifference – suggest the urgent need for sustained compassion. In fact, it is hard to imagine a moment in the world's history when sustained compassion has been so urgently needed (Armstrong, 2010, p. 5). We are more capable than ever before of applying knowledge to solve our most intractable problems, but our motivation to do so often falters. More connected than ever before, our concern for one another often remains unchanged. Familiar with how to respond to suffering, we do so only episodically and usually only to dramatic natural disasters, allowing the daily catastrophe of extreme poverty to continue.

Ours is a unique moment in world history. For the first time, we are capable of ending extreme poverty (Sachs, 2005, p. 25; Beckmann, 2010, p. 31). Social entrepreneurs, academics, economists, politicians, business people, and others have identified promising practices that, if implemented on a scale equivalent to the need, could overcome many of the logistical and political challenges which have debilitated anti-poverty efforts for decades. If the global community can generate the will commensurate to its technology, the one sixth of the world's population that struggles daily for survival could be freed from that struggle. Ending poverty is possible – but only if the sustained compassion of the global community can be activated on an unprecedented scale. Unlike previous generations, we cannot claim that we do not know how to do it. We cannot say we do not have reason to do it. It remains to be seen, however, if we will.

It is within this context that American colleges and universities – especially Catholic colleges and universities – are beginning to reexamine their purpose and practice. American institutions of higher education share much of the credit for the scientific breakthroughs that have produced the ability to solve global poverty. Yet, as their graduates disregard the opportunity to apply their knowledge to address the world's greatest needs, American colleges and universities share the blame for the persistence of that suffering. This disconnect represents another paradox: While American colleges and universities are unparalleled in their ability to produce disciplinary-based knowledge through faculty research and scholarship, their ability to encourage students to use the information and methods about which they are learning to create positive social change has lagged. Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm (2006) wrote, "Such characteristics as wisdom,

compassion, and integrity, and such concepts as justice, ethics, values, morality, virtue, and character are ones that most undergraduates fail to consider because the curriculum does not encourage them to do so” (p. 2).

Aware of the magnitude of the issues confronting us and dissatisfied with the current disparity between the world’s reality and the standard university curricula, an increasing number of scholars and authors have begun to re-imagine the role of higher education in forming the leaders who will face our most pressing problems. Many of these authors and scholars argue that now more than ever we need fully developed human beings, “whole people with whole minds and hearts” (Nepo, 2010, p. v) and thus, we need to prepare students to become leaders capable of living moral and meaningful lives in our interdependent world. Diana Chapman Walsh (2006, p. 2), former President of Wellesley College, has argued that helping students to develop “deep empathy” with those considered “other” or “alien” is one of the most pressing imperatives of our time. According to Chapman Walsh,

The issues facing the next generation globally demand that we educate our students worldwide to use all of their resources, not just their mind or their heart. The hour is late, the work is hard, and the stakes are high, but few institutions are better positioned to take up this work than our nation’s colleges and universities. (p. 38)

Similarly, Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm (2006) argue that “No other institutions are better positioned to address” our most daunting problems “than our two- and four-year colleges and universities” (p. 27). Their work, and the spirituality-in-higher-education movement out of which it emerges, suggests that institutions of higher education may be

the only institutions capable of educating a citizenry capable of functioning at the levels of cognitive and affective complexity that our global and local problems require.

Recent empirical work on today's college student presents yet another paradox. Pryor (2007) and his colleagues at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) have documented a significant increase over the past forty years in the value that students place on "being very well off financially" (p. 32). At the same time, the value students assign to "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" – the highest rated concern in the 1970s – had declined sharply among undergraduates. While materialism and a keen interest in social mobility are likely involved in these trends, they are "not the only characteristic of the millennial generation" (Pryor et al., 2006, p. 32). In 2007, for example, the importance students assigned to "helping others in difficulty" was the highest it had been in twenty years (p. 33).

The more recent research of Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) supports this multidimensional portrait of today's undergraduates. While their work identified a similar pattern of increasing materialism and decreasing concern with existential questions, they also found that undergraduate students are searching for deep meaning in their lives, looking for ways to be compassionate, and seeking insight into the implications for their lives of the many issues confronting the global community (p. 4). Their research suggests that as they enter college, many students have a desire to explore their connectedness to one another and to the world around them. Additionally, most students grow in empathy during their college years; i.e., while undergraduates, many students become more caring and more connected with others. Very often, they are interested in finding ways of alleviating the suffering they see around the world and close

to home (Astin et al., 2010, p. 65). As a part of their studies and cocurricular activities, a significant number undertake impressive projects to connect their learning with people in poverty and the issues that make their lives difficult.

The question remains, however, as to how better to encourage young people who enter college with an empathetic interest in others to strengthen and sustain that interest as they move through their college experience and then out into the world to begin to exercise adult responsibilities. A growing number of critics are asking whether colleges and universities are amplifying or diminishing the desires of their students to connect their education with the world's needs. Many scholars and authors have argued compellingly that the current system of higher education is fragmented and disintegrating. By focusing almost exclusively on the cognitive development of students, American institutions of higher education have systematically ignored the most fundamental aspects of their students and, in the process, encouraged a lack of wholeness and authenticity. By avoiding ineffable concerns and standing apart from students' most deeply felt values and desires, colleges and universities have prevented students from discussing issues of meaning, purpose, wholeness, and compassion. Thus, too often students have been left with insufficient resources and insignificant guidance as to how to navigate the demands of the marketplace without compromising their deepest longings and highest aspirations.

Momentum is building, especially among Catholic institutions of higher education, to re-examine this unreflective, unbalanced approach to education that privileges the external while marginalizing the internal (Benne, 2001; Braskamp, Buckley, 1993; Ellacuría, 1982; Parker & Zajonc, 2010; Rausch, 2010; Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006). A growing cohort of scholars is recognizing that in light of the complexity and fragility of

our world, “every resource of our humanity, as individuals and as communities, will be needed if we are to safely navigate the shoals of the future” (Parker & Zajonc, 2010, p. 17). Now more than ever, higher education needs to do more than focus on the external world and the practical skills necessary to achieve success in that domain. Given the enormity of our challenges, technical knowledge alone will not be enough. It is becoming increasingly clear that we need graduates with not only the competence to succeed in the world, but also the compassionate desire to change the world.

### **Problem Statement**

Founded explicitly to provide education integrated with the formation of values, a significant number of Catholic colleges and universities claim the cultivation of compassion as a primary purpose. The mission and vision statements of such institutions frequently reference the goal of “preparing leaders dedicated to compassionate service” (University of San Diego, 2004) or “educating citizens and leaders of compassion” (Santa Clara University, 2011). Many of these institutions claim the education of the whole person as a core value and define this concept so as to include an explicit focus on compassion. Neither the eloquence nor the ambition of these statements, however, is matched by a rigorous and empirical examination of the reality of the goal. There is a dearth of empirical study of whether or not such universities are accomplishing the important goals they articulate. Therefore, research is needed in order to determine if, and if not, how, Catholic colleges and universities might cultivate compassion in the approximately 900,000 students who study at these institutions each year. With sufficient preparation, formation, and motivation, a substantial number of these students could lead the change the world so desperately needs.

### **Purpose of Study**

Despite the acute need for compassion in our world and the massive amounts of research conducted on the impact of college on students (Astin, 1977, 1993; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978; Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) almost no empirical work has been done on whether students grow in compassion during their undergraduate course of studies. Studies have been done on students' faith development and/or spirituality; a small number of those studies treat compassion (or altruism or some other related measure) as a subcomponent of faith or spirituality. Very few studies, however, have explicitly examined the development of compassion as a distinct construct.

The one domain in which initial work on the development of compassion has been conducted is the community service learning (CSL) literature. Yet, while the CSL literature has done an exemplary job of legitimating the pedagogy, it has only begun to document its affective, nonacademic impact on students. In that regard, it is similar to the work of Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) – exemplary in its holistic approach and attention to the ineffable aspects of undergraduate students, but limited by the lack of a particular focus on the development of compassion. The limited number of studies extant in the CSL literature that concentrate explicitly on the development of compassion and empathy all examine the influence of a particular experience (e.g., an alternative spring break service trip) rather than on the impact of the university experience as a whole. Since the majority of the few studies on compassion – which, for the purposes of this study, will be defined as “being moved by the suffering of another, and desiring to help”

(Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010, p. 351; Lazarus, 1991, p. 289) – have been done on students who volunteer for particular experiences or register for clearly designated service learning courses, we do not know if and/or how students in general at a particular institution grow in compassion. Similarly, we do not know if and/or how enduring those shifts in compassion might be. Larger scale, longitudinal studies are needed in order to determine if a particular institution which claims the cultivation of compassion as a purpose is accomplishing that goal.

This study begins to address the question of whether a significant number of undergraduate students demonstrate change in their level of compassion during their first two years of college. An explanatory sequential mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011), this research included both quantitative and qualitative components; I began by surveying a large number of students as they started their university experience and again as they approached the mid-point of their campus tenure. Based on the results of the quantitative data generated by administering the survey at two points in time, I then used qualitative methods to focus in depth on a small cohort that demonstrated an increase in compassion, a small group that demonstrated a reduction in compassion and another group whose level of compassion did not change significantly. Through careful reading and analysis of these data, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of some of the personal characteristics, campus experiences and other aspects that differ between those students who grew in compassion and those who did not than can be gained by systematically reviewing the quantitative data. This information is a critical initial step in the emerging efforts of Catholic colleges and universities to assess how well they are accomplishing their missions – and for all institutions of higher education as they strive



to more directly link the university experience with the world's greatest challenges and opportunities

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided this study:

1. To what extent are first-year University of San Diego (USD) students compassionate?
2. Do USD undergraduate students demonstrate a change in their level of compassion during their first two years of study?
3. If so, to what extent can these changes be explained by select demographic characteristics (including sex, race/ethnicity, intended major and type of high school attended) and various aspects of their campus experience?
4. What do the students who demonstrate the most change in compassion say are the key personal characteristics and/or collegiate experiences that have motivated that change; how does their understanding or experience compare and contrast with the experience of students who do not grow in compassion?

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

A significant number of Catholic colleges and universities claim the cultivation of compassion as a primary purpose. The mission statements of such institutions frequently reference the goal of “preparing leaders dedicated to compassionate service” or “educating citizens and leaders of compassion.” Neither the eloquence nor the ambition of these statements, however, is matched by a rigorous and empirical examination of the reality of the goal. This lacuna between rhetoric and reality reflects the gap that exists in the large and rapidly expanding body of literature on student development.

Despite the massive amounts of research conducted on the impact of college on students (Astin, 1977, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Knefelkamp et al., 1978; Komives et al., 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) almost no empirical work has been done on whether, and if so, how, students grow in compassion during their undergraduate course of studies. On the rare occasions when constructs such as compassion are treated, they are typically examined through the lens of students’ spiritual development – or as a subcomponent of some other construct. Even with such indirect approaches, there is a scarcity of research; in the most recent comprehensive review of student development literature (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), there are no references to “spirituality” and only two references to “religion” (Astin, et al., 2011).

In light of the history of higher education, this void is not surprising. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the majority opinion on most campuses held that the proper concern of university faculty and administrators was exclusively students’ intellectual

development. Even as they have lost their dominance, voices in this tradition continue to influence the contemporary conversation about the role and purpose of higher education (Fish, 2003). Growing numbers of more recently arrived faculty and administrators, however, take it for granted that, in light of the extraordinary and unprecedented challenges presented by the complexity of our hyper-connected, globalized world, there is an intense need for fully developed human beings. Sharon Daloz Parks (2000), for example, argues boldly that “not only the equality of individual young adult lives but also our future as a culture depends in no small measure upon our capacity to recognize the emerging competence of young adults” and to encourage their flourishing in its fullest possible understanding (p. xi). A consensus is emerging among those concerned with global interdependence and economic competitiveness (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Such voices are coalescing into a chorus, asserting with increasing vigor that the purpose of contemporary American higher education should be nothing less than fully developed human beings (Lewis, 2006). At the same time, many well-respected faculty and administrators are advocating a reform of higher education practice so that issues such as spirituality, authenticity, character, and compassion receive the attention they deserve (Bok, 2006; Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Kronman, 2007; Lewis, 2006). As more members of the academy recognize that the world today’s college students will enter is fundamentally different from that of the 1950s and 1960s, there is an increasing recognition that “the developmental window from approximately ages eighteen to thirty-five,” ages that “correspond to the span of undergraduate education, graduate education, and professional school” is a unique opportunity to form, develop, and nurture integrated, fully human individuals – including

mind, heart, and spirit – prepared to engage the shifting world in constructive and urgently needed ways (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. viii).

Founded for the explicit purpose of cultivating moral values and character development, Catholic colleges and universities – as well as universities established by other faith traditions – are uniquely positioned to promote ineffable outcomes such as compassion and prepare graduates for effective engagement in a globalized world. While a consensus has emerged regarding the critical role of Catholic higher education in the formation of the whole person, and while inspiring statements of the purpose of Catholic higher education are abundant, there nevertheless remains a dearth of empirical study of whether or not such universities are accomplishing their goals.

In this chapter I will review and synthesize three literatures. First, I will consider the origins, evolution and current state of the student development literature. I will then turn to the emerging field of spirituality in higher education as an illustrative example of the many critiques of and challenges to current practice in American higher education. Finally, I will focus on literature from the community service learning field, a domain in which promising practices exist for assessing the cultivation of compassion. In the end, however, I argue that compassion has yet to be given the attention it deserves; each of the literatures I review lack an explicit focus on whether and how compassion can be cultivated in undergraduate college students.

### **Student Development**

The student development literature is extensive. In order to summarize in a manageable way the expansiveness of the field, I will begin by tracing the field's evolution while drawing attention to some of the most widely shared definitions of

student development. This review of the field's development will highlight the various ways that the field has been organized into theoretical clusters; after briefly reviewing those organizing schema, I'll offer a concise summary of each cluster.

## **Evolution**

Since the late 1950s there has been a remarkable surge in research on how college affects students as well as a commensurate increase in the number and sophistication of student development theories that have emerged from that research. While the need for research on student development was recognized by some as early as the start of the twentieth century (Harper, 1905), it wasn't until the 1957 publication of Phillip Jacob's *Changing Values in College* and the 1962 release of *The American College* by Nevitt Sanford that the field coalesced and research proliferated. In 1969, Feldman and Newcomb attempted an impressive first summary of the empirical knowledge and theoretical models produced by the first decade of sustained student development research. Their book, *The Impact of College on Students*, organized and synthesized the abundant research which emerged over the preceding ten years. During that prolific decade, Chickering (1969), Erikson (1963, 1964, 1968), Douglas Heath (1968), Roy Heath (1964), Hunt (1966), Kohlberg (1969), Piaget (1964), Sanford (1962, 1966) all produced significant models of student development. Feldman and Newcomb's (1969) wide-ranging attempt at integration led them to conclude that college has significant and enduring effect on those who attend, including impacts upon students' attitudes, values, and beliefs. They summarized these impacts as increases in "open-mindedness (reflected by declining authoritarianism, dogmatism, and prejudice), decreasing conservatism... and growing sensitivity to aesthetic and 'inner' experiences" (p. 48).

By 1978, Knefelkamp, Widick and Parker were able to produce a second major summary of student development theory. In their work, *Applying New Developmental Findings*, they suggested that the expansion of empirical research on student development had produced at least two subsequent problems: How to keep up with the knowledge explosion and how to make sense of the many models (p. ix). Their purpose, much like Feldman and Newcomb's, was to take stock of the field, including how the work of the researchers who were influential in the field's first decade had been appropriated and expanded during the 1970s. The theorists considered by Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978) included Gould (1972), Keniston (1971), Kohlberg (1969, 1972, 1975), Levinson (1978), Loevinger (1976), Marcia (1966), Perry (1970), and Vaillant (1977). At this point in the field's evolution, the many and varied student development theories could be sorted into families or clusters; Knefelkamp, Widick and Parker (1978) articulated five such theory clusters, including psychosocial, cognitive, maturity, typology, and person-environment interaction models.

The next major summary of student development research and theory arrived in 1991 with Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Ternezini's publication of *How College Affects Students*. Their impressive work attempted to review every major study since 1967 on the impact of higher education on student development, with a special concern for the theories which built on the foundational psychosocial and cognitive-structural theories. Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) review of the evidence led them to conclude that "college has a broad range of enduring or long term impacts. These include not only the more obvious impacts on occupation and earnings but also influences on cognitive, moral, and psychosocial characteristics, as well as on values and attitudes" (p. 573).

Perhaps most notable about the literature during the 1980s was the extension of the original theories to examine the experience of previously ignored populations, especially women. Ruthellen Josselson (1987), for example, extended prior research on identity development by studying the experience of female college students – something that the earliest theorists neglected to do – by focusing on how women’s experiences lead to a distinctively feminine process of identity development. In her early work, she found that women are more likely to focus on “the kind of person to be” (Josselson, 1973, p. 47) rather than identity markers based on career, political affiliation, sexual identity or activity, religion, or ideological beliefs. By continuing her research with her female subjects after they graduated from college, Josselson outlined an alternative identity development process for women. These insights were the basis of her 1987 book *Finding Herself: Pathways to Identity Development in Women*.

Analogous movements were unfolding in the theoretical cluster of cognitive development. *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (1986), authored by Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger and Jill Tarule, presented the findings of their initial research project focused specifically and intentionally on the intellectual development of women. Their insights were further developed by Marcia Baxter Magolda (1987) who included women and men in her longitudinal study of the epistemological development of college students. Finally, and perhaps most famously, Carol Gilligan (1982) enhanced Kohlberg’s influential research on moral development. Kohlberg developed his theory of moral reasoning by studying only male subjects and, not surprisingly, concluded that women were unable to reach the most advanced developmental stages. Gilligan argued that the problem was the research instrument rather than the women. Her seminal work,

*In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, introduced her initial theory of the distinctive ways women approach moral reasoning. She articulated a care-based rationale for making moral decisions that emphasized and acknowledged relationships, responsibility, and connection with others as much as justice, universalism, and individualism.

The empirical work summarized by Pascarella and Terenzini in 1991 also included several novel integrative approaches. Perhaps most well known among these is the work of Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) who attempted to blend the key elements of the psychosocial and cognitive-structural theories into an integrated theory of self-evolution. His 1982 book, *The Evolving Self*, presented his theory which, while inspired by Piaget's focus on cognitive development, sought to include substantial roles for affective development and subjective experiences of growth. In his five stages of development, Kegan argued that the process of development is characterized by the enduring tension between the desire for individuation and the equally strong desire for inclusion. Each stage represents an "evolutionary truce" (1982, p. 107), a temporary solution to these lifelong tensions. Kegan referred to the highest stage of his model as the "self-transforming mind," a stage reached by a small minority of people and only after the age of forty.

Baxter Magolda (1998, 1999, 2001, 2004) extended Kegan's insights by focusing on his fourth stage of development, self-authorship. Her attention to self-authorship, while primarily subsequent to Pascarella and Ternezini's first edition, emerged from her research conducted in the 1980s and offered a robust example of an integrative approach. Rather than considering a portion of a student in isolation – such as the intellect – self-



authorship models strive to consider the individual's ability to take responsibility for and ownership of one's internal authority and establish one's own set of values and beliefs (Kegan, 1994). Other integrative theories were offered by James Fowler (1981, 1996), who studied empirically the faith development of college students, and Sharon Daloz Parks (1986, 2000), who expanded Fowler's work to craft an alternative model of faith development during college. Attention to the experience of women and the emergence of integrative approaches such as self-authorship and spirituality represented a significant advance in the field of student development.

The fourth and final major mile-marker in the evolution of student development theory was the 2005 publication of *How College Affects Students, Volume 2: A Third Decade of Research* (Pascarella & Terenzini). According to the authors, the single most significant shift in student development theory reflected in the years leading up to their second volume was the "expansion of the notion of who constitutes the students worthy of study in the American postsecondary system" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 2). While the research summarized in their first volume largely reflected "traditional" White undergraduates, ages eighteen to twenty-two, who typically attended four year institutions on a full time basis while living on campus and not being responsible for more than part-time work, the student development literature of the 1990s and early 2000s began to address the changing and increasingly diverse American undergraduate student population.

Four other emerging themes were also reflected in the literature of the 1990s and 2000s and captured in Pascarella and Terenzini's second volume. The first was an expansion of the types of institutions studied; in addition to four year colleges and

universities, attention has been directed to women's colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, two-year community colleges and, more recently, for-profit institutions. Second, in light of the increasing racial diversity of American society, more research has been conducted on the manner in which college affects students' attitudes toward and openness to diversity in general and people of disparate backgrounds in particular. Third, recent student development theory has increasingly recognized the constructivist nature of learning; thus, the instructional approaches associated with a constructivist approach (i.e., service or problem-based learning) have received greater attention. Finally, the literature of the 1990s and 2000s is characterized by an "expanded repertoire of research approaches for estimating the impact of college" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 4). While positivist, quantitative approaches remain more or less paradigmatic, there has been a notable increase in the use of naturalistic, qualitative methodologies as well.

Beginning in the early 1960s, the student development literature experienced a remarkable expansion. The summaries of Feldman and Newcomb (1968); Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978); and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) provide valuable observation platforms to view and reflect on the evolution of the field, illuminating the foundational theories as well as more recent expansions and applications of those foundations to address the changing shape of higher education in the United States. Tracing the evolution of the field also brings into sharper relief the diverse ways that the term student development has been understood and defined. To be certain, such a systematic review of the field's evolution makes plain the fact that it has yet to address important but ineffable constructs such as compassion.

## Definitions

During the evolution of student development theory, a variety of conceptualizations of the term surfaced. While many of these definitions overlap, at least in part, and share common elements, important differences exist. Complexity is one of the primary characteristics of the definitions which eludes consensus; thus, various understandings of student development can be positioned along a continuum stretching from the straightforward to the significantly more nuanced.

As with many aspects of student development theory, Nevitt Sanford was a major influence in the foundational conceptualization of what was meant by the term “student development.” According to Sanford (1967), the phrase referred to the “organization of increasing complexity” (p. 47). Building by Sanford’s definition, Rodgers (1990) described student development simply as “the ways a student grows, progresses, or increases in his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education” (p. 27). Miller and Prince (1976) offered a similarly straightforward understanding of student development as “the application of human development concepts in postsecondary settings so that everyone involved can master increasingly complex developmental tasks, achieve self-direction, and become independent” (p. 3).

These relatively simple understanding were enhanced by the thinking of Feldman and Newcomb (1969) who differentiated development from change (a difference in an attribute over time) and growth (an increase in an attribute). Certainly, most students change during the time they are enrolled in college. How much of that change, however, can be considered development, is another question. This more fine-grained approach to

the definition was adopted by McEwen (2003) who suggested that development refers to and “represents a qualitative enhancement of the self in terms of complexity and integration” (p. 205). Thus, development implies and requires change, and it may include growth. Authentic development, however, is more than growth and deeper than change; it represents a more profound enhancement of an individual’s ability to function in increasingly complex and integrated ways (McEwen, 2003).

In order to prevent its reduction to a catchphrase devoid of meaning or relevance, Parker (1974) advocated for a more precise understanding of the term student development. This was a major motivation for the work of Knefelkamp, Widick and Parker; in their 1978 review of the literature they wrote that development “involves an upending which brings about new, more differentiated responses” (p. ix). Moreover, they posited that the study of student development should proceed through the consideration of four questions: (1) What interpersonal and intrapersonal changes occur while the student is in college? (2) What factors lead to development? (3) What aspects of college encourage or impede growth? And (4) what developmental outcomes are most desirable? (1978, p. x).

On this more complex end of the continuum, cognitive developmental theorist Patricia King (2009) offered a definition of development as the movement from simple to complex, “from one dimension to multiple dimensions, from authority-based to criteria-based judgments” (p. 617). As individuals develop, they begin to see and understand the world through broader, multilayered frames of reference, relying less on external or internalized authority figures, and therefore taking more personal responsibility for their opinions and choices. King (2009) offered a succinct yet evocative way of describing

development: “increasingly complex and adaptive forms of seeing, knowing, and caring” (p. 599).

Based on their most recent review of thousands of studies of the impact of college on students, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggested a consensus definition: “most writers view development as a general movement toward greater differentiation, integration, and complexity in the ways individuals think and behave” (p. 19). It is widely agreed that development involves moments of disequilibrium which yield to new and more complex ways of interpreting experiences. These broad agreements, however, do not deny the important and meaningful differences which exist. In addition to the variations already mentioned, robust debate continues on whether predictable stages or positions that mark developmental shifts exist and, if so, whether these stages are sequential, invariant and/or irreversible. Likewise, developmental theorists disagree over whether development tends to be gradual and constant or sporadic and disjointed (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Perhaps more importantly, much remains unknown and contested regarding developmental differences between men and women as well as differences based on ethnic background, sexual orientation, and/or age.

Having traced the evolution of the student development literature and examined several key definitions of student development, I will now suggest a way of synthesizing the literature.

### **Organizing Schema**

As the field has evolved and expanded, different theorists have attempted to make sense of and present an overview of the expansiveness of the theories by employing different organizing frameworks. Feldman and Newcomb (1969), for example, examined

the research through the following lenses: values, goals, and life satisfactions; attitudes and orientations; authoritarianism; interpersonal and intrapersonal adjustments; major field and career; and group homogeneity. As previously mentioned, Knepfelkamp, Widick and Parker (1978) offered the first set of clusters or families of theories; they suggested five such clusters, including psychosocial, cognitive, maturity, typology, and person-environment interaction models. These five clusters have largely endured as distinct lines of theorizing through the evolution of the student development literature with little attention to their intersections.

Following Pascarella and Terenzini's approach in their first volume, Chickering and Reisser (1993) portrayed four broad categories: psychosocial, cognitive, typology, and person-environment interaction theories. Pascarella and Terenzini dropped typology models from their second volume so they could devote more attention to social identity research, which they categorize as part of the psychosocial family.

In their influential work for those preparing to work as student affairs practitioners, Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010) present a tripartite model: foundational theories, integrative theories, and social identity development theories. This approach brings together many of the psychosocial and cognitive development theories into the foundational category while providing a fuller treatment of social identity development and integrative theories. The decision to examine social identity development models apart from other psychosocial theories was driven by the recognition of the growing diversity of the American college student population and the proliferation of models which address previously underappreciated aspects of students' identity.

While the content and organization of different clusters varies, there is a clear benefit of relying on some classification scheme to organize and sort the vast amount of empirical studies and theories. Informed by the most influential summaries, I will offer a brief overview of each cluster by using four categories. Each category relates to an ultimate, existential question that students are challenged to begin to address as they move along developmental processes. The four questions are: (1) Who am I? (2) Whose am I? (3) How do I know? And (4) what is the meaning of my life?

**Psychosocial development: Who am I?** A clear consensus exists within the student development literature that psychosocial development theories are concerned primarily with the content of development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, et. al, 2010; Knefelkamp et al., 1978; McEwen, 2003). In other words, theories in this cluster foreground the issues and decisions that seem most relevant to students, as well as how those issues and decisions shift over time. Psychosocial theories are concerned with what people think about themselves and their world at different moments in their lives, as well as how they feel, behave, and interpret the meaning of their experience (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Erik Erikson (1959/1980, 1963, 1968) was the progenitor of the majority of the models in this theoretical category.

Prior to Erikson's eight stage model, development theories focused almost exclusively on childhood; Erikson was the first to expand the scope of study to include adolescence and adulthood. Erikson's theory was grounded in what he called the epigenetic principle: "Anything that grows has a ground plan, and . . . out of this ground plan the parts arise, each part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole" (Erikson, 1968, p. 92). This principle guided him as

he described eight stages, or “crises,” of development. These crises are psychosocial turning points that the individual must resolve by negotiating a balance between the internal self and the external environment (Erikson, 1968). The most pivotal stage in Erikson’s (1959/1980) theory was the fifth, “identity versus identity diffusion,” (p. 94) which usually occurs at end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. This stage also aligns with the time span during which most traditionally aged students are enrolled in college.

This transition period, for most people, elicits the need for self definition. During this time, adolescents begin to develop a core sense of self including newly internalized values, beliefs, and goals. Young people in this stage usually assume greater independence, begin to deal with life’s inherent complexities, and seek answers to the enduring question “Who am I?” As they try to work out their answer, they seek “congruence between external recognition and internal integration of meanings derived from previous stages” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 50).

Identity, for Erikson (1959/1980), referred to a “persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others” (p. 109). At stage five, the challenge is to establish an awareness of one’s core, an integration of inner and outer worlds, and a confidence that how one experiences oneself is similar to the experience of others. In Erikson’s schema, identity was understood as a sense of self which expresses coherently and consistently key aspects of a person and thus, organizes and communicates the essence of the person. The establishment of this sort of firm identity in late adolescence is critical; a well-formed



sense of self sets the stage for and enables subsequent development in the areas of intimacy and generativity (Marcia, 2002, p. 12).

While Erikson's work is the bedrock of subsequent psychosocial theories, it was more descriptive than empirical. James Marcia (1966) developed the first empirical study of the identity development of young adults (Widick et al., 1978, p. 11). Based on his research, Marcia (1980) introduced four identity statuses – foreclosure, moratorium, identity achievement, and diffusion – as a “methodological device by means of which Erikson's theoretical notions about identity might be subjected to empirical study” (p. 161). Marcia concluded that the formation of identity depends on two complementary dynamics: exploration and commitment. Exploration involves the questioning of values and goals received from parents, teachers or other authority figures while weighing potential identity alternatives. Commitment refers to settling on pronounced choices, values, goals, and other markers of identity. Individuals who have solidified commitments have made conscious decisions about which they are optimistic and confident. Marcia's model differed from Erickson's in that the identity statuses he suggested were neither sequential nor permanent (Evans et al, 2010). Moreover, Marcia concluded that not all students approach the identity resolution process similarly and that different students may need different interventions to progress.

In addition to being descriptive rather than empirical, Erikson's work did not specifically address college students' development. Later theorists, especially Chickering (1968) and Chickering and Reisser (1993), applied Erikson's ideas to this population by focusing on the fifth stage – identity versus identity diffusion – to create a framework that could be used to guide educational practice. Chickering's research led him to believe

that the establishment of identity is the central developmental issue during the undergraduate years and to propose seven vectors of development, each of which could be seen as more specific aspects of the general concept of identity. In his landmark book *Education and Identity*, Chickering (1969) used the term “vector” because each of the seven he identified “seems to have direction and magnitude – even though the direction may be expressed more appropriately by a spiral or by steps than by a straight line” (p. 8). Referring to vectors rather than stages allowed Chickering to account for non-linear, non-sequential development. While variations exist, vectors refer to the most common “highways for journeying toward individuation” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 35). With the seven vectors, Chickering attempted to paint a comprehensive portrait of psychosocial development in college students.

In differing but complementary ways, the work of Erikson, Marcia, Chickering and Chickering and Reisser illuminate the centrality of the question “Who am I?” for the majority of college students. Psychosocial theories and the research which has emerged from and been guided by those theories offer a valuable schema for understanding this major developmental task which confronts students during their undergraduate studies. To be certain, this is not the only question students are challenged to consider. The question of “Who am I?” is closely linked to and frequently overlaps with other key questions, especially “Whose am I?”

**Social identity development: Whose am I?** While identity refers to an established, reliable, core sense of self, it is also an interpersonal phenomenon. In Erikson’s model, development is propelled by interaction between self and society, including one’s negotiation with often powerful signals regarding one’s proper role and

place. Kegan (1982) articulated this reality in vivid terms by noting that “the person is an ‘individual’ and an ‘embeddual’” and, since every individual is intrinsically embedded in a culture, “there is never just an individual” (p. 116). Recognition that we are all a part of and influenced by the cultures which surround us highlights the important role of social identity development. Social identity broadens the question of “Who am I?” to ask “Who are the key people in my life and what are the principle reference groups that I rely on to understand who I am?” Social identity relates to the membership categories – such as Latino or woman – that a person believes are representative of oneself (Deaux, 1993, p. 6). While most theorists prior to the 1990s tended to treat social identity development as part of psychosocial development models, the increased diversity of the college student population in the United States, the growing numbers of students who claim multiple identities, and an enhanced appreciation for the dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression have led many theorists to focus on social identity as a distinct construct.

Social identity development is the process by which people come to understand their social identities – including race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and social class – as well as how these identities affect other aspects of their lives (McEwen, 2003). The concepts of privilege and oppression are central to these theories; social identity development models attempt to account for the reality that some identities are highly valued and confer legitimacy while other identities are historically stigmatized and create additional challenges for those who hold them.

Social identity development theories encompass a wide range of social identities and membership classes. Developmental theories have emerged for racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, sex, gender, ability/disability, social class, and religious identity. Two

themes, however, underlie all such identity development theories. The first is that development concerns the gradual emergence of awareness and abandonment of internalized racism, heterosexism, and sexism (McEwen, 2003, p. 206). A second theme is that greater and more complex development is better, is valued as a goal for college students, and is associated with greater mental health.

Empirical research into these identities is complicated by their constructivist and temporal nature. How one understands and acts based on that understanding of what it means to be a member of a racial minority, for example, can and does shift depending on circumstances, especially the absence or presence of other members of one's community. Likewise, perceptions about social identities change across time; what it means to be African American today is very different from what it was to be an African American in the rural South of the 1920s (Evans et. al, 2010). Weber (1998) suggested that instead of reifying identities in an essentialist manner, a social constructivist approach which treats identity as socially, historically, and culturally constructed at both the micro and macro levels, is more appropriate. Despite the complexity and challenges associated with empirical research on social identity development theories, a rich body of research has emerged over the past twenty years. The best developed of these are racial identity models; these models, therefore, can serve as helpful illustrations of other types of social identity development models.

During the 1970s and 1980s, researchers built on the work of Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966) to propose the initial models of racial identity development. One of the first to emerge was the minority identity development model (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1979). Revised and renamed the racial and cultural identity development model in 2003,

it consists of five stages: conformity, dissonance, resistance, introspection, and synergistic articulation and awareness (Sue & Sue, 2003). These five stages describe a process that is characterized by movement from acceptance of external assumptions and judgments to an informed, internalized, and personally constructed sense of equilibrium and comfort with one's racial identity.

Cross's (1971) theory of psychological nigrescence was another of the incipient racial identity models – and remains one of the most influential. Using the French term *nigrescence* to refer to “the process of becoming black” (Cross, 1971, p. 147), Cross articulated a five stage model – later reduced to four – which attempted to account for three critical, interlocking components: personal identity, orientation to reference groups, and race salience. These three elements offered a means of examining in an integrated way the manner in which one sees oneself, the way one sees the world, and the way one views race. More recently, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) have approached black identity development using a life span perspective and placed the original *nigrescence* theory within larger concepts of human development (Evans et al, 2010).

Inspired by Cross' work, the research of Helms and Cook has been critical to the evolution of research on social identity development. Helms and Cook (1999) extended Cross' consideration of African Americans to develop a People of Color development model which attempts to account for the experience of people of African, Latino, Asian, and Native American descent. Helms and Cook coined the acronym ALANA to refer to this broader range of People of Color. According to their theory, People of Color share a common developmental task “to overcome or abandon socialized negative racial-group conceptions (that is, internalized racism)... in order to develop a realistic self-affirming

collective identity” (p. 86). This articulation is consistent with that offered by Atkinson, Morten, and Sue’s minority identity development model. The six stage model proposed by Helms and Cook suggests an emergence from an implicit acceptance of White standards and the devaluing of one’s own racial group, to idealizing one’s racial group and dismissing anything perceived to be White, to an eventual, critical acceptance of and commitment toward one’s racial group which allows and includes an embrace of other racial groups.

In the 1990s and 2000s, a number of models of racial development for other oppressed racial groups were developed. Alvarez (1997, 2002), Alvarez and Yeh (1999), Kim (2001), Kohatsu (1993), and Sadowsky, Kwan and Pannu (1995) and offered Asian American identity development theories. Similarly, Canabal (1996), Ferdman and Gallego (2001), Miville (1997), Ruiz (1990) and Torres (1999) proposed Latino and Latina identity develop models. Horse (2001) provided a framework for understanding Native American racial identity development. These racial identity developmental modes are examples of the many social identity developmental models that exist; similar theories have been developed for other social identities, including sexual orientation (Cass, 1979; D’Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998) and gender (Bem, 1983; Lev, 2004;) as well as for the intersections of multiple identities (Abes, Jones, McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). While the major motivation for the establishment of many social identity models was the recognition of the important role of privilege, power, and oppression, more recently models have emerged which address the social identity development of privileged and dominant identities. These models include White (Helms,

1995; Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994) and heterosexual (Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002) identity development.

The emergence of social identity development theories over the past twenty years has been one of the most distinguishing aspects of the student development literature. These theories complement the foundational approaches by recognizing that much of the original work did not adequately account for the experiences of People of Color, those who identify as homosexual, or those in other traditionally oppressed groups. Moreover, recognition of the fundamentally embedded nature of all individuals offers a more accurate portrayal of human development. While each person must answer the question “Who am I?” for her or himself, each person must search for the answer in the midst of her or his relationships, reference groups, and cultures. Thus, the search for an answer to “Who am I?” is inseparable from a serious consideration of “Whose am I?”

**Cognitive development: How do I know?** The central mission of higher education is to promote student learning (King, 2003). Learning, however, is more than an outcome, a set of facts or a store of knowledge. The learning that colleges aim for is not the “banking approach” denounced by Paolo Freire (1993). Rather, colleges and universities strive to introduce students to learning as a process and to foster in them increasingly sophisticated strategies for analyzing information and data, forming judgments, and solving problems. While students are confronted with frequent examinations and other assignments that assess *what* they know, the larger task during their time in college is to consider “*How* do I know?” In other words, throughout the course of their studies, students are searching for a way of interpreting and making meaning of all the data, information, and knowledge to which they are exposed. When

done well, one result of that search is an individualized repertoire of methods used to determine what is true.

Originating from the research of Jean Piaget (1952) on the intellectual development of children and adolescents, cognitive structural theories attempt to explain how one knows. Piaget's pioneering work laid the groundwork for the major ideas and models that followed and articulated three central notions which undergird subsequent cognitive development theories: structural organization (each person develops a mediating structure or filter to translate reality), developmental sequence (development is a progression along a hierarchical continuum), and interactionism (development emerges out of the interaction between person and environment) (King, 1978). Based on his extensive observations of children, Piaget suggested a four-stage model of cognitive development. Those four stages – sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational – traced a movement from an extremely narcissistic, self-centered, and infantile world-view to a more logical, “de-centered,” adult view of reality (King, 1978, p. 37). As people mature, “age-related changes become apparent in the way they organize and reorganize” their thinking to interpret experience (King, 2009, p. 601). Maturation involves growing awareness and possession of perceptions and, ultimately, the ability to comprehend that one's perceptions only partially capture the fullness of reality. Kegan (1982) described this development with the example of a child “having reflexes” rather than “being reflexes,” which allows the child to “stop thinking he causes the world to go dark when he closes his eyes” (p. 31). Kegan's example is a vivid illustration of Piaget's proposed movement from simplistic to more complex cognitive development, movement which is animated by the adoption of new filters which reveal



increasing complexity to the individual as he or she takes in information, perceives experiences, and constructs meaning.

Cognitive structural theorists agree that changes in ways of organizing what and how one knows – what Mezirow (2000) calls shifts in “habits of mind” (p. 6) – take place as a result of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of integrating new information into existing structures of thought; accommodation is the process of creating new structures to incorporate stimuli that do not fit into existing thought patterns. While assimilation represents quantitative change, accommodation refers to qualitative change (Wadsworth, 1979). The experience of attending college guarantees that students will be presented with information and experiences that provoke disequilibrium and cognitive conflict. When this occurs, students seek first to assimilate the new information; if assimilation is not possible, they attempt to reestablish equilibrium by accommodating the new information or experience. King (2009) used the term “epistemological development” to describe this process which yields increasingly complex ways of knowing (p. 607). Other theorists in this category include William Perry, Lawrence Kohlberg, James Rest, Carol Gilligan, Mary Belenky and her colleagues, and Marcia Baxter Magolda.

Perry (1968) was the first cognitive structural theorist to focus on intellectual development in college students. Based on his research with students at Harvard and Radcliffe, Perry and his associates developed a model of students’ “unfolding views of the world,” (1968, p. ix), which he later referred to as “the typical course of development of students’ patterns of thought” (1981, p. 77). His nine-position scheme outlined the intellectual and ethical development of college students stretching from simplistic, “right-

wrong,” “good-bad,” “us-them,” dichotomies to more “complex forms through which the individual seeks to affirm personal commitments in a world of contingent knowledge and relative values” (Perry, 1968, p. 3). Perry chose the term position in order to emphasize the need to understand students in motion rather than immobilized in stages. One of the most unique features of Perry’s scheme is that it provides three alternatives to forward progression through the positions: temporizing (delaying in a position), escape (avoiding the responsibility of taking the next step toward commitment), and retreat (returning to the safety of dualistic thinking).

A substantial amount of empirical research has been done on Perry’s nine position model, including by Perry himself (1981), Kurfiss (1977) and Meyer (1975, 1977). Likewise, in order to test Perry’s theories, Kniefelkamp (1974) and Widick (1975) developed the Measure of Intellectual Development and Baxter Magolda created the Measure of Epistemological Reflection (1987). While his theory has been rightly criticized – especially for its reliance on traditionally-aged, male students at elite universities – the heuristic value of Perry’s theory is impressive. The subsequent research of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986); Baxter Magolda (1992, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2009); King and Kitchener (2002); and Parks (1996, 2000) draws heavily from insights first sketched by Perry. In fact, his influence is so pervasive that one summary identified Perry as the source of “nearly all of the existing psychological work on epistemological beliefs” of college students (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997, p. 90).

Much like Perry, Kohlberg built on the research conducted by Piaget (1932/1977, 1950). In contrast to Perry, however, Kohlberg (1976) focused exclusively on the moral reasoning of his research subjects (adolescent boys); while Perry’s overall scheme

included moral reasoning, Kohlberg was the first to examine it as a distinct construct. In an attempt to validate Piaget's and Dewey's (1958) assumptions about moral development, Kohlberg studied fifty boys between the ages of ten and sixteen. This research was the foundation for Kohlberg's (1976) six-stage model of moral reasoning with each stage representing a different negotiation between the self and society's rules and expectations. Individuals at the first stage make moral judgments based exclusively on a desire to avoid punishment. This external, objective orientation gives way to more considered approaches that involve following rules when it is one's interest to do so (stage 2), meeting the needs of close others (stage 3), adhering to larger societal norms and perceived duties (stage 4), considering laws and social customs based on human rights and values (stage 5) and devoting consideration to the points of view of all involved in a moral situation (stage 6). The role of empathy and justice are the dual foundations of this theory. The various stages depend on and are distinguished by the manner in which they reflect these complementary but distinct dynamics. Each of the six stages represents a different way of deciding what is fair or just by considering the widening perspectives of others. There is a direct connection between Kohlberg's model and Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Understanding and using higher forms of moral reasoning requires the ability to be, in Piagetian terms, at a formal operational stage (Knefelkamp et al., 1978, p. 57).

Kohlberg's work was expanded and extended by James Rest and his colleagues (1999). By adopting the major assumptions of Kohlberg's work and then subjecting them to extensive empirical study, Rest and his colleagues created a neo-Kohlbergian approach to moral thinking (Evans et al., 2010, p. 105). This research led to the creation of the

Defining Issues Test, a research instrument designed to measure moral development. His empirical work led Rest to depart from Kohlberg's rigid stage model in order to suggest instead that a person may utilize moral reasoning characteristic of several stages simultaneously. Similarly, Rest and his colleagues (2000) altered Kohlberg's model by proposing three schemas which they intended as a more comprehensive way to encapsulate Kohlberg's six stages. These three schemes are usually described as personal interest, maintaining norms, and postconventional.

Thousands of studies based on Kohlberg's and Rest's theories of moral development are extant in the literature. These studies have established the validity and reliability of the research instruments employed by Kohlberg and Rest as well as demonstrated the validity of the basic premises of Kohlberg's theory (Rest, 1979, 1986; Walker, 1988; Walker & Taylor, 1991). Studies suggest that university life, including academic coursework, cocurricular programs, and peer interactions can have a meaningful impact on moral development (Derryberry & Thoma, 2000; Rest, 1986).

As mentioned previously, Kohlberg's theory was critiqued by Gillian for its bias against women and for failing to give as much weight to care, responsibility, and relationships as it does to justice, rights, and rationality. Based on the results of her research with women dealing with a real life moral dilemma – whether or not to have an abortion – Gilligan proposed an alternative model of moral development. In her three level model, the most advanced level is characterized by individuals who “assert a moral equality between self and other” and who come to understand that the prohibition against hurting also includes not hurting oneself” (Gilligan, 1977, p. 504).

Similar to Gilligan, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule critiqued and then expanded prior work – in this case, that of Perry – to more accurately address gender-related differences in cognitive development. Concerned about “why women speak so frequently of problems and gaps in their learning and so often doubt their intellectual competence” (1986, p. 4), the authors undertook in-depth interviews of more than one-hundred women, some of whom were students or recent graduates and some of whom were not college educated. This research led to the publication of their book, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (Belenky et al., 1986), which presented five “epistemological perspectives from which women know and view the world” (p. 15). These five perspectives were silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge.

Perry's focus on men and Belenky et al.'s attention to women motivated Baxter Magolda to address gender in a study of cognitive development that included both men and women. Her longitudinal study of 101 students at Miami University led Baxter Magolda to articulate the epistemological reflection model that she outlined in her early work, *Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns in Students' Intellectual Development* (1992). The epistemological reflection model consisted of four stages, stretching from absolute to contextual knowing. Baxter Magolda emphasized that she found more similarities than differences in men's and women's ways of knowing and stressed that variability exists among members of a particular gender. Thus, the patterns she described were related to but not dictated by gender. Moreover, Baxter Magolda (1992) described three “underlying story lines” that connected her study to the work conducted by Kohlberg, Gilligan, Belenky, and other cognitive structural theorists: the

development and emergence of voice, changing relationships with authority, and evolving relationships with peers (p. 191).

Each informed by Piaget, Perry, Kohlberg, Rest and his colleagues, Gilligan, Belenky and her colleagues, and Baxter Magolda crafted important and influential models of cognitive development. Each of these theories helped illuminate the often hidden processes students use to make decisions and form judgments. In other words, these theorists attempted to study empirically and describe in detail the typical processes employed by students as they strive to answer the question “How do I know?” Psychosocial, social-identity, and cognitive-structural development are interrelated and often overlap. They also interact and inform one another to produce a developmental synthesis. That synthesis can be thought of as the inchoate beginning of an answer to the perennial question, “What is the meaning of my life?”

**Integrated approaches: What is the meaning of my life?** Rather than examining specific, limited aspects of the human being in fragmented ways, integrative approaches attempt to consider the holistic development of students including psychosocial, social, cognitive, and moral dimensions. The theories in this category are constructive-developmental in that they examine the ways people “construct meaning” (Kegan, 1994, p. 199) out of their life experiences. This theoretical cluster also includes those which address explicitly the question “What is the meaning of my life?” Kegan’s self evolution model, Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship, and the faith development models of James Fowler and Sharon Daloz Parks shine light on the journey students make toward confronting, wrestling with, and forming initial responses to questions of ultimate meaning. While integrative theories tend to be more complex than

those in the other three theoretical clusters, they provide added dimensions to understanding how students change, grow, and develop during their time in college.

Kegan first introduced his theory of self-evolution in his 1982 book, *The Evolving Self*. His later book, *In over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (1994) presented a revised version of his theory and offered more extensive consideration of its implications for contemporary society. Kegan was significantly influenced by the work of Piaget; he was troubled, however, by Piaget's exclusive focus on cognitive development. Since Kegan believed that cognitive, affective, and interpersonal processes are intertwined in a single process of development, his theory of self-evolution provided central roles for each. He understood the development of meaning making as dependent on shifting relationships between the self and others. By building this dynamic into his model, Kegan highlighted the importance of the interpersonal dimension to development.

Kegan (1994) summarized the focus of his work as the "evolution of consciousness, the personal unfolding of ways of organizing experience that are not simply replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind" (p. 9). This evolution involved movement through five stages of development which Kegan first referred to as "orders of consciousness" (1994) and, later, as "forms of mind" (2000). Kegan (1982) argued that since the process of development requires a shift in one's way of functioning in the world, it is usually painful.

Three other aspects of Kegan's model merit attention. The first was his reliance on object-relations theorists such as Kernberg (1966) to craft a hypothesis regarding the centrality of self-other relationships to the self-evolution process. A consideration of what is object and what is subject, of that which an individual is aware of rather than

unconsciously guided by, is key to the process of “decentration” – the loss of an old self – in order to achieve a “recentration” – the recovery of a new center (Kegan, 1982, p.31). This dynamic is necessary for development. A second notable aspect of Kegan’s theory was the emphasis he placed on the fundamental and life-long process of negotiating a balance between the desire for inclusion and the desire to be distinct. Kegan understood these two competing yearnings to be powerful parts of the human condition. “Evolutionary truces,” temporary solutions to this lifelong tension (1982, p. 107) were periods when the two contrasting but complementary longings were brought into equilibrium. Development involved disruptions of these periods of equilibrium in order for a freshly negotiated balance between inclusion and distinction to emerge. The third aspect of Kegan’s theory was his use of Winnicott’s (1965) notion of “the holding environment” (p. 116) to describe the critical importance of support for those in the process of development. In addition to supporting individuals in a particular evolutionary truce, a holding environment also fostered movement to the next phase of development. Kegan (1994) thought of a holding environment as an “evolutionary bridge” which he described as “a context for crossing over” (p. 43) from one order of consciousness to the next.

A number of research projects have tested the veracity of Kegan’s theory. Kegan and his colleagues developed a research instrument they titled the Subject-Object Interview (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 1988) to assess individual’s operative order of consciousness. Based on the results of these studies, Kegan argued that “around one-half to two-thirds of the adult population appears not to have fully reached the fourth order of consciousness” which they labeled self-authorship (Kegan,



1994, p. 188). Similar studies have indicated that most college students employ order three – the socialized mind – meaning making strategies that depend largely on the acceptance of others. At this stage of development codependence is a major risk and the challenge is for individuals to take responsibility for their decisions while establishing an independent compass for their lives.

One of the most interesting implications of Kegan's theory and the empirical work conducted with it was the suggestion of a developmental mismatch – that is, the demands and expectations placed on most individuals in modern societies require an order of consciousness that is achieved by only a minority of adults. Kegan suggested that the most appropriate response to this mismatch was to support people in reaching stage four – self-authorship – a concept which has been central to the later work of Marcia Baxter Magolda.

In her recent work, Baxter Magolda (2008) shifted away from her previous focus on epistemological perspectives to focus on self-authorship. Expanding on the theory-building work of Kegan (1994), she defined self-authorship as “the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269). Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship was integrative in that it attended to the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal aspects of human development, as well as the intersections of these elements. Her research led her to suggest that self-authorship usually begins during one's twenties – the undergraduate years – and is solidified during one's thirties as one settles on personally constructed answers to “three major questions: ‘How do I know?’ ‘Who am I?’ and ‘How do I want to construct relationships with others?’” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 15).

Baxter Magolda's (2001) model incorporated four phases in the journey toward self-authorship. The four phases are: (1) Following Formulas, (2) Crossroads, (3) Becoming the Author of One's Life, and (4) Internal Foundation. Self-authorship is achieved when individuals are able to take control of their lives and decisions. Feelings of peace, contentment, and inner strength mark the achievement of self-authorship; such individuals have learned to hear and trust their inner voice and are able to make important life decisions based on that internal foundation. Similar to other development models, Baxter Magolda's self-authorship model involves movement from an external to an internal orientation toward authority, from looking to and trusting others for direction to looking inward and relying one's inner voice for guidance.

In order to use her theory in empirical research, Baxter Magolda partnered with Patricia King (2007) to create the Self-Authorship Interview, a series of questions designed to elicit participants' sharing of their personal reflections on topics of personal importance. The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education Interview was also created by Baxter Magolda and King (2007); that interview schedule was intended to assess development vis-à-vis seven liberal arts outcomes and to compare that development with students' path toward self-authorship. Jane Pizzolato (2005) introduced a quantitative measure of self-authorship, the Self-Authorship Survey, which can be used in tandem with her Experience Survey. Pizzolato's Experience Survey was designed to assess participants' decision-making, problem solving, and autonomy. From her study of the narratives of 613 undergraduate students, Pizzolato (2005) concluded that in order to move through The Crossroads phase of Baxter Magolda's model, students need to confront and struggle through at least one or more "provocative moments" (p.

630). These moments of challenge are critical in creating the dissonance necessary to compel students to engage in the difficult work of establishing “a self-authored equilibrium characterized by new types and patterns of relationships, reconstructed conceptions of the self based on clarifications, and enactment of internally defined goals and sense of self” (p. 635).

The most salient critique of Baxter Magolda’s theory is that it was created based on her research with White students – and then graduates – of a single university. Subsequent work has been done to test the theory’s applicability to other populations. Pizzolato (2003) applied the self-authorship model to high-risk college students; Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004) focused on Latino/a students from seven colleges and universities to consider self-authorship in conjunction with ethnic identity development; and Abes and Jones (2004) applied the model to the experience of lesbian students. In each of these varied contexts, the theory has been demonstrated to be valid and useful in understanding student development.

Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda (2008) have presented cogent and compelling arguments that the complexities of society make self-authorship a necessity. A consensus has emerged that self-authorship arises from students processing experiences and situations of disequilibrium and that self-authorship can be facilitated through pedagogical, curricular, and programmatic reforms to higher education (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2003, 2004; Hornak & Ortiz, 2004; King & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Pizzolato, 2003).

Baxter Magolda (2001) argued that in the fourth phase of self-authorship –

internal foundations – spirituality frequently plays a meaningful role. Prior to the work of Fowler and Parks, however, spirituality was an aspect of student development that was largely neglected by the literature (Love & Talbot, 1999). Although the first colleges in the United States were created to train clergy and provide a religiously grounded education (Temkin & Evans, 1998), higher education has largely been reluctant to address the spiritual and faith development of students (Tisdell, 2003). Fowler and Parks' groundbreaking work, however, opened the way for many other theorists who have examined how students explore and address spiritual issues, as well as how universities can assist students in that search.

Fowler was the first theorist to address spirituality from a developmental perspective. In his 1981 classic, *Stages of Faith*, he described faith as “a universal feature of human living, recognizably similar everywhere despite the remarkable variety of forms and contents of religious practice and belief” (p. 14). He understood faith as a process of meaning making which was inherently relational; faith was reflected in the interaction of self with others as well as the commitment the individual holds to God (Fowler, 1981). Fowler focused intentionally on faith rather than spirituality or religion; he defined faith as “our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives” (Fowler, 1981, p. 4). Fowler (1978) stressed the distinction between the content and structure of faith; individuals at the same stage can hold beliefs that are vastly different (content) while their ways of conceiving and making sense of their beliefs (process) are similar.

Fowler (1981) composed his six stage faith development model based on interviews with 359 individuals from a wide variety of ages. In his theory, faith functions

as the unconscious structures that constitute a series of progressively more complex and comprehensive stages of meaning making. He posited that movement through the stages is most often spiral rather than linear but he argued that development is invariant. That is, like Kohlberg's model of moral reasoning, in Fowler's model the stages are always experienced in the same order and none can be skipped.

Following the model of Kegan – one of Fowler's major influences – Fowler (1981) included both cognition and affect in his model. In addition to Kegan, Fowler was heavily influenced by Erikson's (1968) model of identity development, Kohlberg's (1969) work on moral development, Piaget's (1950) study of intellectual development and Selman's (1976) examination of social perspective taking (Dykstra & Parks, 1986). Fowler attempted to craft his theory so that it would parallel and elaborate the theories of psychosocial, cognitive, and moral development which influenced him most significantly (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, p. 53). The model of faith development proposed by Fowler was integrative not only in that it attempted to address questions of ultimate meaning but also in that it considered "biological maturation, emotional and cognitive development, psychosocial experience, and religio-cultural influences" (Fowler, 1996, p. 57).

Fowler's theory has been validated by a number of researchers, including Fowler himself (1981). In a qualitative study using a narrative approach, Lee (2002) found that her participants were moving toward the fourth stage, intuitive-reflective faith, which depends on the individual approaching self-authorship so that a coherent meaning making system may begin to emerge. Leak, Loucks, and Bowlin (1999) created the Faith Development Scale – a research instrument they designed based on Fowler's model.

Leak (2003) employed the tool in a longitudinal study of students from their first to their senior year and found that students demonstrated movement toward more advanced stages of Fowler's theory. While the model has been empirically validated, it has also received a healthy amount of criticism. In addition to its creation based on a study of primarily White individuals, Fowler has also been critiqued for developing his theory first and collecting data to support it subsequently. Other authors have disputed Fowler's definition of faith (Dykstra, 1986), suggested that his approach is biased in favor of his Protestant Christian background (Moran, 1983), and argued that he was influenced exclusively by male psychologists – Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg, Kegan, and Selman – and thus may have overlooked important gender-related differences (Harris, 1986; Anderson, 1994). Perhaps the major criticism of Fowler's work has centered on the lack of empirical evidence for the final stage of his model, universalizing faith. As a response to that criticism, Fowler (2000) adapted his model to present the fifth stage – conjunctive faith – as the end point of faith development. Despite the numerous criticisms of his model, Fowler's theory of faith development has stood the test of time and continues to be an important touchstone for later theory building and research. One of the most prominent theorists to follow in his footsteps was Sharon Daloz Parks, a theologian who worked in the collegiate environment as a teacher, counselor and minister.

Parks (1986, 2000) extended Fowler's (1981) insights by focusing on the faith development of young adults in college. While significantly influenced by Fowler's work, Park's model differed in two substantial ways. First, she attempted to enhance Fowler's model by adding a stage between adolescence and adulthood which she titled the "Young Adult" stage. Parks proposed that young adulthood presents a plethora of

strenuous challenges including questions related to purpose, vocation, and belonging. During this time, individuals often express a desire to make a positive difference in the wider world while admitting a profound sense of ambivalence about their ability to do so. Because of the unique and multiple issues related to this time frame, Parks was convinced that it merited special attention. The second contrast between her model and that of Fowler was her consideration of the content as well as the process of faith. Parks (1986) stressed that young adults are often vulnerable to various ideologies and to the influence of charismatic leaders or communities. Thus, she argued that any attempt to map faith development should seek to understand the content of faith – the symbols, images, and ideology – as well as its structure.

Despite these two differences, Parks' theory is fundamentally similar to Fowler's. Like him, she drew on the work of developmental psychologists, including Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Perry and Kegan. She defined faith as "the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience" (Parks, 2000, p. 7), an articulation parallel to Fowler's notion of faith as a way of finding coherence and meaning in our lives. Both of these constructions are broad enough to consider the meaning making activity of religious practitioners as well as those who engage in nontraditional spiritual practices or who do not consider themselves religious or spiritual. Also similar to Fowler's model was Parks' assertion that faith development is more recursive than linear. A fourth resemblance was her integrative approach. Parks (2000) posited that three forms of development – cognition, dependence, and community – contribute to faith development. Thus, individuals' faith is shaped by their personal epistemology, degree of reliance on others for emotional support, and the

countless interactions with others in social settings that characterize campus life. A final similarity between Fowler's and Parks' model was their common suggestion that more advanced levels provide an equilibrium between deep commitment to one's truth, beliefs, and values and a gentle acceptance of the truth, perspectives, and beliefs of others.

An additional aspect of Parks' theory that deserves mention was her assertion that young adults can benefit greatly from the mentoring community provided by colleges and universities. In Parks' thinking, higher education offers much more than intellectual development. Mentoring communities provide a "network of belonging" (Parks, 2000, p. 135) in which young adults are encouraged to use their imagination in the exploration of the big questions that will shape their future, "questions of meaning, purpose and faith" (p. 138). Mentoring communities can also cultivate particular "habits of mind" (p. 142) such as critical thinking, connective-systemic-holistic thought, and a contemplative mind. These habits of mind can "yield the gift of a worthy dream" (p. 146) which, Parks' argued, is the critical task of young adult faith.

While her work has been applied in a wide variety of cocurricular and student affairs contexts (Love, 2001), only a limited number of empirical projects based on Parks' theory have been conducted. Buchko (2004) investigated the faith development of college students and found that women were more likely to have a close relationship with God. Lee (2002) reported that the participants in her study of faith development of Catholic college students described their faith in terms similar to Parks' hypotheses. In addition to the need for further research to validate Parks' model, her theory has been critiqued for emphasizing cognitive aspects of faith to the detriment of the affective (Watt, 2003). Other authors have suggested that Parks did not sufficiently consider the role of



race and ethnicity (Watt, 2003) or gender (Anderson, 1994) in the faith development process.

The faith development models of Fowler and Park offer a unique contribution to the student development literature (Love, 2002). The movement of faith development theories from the margins to the mainstream of the field has enabled a more intentional consideration of where and how they fit into the overall expansiveness of the student development literature. In contrast to traditional cognitive development theories, theories of faith development concern the activity of seeking and constructing meaning involving the most comprehensive dimension of the human condition. In other words, faith attempts to make sense of the big picture, to find an overall sense of meaning and purpose in one's life (Love, 2002, p. 358). Along with the constructive-developmental, integrative approaches of Kegan and Baxter Magolda, faith development theories allow the contours of college students' struggle with the question "What is the meaning of my life?" to come into sharper relief.

The incorporation of faith development models into the psychosocial, social identity, and cognitive-structural theories rounds out the student development literature and ensures that it has addressed each of the major aspects of human development. Each theoretical cluster offers an important contribution to a map of a holistic human life; moreover, these theories provide a "normative depiction of the *telos* or goal of human life" (Fowler, 2000, p. 11). Taken together, student development theories offer a compelling vision of completion, of fullness of being, and of maturity. In sum, the student development literature provides both map and compass for the navigation of life's major dilemmas.

While the expansiveness and comprehensiveness of the student development literature is indeed impressive, the field has largely neglected the role of compassion in students' lives. Compassion has been investigated neither as a cognitive construct nor as an aspect of moral development. Likewise, it has only received cursory attention as a subcomponent of spirituality, and even then, only rarely. This failure has motivated an increasing number of theorists to focus on compassion in an intentional way as a distinct component of their research on spirituality.

Having reviewed and synthesized the student development literature, I now turn to a consideration of the role of spirituality in higher education. In particular, I will review the emerging literature which documents the empirical evidence of students' and faculty members' desire for meaningful ways of considering the role of spirituality in their lives. I will situate the surge in interest in spirituality among some of the more prominent critiques of higher education as it is currently structured in the United States and highlight the manner in which a greater role for spirituality and questions of ultimate meaning could drastically enhance the current reality.

### **Spirituality in Higher Education**

Interest in the role of spirituality in higher education has surged during the past 25 years. This increased attention has been informed by and reflects the changing religious landscape in the United States over that same period (Hoge, Dinges, Johnson, & Gonzales, 2001; Roof, 1999; Wuthnow, 1998). Sociologists of religion have described this shift as a movement away from a "spirituality of dwelling" to a "spirituality of seeking" (Wuthnow, 1998). The altered religious landscape has legitimized the personal practice of religion and the individual exploration of spirituality outside of formal

religious denominations (Douthat, 2012, p. 62). A large and growing percentage of Americans no longer belong to or attend churches or synagogues and a growing majority of Americans now “piece together their faith like a patchwork quilt,” practicing forms of spirituality that are characterized by a vastly more complex quest “in which each person seeks his or her own way” (Wuthnow, 1998, p. 2). The historical foundations of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism have been loosened; the beliefs of Americans are more eclectic and their commitments more private than ever before (Roof, 1999). Today, Americans are much more likely to describe themselves as spiritual rather than religious; many, especially young people, explicitly describe themselves in those terms. While some commentators see in the current spiritual climate in the United States a loss of faith, a more granular analysis illuminates the emergence of a novel, profoundly open, questing mode of spirituality and faith. As a vital part of American society, institutions of higher education have been impacted by and have informed these developments.

It is within this context that a growing number of educators are calling for a more holistic education which attends to the spirit as fully as the mind – and which strives to connect these two fundamental aspects of the human person (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Glazer, 1999; Kazanjian & Laurence, 2000; Palmer & Zajonic, 2010; Lee, 1999; Trautvetter, 2007). These and other voices advocate for an educational approach that integrates learning about the external world with the exploration of the self, a system which incorporates a new equilibrium between exterior and interior. This gathering momentum to establish a more holistic education likely reflects a growing concern with recovering a sense of meaning in American society more generally (Astin et al., 2001, p.

7). Within the literature, a consensus is emerging that the abandonment of spirit and other ineffable aspects of student development has led to numerous deleterious results, including the reduction of education of the whole person to the training of technicians or specialists.

Much of this narrowing of aspiration has been driven by the fear of indoctrination. Rather than risk imposing a set of values or beliefs on students, it has often been thought preferable to avoid entirely the realm of values and beliefs. For most colleges and universities, the ironic result has been the almost total prohibition of spiritual indoctrination with other types of indoctrination and imposition continuing unimpeded. “Rather than religious beliefs, students are indoctrinated into dualism, scientism, materialism, and consumerism” – which serves to limit their imaginations, conceptual frameworks, and worldviews (Glazer, 1999, p. 79). The interest of more educators in reclaiming a place for spirituality and other intangible outcomes of student development reflects and is in alignment with the larger shifts in the American religious landscape which have opened increased possibilities for the recovery of meaning and a role for spirituality neither defined nor limited by denominational boundaries.

To be sure, statements of dissatisfaction with the practice of higher education are not new. Beginning in the 1980s, an expansive literature criticizing American colleges and universities rapidly emerged (Anderson, 1992; Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bennett, 1984; Bloom, 1987; Cheney, 1989, 1990; D’Souza, 1991; Kimball, 1990; Smith, 1990; Sykes, 1988; Wilshire, 1990). According to Derek Bok (2006), a former President of Harvard College, most of these critiques “focus on identifying scapegoats and assigning blame,” with the most frequently cited sources of that blame being cautious, unimaginative

administrators; radical, self-absorbed professors; and low intellectual standards” (p. 56). Bok asserted that the majority of those who author these critiques are more interested in making and winning arguments than investigating rigorously the reality of the effectiveness of higher education – or suggesting what might be done to improve college and university performance. This argumentative approach fails to consider “the most serious problems of our colleges, which have to do less with decline and abuse than with unfulfilled promise and unrealized opportunities” (p. 57)

While there are – and will undoubtedly continue to be – innumerable critiques of higher education, perhaps the most salient is that American colleges and universities are out of balance. For many years, an unquestioning acceptance of rational empiricism has dominated the practice of many institutions, resulting in a form of postsecondary education that is almost exclusively focused on the outer world. The result is drastic underperformance in the form of countless missed opportunities for colleges and universities to address the deepest longings and highest aspirations of their students. Instead of offering a holistic education designed to prepare students to take up leadership roles in addressing the most daunting challenges which will determine their future, too many colleges and universities have settled on the effective, safe, and tidy process of transmitting knowledge from professors to students. After briefly summarizing and reviewing this critique, I will then address two related issues. As Bok and other scholars (Chickering et al., 2006; Lewis, 2007; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010) have argued, higher education has lost sight of its founding purpose and surrendered its role in helping students contend with questions of purpose, meaning, and authenticity. As one author has suggested, colleges and universities have given up on the meaning of life (Kronman,

2007). Finally, drawing on the empirical work of Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011), I will assert that undergraduate students are keenly interested in spirituality and the ultimate questions related to and informed by the spiritual domain. Whether or not colleges and universities intentionally address these issues, students will continue to explore them during their time on campus. Institutions of higher education, then, would better serve their purpose to the extent that they acknowledge the needs and desires of students, and strive to arrange their educational resources in such a way as to facilitate the wise, considered, and prudent exploration of the role of spirituality and spiritual issues.

### **Unbalanced Colleges and Universities**

The American system of higher education is unparalleled in the world. Colleges and universities in the United States have served a critically important role in monumental breakthroughs in the fields of medicine, science, engineering, business, and education. Likewise, a number of the most significant civil rights advances of the last fifty years have benefited from the empirical research and theoretical grounding provided by higher education institutions. Regrettably, however, these accomplishments have not been matched by similar advances in helping students create meaningful lives for themselves and contribute to positive social change for others. Since the literary and philosophical traditions that constitute the core of a liberal education are grounded in the maxim “know thyself,” this inattention to students’ interior development is deeply ironic (Chickering et al., 2006). Constructs and characteristics such as values, wisdom, self understanding, compassion, and spirituality have been relegated to the co-curriculum, or ignored completely, treated as inferior to the ability of faculty and students to manipulate

and investigate the material world. In sum, a focus on the spiritual interior has been eclipsed by attention to the material exterior.

This disequilibrium has resulted in a sense of fragmentation; undergraduates are frequently taught and shown how to deconstruct and objectify but only rarely, if ever, do they receive assistance in constructing a meaningful philosophy of life or searching for answers to life's ultimate questions. As a result, faculty and students are "encouraged to lead inauthentic lives, in which we act either as if we were not spiritual beings or as if our spiritual side were irrelevant to our vocation or work" (Chickering et al., 2006, p. ix). Marginalization of the interior has also led to impersonal, dehumanizing learning environments, contexts "so withdrawn from experience that the only kind of learning that can take place is abstraction" (Glazer, 1999, p. 136). Parker Palmer (1999) has described the academy as "cold" and "flat;" cold because there is no connective tissue to hold "the fragmentation and chaos together" (p. 27) and flat because the "objectivist terrain in higher education is so lacking in variety, so utterly banal, that anything that pops up and surprises us is instantly defined as a threat" (p. 30).

In these kinds of systems, students are taught to ignore and distrust their inner genius and are thereby prevented from discovering their deepest passions and highest callings. In the extreme, when students lose access to their most authentic selves, they are forced to "depend on cost-benefit analyses for every important decision," leaving them unprepared to resist the consumer culture's message that "buying things and feeling good are the whole point of their lives" (Gatto, 1999, p. 162). The atomistic and competitive assumptions adopted – often unreflectively – by colleges and universities have discouraged the exploration of authenticity, integrity, spirituality, compassion, and

other ineffable outcomes. Rational empiricism and its assumption that truth is always and only objectively and externally available prohibit communal exploration and discussion of these essential aspects of the human experience. As a result, higher education often leaves students less self-aware at graduation than they were when they matriculated, with only meager skills, habits, and abilities of integration. Far too often, students are sent into the world without being challenged to reflect on the inner drivers of their own behavior or to arrive at the kind of self-knowledge that gives them power over themselves (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 49).

While the objectivity of the scientific method is unquestionably critical to the advancement of knowledge and the continued first-rate performance of institutions of higher education, rational empiricism has become an unchallenged ideology. Trained to seek “pure objectivity,” many members of the academy “learn to distance, to expect that truth is best perceived at arm’s length, taught that if objectivity is lost, mistakes will be made” (Remen, 1999, p. 36). Similarly, the prevailing assumption that objective methods require the elimination of purpose, values, meaning, and spirituality leave faculty and students alienated from one another and from the world outside the university. These dynamics may be contributing factors to the shifts in college students’ interests and values that have occurred during the past forty years. Since 1970, the percentage of first year students who rate “being very well off financially” as an “essential” or “very important” goal of college attendance has risen from 36 to 74 percent, with the percentage who ascribe similar importance to “acquiring a meaningful philosophy of life” has decreased from 79 to 39 percent (Bok, 2006, p. 26). To be sure, national and global dynamics have exacerbated the shifting concerns of undergraduates. While changes in



college students' interest and values cannot be solely explained by the unchecked supremacy of rational empiricism, the privileged place occupied by this epistemology has done little to offset those changes. Many administrators and faculty members express dismay when students admit their reason for attending college as a desire become wealthy, "they offer students neither a coherent view of the point of a college education nor any guidance on how they might discover for themselves some larger purpose in life" (Lewis, 2006, p. 17).

In the place of such guidance, the assumptions which undergird objectivity and empiricism communicate a powerful message to students about what should matter to them and what they should value. In environments in which wisdom, compassion, and spirituality are wholly avoided or disparaged, it is not surprising that students learn to focus their attention and aspirations in other directions. As more and more scholars have recognized the limits and liabilities of this unbalanced system of higher education, they have advocated for an "education which embraces every dimension of what it means to be human, that honors the varieties of human experience, looks at us and our world through a variety of cultural lenses, and educates our young people in ways that enable them to face the challenges of our time" (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 20). A more holistic approach to higher education would offer the desperately needed balance to the current system and facilitate a return to the original purposes of the first colleges and universities founded in the United States.

### **Neglected purposes**

A second major critique of American higher education is that it has neglected and/or forgotten its original purposes. While a number of prominent scholars have

offered recent iterations of this critique, it is not new. As early as 1951, Buckley argued that his alma mater, Yale, and higher education in general, had lost its way in no longer educating socially responsible individuals. Veysey (1970) built on Buckley's argument by suggesting that the loss of a unifying purpose resulted in a compromised system of watered down, ill-defined goals. More recently, Brubacher and Rudy (1997) have argued that American higher education is in transition from a model securely tethered to the original ideals of the first universities to an uncertain identity in which purpose may be completely severed from the original goals of preparing students for citizenship or equipping them with a moral sense of responsibility to the world (Murphy, 2005, p. 28). While holistic education – education which examines learning and knowledge in relation to an exploration of the self – was at the core of the foundation of liberal education, the past century has seen a number of potent shifts. Aspirations to help students increase in self-awareness, including what for them would constitute a meaningful life, have been frequently overlooked or surpassed by an unspecified commitment to excellence (Lewis, 2006). Many prominent commentators suggest that the unending chase for excellence which colleges and universities have joined is the inevitable result of their uncritical adoption of consumer and market orientations that elevate rankings and customer satisfaction to highest order priorities. With so much attention given to excellence – even to a hollow or undefined notion of excellence – scant time and scarce energy are available for the consideration and pursuit of other, foundational purposes of higher education.

Lucas (1994) argued that the American higher education has proceeded through three distinct apprehensions of purpose. In the first stage, beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century

and extending until the Civil War, the purpose of the American university was understood to be education centered on the self knowledge and the individual's relationship with God. The second phase, beginning approximately at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, saw the emergence of the view of academy as "a research institution dedication to the exploration of knowledge as a means of investing and mastering science and technology" (Murphy, 2005. p. 23). The final stage began roughly at the end of World War II and featured the dominance of the business model as well as its assumption that among the chief aims of the university was preparing future members of the workforce. Murphy (2005) and others have argued that the research and business models have prevailed to such an extent that "the American university is now often indistinguishable from a corporation" (p. 24). In such a context, the original purposes of character education, the promotion of moral responsibility, and education designed to free the human person to reach her or his fullest potential seem anachronistic.

While university faculty and administrators periodically devote enormous time and energy to discussing "the standard components of the undergraduate program" – general education requirements, majors and concentrations, methods of helping students understand cultural diversity and globalization, and so on – they frequently avoid dealing with a comprehensive examination of the ends that a four-year college ought to pursue (Bok, 2006, p. 40). Even the mandated appraisals required by accrediting agencies, according to Bok, too often "proceed in a haze of unwarranted optimism without a thorough discussion of ends and means" (p. 45). By not paying careful attention to purposes, universities have ignored important aims of undergraduate education, including teaching students (1) to reason thoughtfully about contested ethical questions; (2) to be

active and knowledgeable citizens in a democracy; (3) to communicate well with diverse audiences; (4) to think critically and clearly; (5) to live with diversity in a globalized world; and (6) to enjoy full and varied lives (Bok, 2006, pp. 67-76). As an in-depth consideration of purpose has been neglected, the assumption that the purpose of higher education is to prepare future members of the workforce has gained momentum.

While Bok's list of important outcomes of a college is a helpful contribution, it nevertheless falls short of articulating an overarching purpose of higher education. In his book, *Excellence Without a Soul*, former Dean of Harvard College Harry Lewis summarized the purpose of undergraduate education as helping students "learn who they are, to search for a larger purpose for their lives, and to leave college as better human beings" (p. xv). Combining the outcomes described by Bok and the purposes suggested by Lewis illuminates the reality that the end of higher education is – or at least could be – the fostering of students' full humanity. In contrast to the cramped assumptions of rational empiricism, such a holistic approach would include and encourage the consideration of compassion, spirituality, meaning, and related constructs.

An additional theme extant in the literature is that the unbalanced nature of American colleges and universities – focused to the extreme on the external rather than the internal – obscures the current puzzlement about purpose (Kronman, 2007; Lewis, 2006). While many institutions are better than ever at creating and sharing knowledge, they are scarcely aware that they have lost touch with important parts of their own history; the economic demands of the current higher education marketplace exert a constant pull on colleges and universities away from their original moorings. In today's competitive economic environment, it is more difficult than ever to remember that "we

teach the humanities to help students understand what it means to be human” (Lewis, 2006, p. 3). The multiple potent forces acting on colleges and universities have left them with only a superficial grasp of their educational mission and with modest ability to do more than satisfy the urgency of daily demands.

Disconnected from original purposes and lacking compelling substitutes, it is almost inevitable that colleges and universities are subtly but steadily influenced by the forces of empiricism, consumerism, and materialism – all of which leave students and faculty dissatisfied and unfulfilled. The rarity with which colleges and universities engage in an extended discussion of their purpose contributes to the unquestioned ascendancy of rational empiricism. If, instead, institutions of higher education attempt to make clear what it is that they are trying to achieve, previously undervalued aspects of students’ lives may find new legitimacy. As it is, a lack of “adequate criteria of purpose” obscures “how well our higher education works in practice or even what working well would mean” (Carnochan, 1993). In the midst of such a confused environment, compassion, spirituality, and other ineffable outcomes often appear to be unrelated to the “true” or “real” purpose of higher education.

### **Student Interest in Spirituality**

The third and final critique of higher education that I will address is that it routinely fails to respond to students’ robust interest in spirituality and questions of ultimate meaning. As previously stated, the most recent comprehensive review of student development literature (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), contained no references to “spirituality” and only two references to “religion” (Astin et al., 2011). While Fowler’s (1981, 1996) and Parks’ (1986, 2000) seminal treatments of the faith development of

college students provided solid theoretical grounding, only minimal empirical work has been done to test the relevance and validity of their theories. The lack of research on students' spiritual lives stands in sharp contrast with the expansive documentation of how the college experience impacts students' intellectual, personal, and social lives – as well as with their keen interest in spirituality and questions of meaning, purpose, and authenticity (Chickering et al., 2006). The notable exception is the work of Alexander and Helen Astin and their colleagues at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI).

According to Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011), the questions that occupy students are essentially spiritual: “Who am I? What are my values? What is the purpose of my life? Why am I in college? What kind of person do I want to become? What sort of world do I want to help create?” (p. 1). Answers to these sorts of questions depend on the development of greater self awareness, including the self-awareness that emerges from meaningful relationships in a community which encourages their exploration. The belief of Astin, Astin, and Lindholm that spirituality is a fundamental and inescapable aspect of students' lives led them to undertake a seven year study of over 15,000 students from a diverse sample of colleges and universities across the country. By administering surveys to students as they began college and then three years later as they were about to finish their junior year, a longitudinal database was compiled which could track changes in individual students' spiritual and religious qualities. This quantitative method was complimented by qualitative interviews conducted with focus groups of students enrolled in eleven disparate campuses. This research led to the conclusion that while students' degree of religious engagement declines somewhat during college, their spirituality grows substantially. “Students become more caring, more tolerant, more connected with

others, and more actively engaged in a spiritual quest” (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011, p. 10). Moreover, the data indicated that spiritual growth is associated with other positive college outcomes, such as academic performance, psychological well-being, leadership development, and satisfaction with college. The evidence suggested that these changes are not merely maturational; instead, the data pointed to the positive impact of specific experiences – study abroad, interdisciplinary studies, service learning, philanthropic giving, interracial interaction, leadership training, and contemplative practices – on students’ spiritual growth (p. 145).

In order to conduct their research, Astin, Astin and Lindholm faced the challenge of constructing a survey instrument sophisticated enough to measure accurately and consistently complex constructs while simultaneously making sense to students from the full range of faith backgrounds. After dedicating months to reviewing the literature and consulting a technical advisory panel of theologians, as well as completing a pilot survey on more than 3,500 students, they settled on ten areas or domains on which to focus. These include five spiritual measures – spiritual quest, equanimity, ethic of caring, charitable involvement, and ecumenical worldview – and five religious qualities – religious commitment, religious engagement, religious/social conservatism, religious skepticism, and religious struggle (Astin et al., 2011, p. 19).

This methodology uncovered unequivocal evidence that college students are interested in spirituality. According to the results of their 2003 pilot survey administered to 4,000 college juniors at diverse institutions, four out of five students reported having “an interest in spirituality” and believing “in the sacredness of life.” More than two-thirds said their religious or spiritual beliefs “provide me with strength, support, and

guidance.” More than 75 percent believed in God and report feeling a “sense of connection with God/Higher Power that transcends my personal self.” Nearly half of the sample reported that it was “essential” or “very important” to seek opportunities to grow spiritually (Pryor et al., 2007, p. 33).

The research of Astin, Astin, and Lindholm also surfaced students’ expectation that their college experience would contribute to their spiritual development. More than 80 percent reported that “to find my purpose in life” was at least a “somewhat” important reason for attending college, with more than 50 percent identifying it as a “very important” reason. Two-thirds of the students said that it was either “very important” or “essential” that college “helps you develop your personal values” and “enhances your self-understanding” (Astin et al., 2011).

Astin, Astin, and Lindholm’s (2011) research indicated that the decline in religious engagement is “largely confined to attendance at religious services” (p. 137). Slightly more than one-third of the students in their study attend religious services less frequently than they did during high school; fifty-four percent attend at the same rate and seven percent increase their frequency of attendance (p. 89). These results align with the research of Smith and Snell (2009) and stand in sharp contrast to the numerous, often hyperbolic, claims that college students abandon their faith during their time on campus, discard any and all sense of morality, and take advantage of every opportunity to indulge their hedonistic desires. Instead, the reality seems to be closer to the scenario that living away from home for the first time, many college students attend religious services on a less frequent basis while enthusiastically engaging in discussions and other activities that address their spiritual questing and longing.



A similar study of undergraduate students' spirituality by Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield (2001) deserves mention as well. Based on their qualitative research at four diverse campuses, they found evidence that most undergraduates at those four campuses were "spiritual seekers rather than religious dwellers" and many were "constructing their spirituality without much regard to the boundaries dividing religious denominations, traditions, or organizations" (p. 276). While the forms of spiritual practice of today's students differ from previous generations, including a heightened interest in volunteer service, the vigor of their interest in spirituality may be equal or even superior.

Until recently, the spiritual lives of college students and the processes by which they establish and negotiate connections between their interior and exterior selves have been topics conspicuously absent from widespread higher education discourse (Astin et al., 2011, p. 139). The rapidly expanding literature addressing the role of spirituality in higher education has received additional legitimacy from the well-documented interest of students in spiritual questions. Whether or not institutions are interested in such questions, their students clearly are. It remains to be seen if colleges and universities will learn from their students by beginning to reconsider the implications of the dominance of rational empiricism and the results of a neglected attention to purpose.

While interest in the role of spirituality in higher education will likely continue to grow, especially as additional critiques of the current educational model of colleges and universities demonstrate the limitations of current practice, much remains to be done to investigate the subtle contours of spirituality. One such contour which clearly merits additional study is compassion. Among Astin, Astin, and Lindholm's ten domains of spirituality, for example, only two – ethic of caring and charitable involvement –

approach what might be called compassion. As the spirituality in higher education literature matures, the need for specific research which addresses the role of compassion in students' lives will become more acute.

Having completed a review of the spirituality in higher education literature, I now turn to the literature that has emerged from community service learning. Community service learning (CSL) represents an aspect of higher education that has attempted to address many of the critiques raised in the spirituality literature. Furthermore, community service learning provides hints as to how colleges and universities might create additional opportunities for rigorous holistic education. While the CSL literature has done an exemplary job of legitimating the pedagogy, it has only begun to document its affective, non-academic impact on students. In that regard, it is similar to the work of Astin, Astin, and Lindholm – exemplary in its attention to the spiritual interests of undergraduate students, but limited by the lack of a particular focus on the development of compassion.

### **Community Service Learning**

There is a growing body of literature documenting the positive effects of community service learning on student development during the undergraduate years (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Batchelder & Root, 1994; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996; Hesser, 1995; McKeachie, 1999; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Rhoads, 1997; Sax, Astin, & Astin, 1996). While a consensus about the value of service learning has been achieved, considerable work remains to be done in order to assess fully the impact of CSL on the college students who participate in it.

Service learning is complex and multidimensional. Educators who use service learning aim not only for cognitive, discipline-specific learning but also affective, personal development. Affective outcomes are more difficult to measure than academic outcomes that may be demonstrated by performance on exams and papers at the end of an academic term (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Moreover, as a form of experiential learning, CSL is inherently unpredictable; it is impossible to plan or control every interaction in the community. Students in the same course and placed at the same community agency may have substantially diverse experiences. The inherently complex nature of CSL requires that assessment efforts be likewise complex and multifaceted.

The term service learning was originally coined in 1969 to mean “the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth” (Stanton, Giles & Cruz, 1999, p. 13). The philosophical underpinnings of service learning, however, have deep roots emanating from the work of educational theorists John Dewey, Jean Piaget, David Kolb, and Paolo Freire (Kinsley & McPherson, 1995). After experiencing tremendous growth during the late 1980s and 1990s, CSL today is widely institutionalized and employed on a majority of college campuses. Organizations such as Campus Compact and other state-, region-, and nationwide organizations are active in supporting the ongoing development and refinement of the pedagogy. Despite this relatively recent surge in popularity, proponents and practitioners of CSL continue to face the challenge of overcoming the skepticism of some – including administrators, faculty, students, and community members – who remain unconvinced of the quality of the service and the rigor of the learning (Gose, 1997).

There is general agreement that service learning is intended to connect students and institutions of higher education to the communities of which they are a part while instilling in the participating students the values of community and social responsibility (Neururer & Rhoads, 1998). Most definitions link community service to academic learning goals combined with intentional reflection on the service experience (Mitchell, 2008). The expansive boundaries of this definition allow for the great diversity in practice which currently exists. The literature is clear, however, that CSL involves the incorporation of three components: service, classroom-based instruction, and reflection. More specific definitions include the creation of mutuality between higher education and the community; ideally, the community service should be aimed at real needs identified by the community. Moreover, while students bring the concepts and theories they learn in the classroom to bear on helping to solve community problems, the experience in the community and their reflection on it should enhance the personal and social development of the students. While the great diversity of practice and definitions will likely continue for the foreseeable future, the central claim of service learning has become clear: “Service, combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both” (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989, p. 1).

To date, only modest research has been done on the ability of CSL to achieve the academic and affective learning outcomes it promises (O’Grady, 2000). While the last two decades have witnessed a surge in assessment efforts, the majority of the attention has been directed to academic goals. Current research documents a significant but minor effect on the psychological, social, and cognitive development of undergraduate student participants. The modesty of the empirical findings may be explained by the

methodological challenges and complications inherent in CSL assessment. These challenges include the complexity of learning outcomes, unpredictable nature of experiential education, difficulty of creating suitable instruments to detect and measure shifts in students' affective growth, struggle to define relevant variables, and challenge of controlling for confounding factors (Batchelder & Root, 1994). While the impact of CSL has been conceptualized in a variety of ways, these assessment efforts can be sorted into two categories – those focused on academic skills and those focused on the personal, co-curricular development of the participating students.

### **Academic Outcomes**

An unambiguous theme evident in the literature is the impact of community service learning on academic performance, the acquisition of course content, and the cognitive development of participants. Researchers frequently rely on critical thinking skills, writing skills, and grade point average as proxy measures for the impact of the pedagogy on academic achievement. Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) concluded that community service learning is positively related with heightened performance in each of these three categories; the authors suggested that participation in service-learning may help to “get students more engaged in the overall academic experience, thereby enhancing their overall academic performance” (2000, p. 30). The data for their study was collected as a part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), a long-running project of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) in which more than 170 diverse colleges and universities take part each year. The CIRP program administers surveys to collect data on first year undergraduate students as they enter college as well as four years later. Vogelgesang and Astin analyzed this quantitative, longitudinal data

for more than 22,000 students in order to reach their conclusions. In an effort to control for selectivity bias, they attempted to isolate the effect of antecedent factors that predispose students to engage in service such as gender (women are more likely than men to participate), high school volunteer work, and religious affiliation. The results of the study suggested that “service learning has a place in the curriculum, and should not be relegated solely to co-curricular efforts” (p. 31). A major limitation of the study was that for the measures of critical thinking and writing the authors relied upon self-reported assessments collected via survey without examining evidence of actual academic achievement. The findings would be significantly more compelling if these two outcomes were assessed as objectively as grade point average.

Eyler, Giles and Schmiede (1996) documented similar positive impact of CSL on three aspects of academic development: (1) enhanced academic understanding of the subject matter; (2) ability to apply knowledge and skills learned in one setting to another setting; and (3) ability to reframe complex social issues. These authors gathered their data from extensive interviews with over 50 students who had participated in service learning. The strength of these findings is limited by the one-time nature of the interviews; nevertheless, the researchers documented enduring positive impact of service learning on the ability of student participants to apply course concepts to real world, dynamic situations.

Similarly, the research conducted by Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) revealed that students who take service learning courses tend to earn somewhat higher grades throughout their college experience than do students who did not take such courses (p.

127). This same effect was demonstrated in other studies such as by Astin and Sax (1998) and Eyler and Giles (1999).

Taken together, these and similar studies offer robust evidence for the positive influence community-service learning can have on classroom-based learning. This research indicates a double-positive impact of CSL – participants do better and score higher in courses that include a CSL component and they develop an enhanced ability to apply knowledge to real-life situations, including those that are ambiguous and ill-framed.

### **Affective Outcomes**

Researchers have applied different descriptive labels to various conceptualizations of non-academic impact of community service learning. Vogelgesang and Astin (2000), for example, have adopted the phrase “values and beliefs” to indicate the domain of personal impact of CSL. While the literature includes a range of terms treating affective development, I will focus on four domains: civic engagement, moral development, adult identity development, and education for compassion. These four themes include two of the most well-established and thoroughly-researched measures – civic engagement and moral development – as well as two which have received less consideration – adult development and compassion. Civic engagement and moral development have been a focus of CSL researchers since the inception of the pedagogy. Adult development and education for compassion, however, have grown in popularity only recently, largely as a result of the desire for a more comprehensive understanding of how CSL impacts participants.

**Civic engagement.** The promotion of citizenship has been a primary aim of American colleges and universities since their founding (Jones and Abes, 2004). Many CSL researchers reference Dewey's (1938) insight that "Democracy has to be born anew every generation and education is the midwife." In today's globalized and interconnected world, the definition of civic engagement as well as the understanding of what it means to act in a socially responsible manner is increasingly complex (Jones & Abes, 2004). Given this complexity and the demand for innovative solutions to novel, urgent challenges such as global climate change, institutions of higher education continue to have a significant role to play in preparing their graduates for active engagement in the local and global communities in which they will be a part.

The literature includes a variety of definitions of civic engagement and no clear consensus exists as to the meaning of citizenship. Some researchers focus on concepts of social responsibility, political participation (voting and/or seeking office), political activism (campaigning for an aspiring public servant), volunteer work on behalf of a cause, involvement with civic organizations such as Rotary, or attempts to influence the public discourse (by, for example, writing letters to the editor). Other researchers turn to appreciation for diversity and the ability to empathize with those dissimilar from oneself as measures of citizenship (Jones and Hill, 2001). While a precise definition of civic engagement is not possible, the literature is clear that immersion into a context with which one is unfamiliar and the requirement of developing relationships with those previously categorized as "other" has the potential to foster a sense of connection and community. This sensitivity can, if nurtured through reflection, increase one's desire to be an engaged member of a community.



A number of authors, including Vogelgesang and Astin (2000), have documented the potential of CSL to advance participants' commitment to civic engagement and community participation. In their large scale quantitative study, CSL participants were found to be more likely to participate in student government during their undergraduate education as well as to express a desire to exert influence on the political structure after graduation. A positive relationship between participation in service learning and a desire to play an active role as citizen was also found in a study conducted by Eyler and Giles (1999) which focused on political participation (voting or seeking public office), participation in voluntary associations, and the generation of social capital. These researchers assessed civic engagement by measuring students' sense of community connectedness, importance placed on social justice, commitment to service, and understanding of social problems. They developed a model of citizenship which included five elements: values, knowledge, skills, efficacy, and commitment (p. 163).

A full understanding of how service learning influences civic engagement requires a longitudinal study that examines actual citizenship behaviors over a significant period of time. The data collected and analyzed by Eyler and Giles traced changes over a much briefer period. Despite this serious limitation, the data did indicate that service learning participants are more likely to become involved in the communities of which they are a part and better able to solve ill-structured problems.

**Moral development.** Many CSL practitioners believe the pedagogy can play an important role in character development in undergraduate students (Hatcher, 1997; Kohlberg, Higgins & Power, 1989; Rest & Narvaez, 1991). Character development is most commonly assessed in the CSL literature using Kohlberg's (Kohlberg, Higgins, &

Powers, 1989) model of cognitive moral development. This six stage model attempts to explain differences in the reasoning processes that people use to make moral decisions. The consensus is that most adults – including undergraduate students – are in the conventional stage (stages 3 and 4) of Kohlberg's scale and thus their thinking about what is right is primarily influenced by significant others, rules, and laws (Rest & Narvaez, 1991). When immersed in a new environment and challenged to adopt a new way of thinking, people may discover a previously unrealized ability to reason at a higher level. This shift requires "a reorganization and reorientation of patterns of thought and perception" (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008, p. 5). Since established patterns are resistant to change, the often intense experience of service learning may offer a unique opportunity to provoke growth. Kohlberg himself described community service as an important element of moral education because of its tendency to force students to confront moral issues. Similarly, Rest and Narvaez (1991) have also identified community service as a means of promoting moral development, especially at the college level.

The evidence in the literature of the influence of CSL on participants' moral reasoning, however, is mixed (Smith, 2008). In a study of 71 students, Boss (1994) found that service learning participants demonstrated significantly greater gains in their moral reasoning abilities than non-service learning participants. Likewise, a similar study (Gorman, Duffy & Heffenan, 1994) documented significant increases in moral reasoning for students who participated in service learning. In contrast, two 1997 studies (Fenzel & Leary, 1997; Green, 1997) found no statistically significant impact of service learning on the moral reasoning of students who participated in service learning compared with those who did not. A more recent study also failed to document a

significant difference in the change in moral reasoning abilities among service learning as compared to non-service learning students (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008).

The most common measure of moral reasoning is the Defining Issues Test (DIT). Based on Kohlberg's theory, the instrument assesses the percentage of time that one uses principled moral reasoning. While rigorous examinations of the reliability and validity of the assessment tool have been conducted with positive results, a noteworthy weakness of the DIT is that it measures hypothetical moral dilemmas and principles – some of which are dated and unfamiliar to the current generation of college students – rather than addressing concrete moral thinking and action. A second measure of moral reasoning is the Sociomoral Reflection Objective Measure (SROM). This tool also provides a measure of moral development in Kohlberg's framework by presenting two moral dilemmas. Much like the DIT, the SROM is limited by its reliance on somewhat static, hypothetical dilemmas. These measures of the impact of service learning may not be nuanced or sensitive enough in their design to track changes in individual constructs such as appreciation for human dignity, empathy, and a concern for social justice – concepts related to Kohlberg's post-conventional levels of moral development.

While Bernacki and Jaeger's (2008) study did not show change in moral development the authors found that, in comparison to non-CSL participants, their subjects grew in compassion, became more sensitive, developed an enhanced understanding of social problems and possessed a heightened sense of efficacy to make the world a better place. Just as more nuanced assessment tools may be needed to measure moral development, longitudinal studies may be required to trace moral

development across time frames greater than the one semester that most CSL assessment projects consider.

**Adult development.** A number of studies have demonstrated the relationship between service learning and adult identity development (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jones & Hill, 2001; Rhoads, 1997; Youniss & Yates, 1997). The dissonance created by having previously unrecognized assumptions and values challenged through personal engagement with complex social problems has the potential to push participants from one developmental stage to the next. Baxter Magolda (2000) suggested that “reflecting on the meaning of service-learning experiences ... offers the opportunity to acquire an internal sense of self” (p. 154) and thus fosters self-authorship. While full self-authorship and progression to the highest levels of Kegan’s (1982) constructive-developmental framework is unlikely for traditionally-aged college students, the evidence suggests that service learning may play a pivotal role in moving students toward that developmental goal.

An enduring impact of service learning experiences on the identity development of participating students was documented through in-depth interviews conducted two to four years after their service experiences (Jones and Abes, 2004). The influence of CSL included increased complexity in thinking about self and relationships with others, openness to different perspectives and new experiences, and shifts in future commitments. These researchers’ rigorous consideration of CSL participants’ description of their experience and its effect revealed a heightened sense of intrapersonal and interpersonal development as well as growth in cognitive functioning (Jones and Abes, 2004). The data suggested that the complicated, challenging context of service learning promoted not

only development in each domain of self-authorship (interpersonal, identity, cognitive) but the integration of the three domains as well. While the particular details of the CSL experience tended to fade over time, what persisted was the disposition to a cause or purpose beyond self-interest. This commitment often led to a re-evaluation of values, beliefs, future plans, and career choices. Jones and Abes (2004) concluded that “what is enduring about service learning is not only its potential to shape a more integrated identity, but also how this identity then sparks commitments to socially responsible work” (p. 165).

The strength of these researchers’ claims is surprising given the size of their sample – 8 students, with only 1 male – and the fact that the experiences of those included in the sample were not contrasted with the experiences of students who did not participate in service learning. Moreover, there was no way of controlling for the fact that those interviewed may have been influenced by other factors and/or may have been more open to the influence of service learning. The results of this cross-sectional study would be amplified significantly by a longitudinal approach.

These findings echo an earlier study (Jones and Hill, 2001) which also relied upon in-depth interviews of students who participated in service learning experiences. Through the relationships established at community agencies, service learning participants have the opportunity to reflect on the self and the other in a new way. While many students begin service experiences with the assumption that they will be learning about “the other,” people whose life situations are not at all similar to their own, many students report that the most valuable aspect of the experience was self-discovery. The power of this study was constrained by a very small sample size – 6 students – and by the

fact that the students were interviewed less than one year after their service experience; such a short time span precludes conclusions about the enduring impact of service experiences on the identity development of the participating students.

Eyler and Giles (1999) referred to the potential for identity development in service learning participants as “perspective transformation” (p. 133). Based on their large mixed-methods research project of the experience of students who participated in service learning compared to the experience of those who did not, these researchers suggest that transformational learning occurs when students struggle to solve a problem and when their usual ways of understanding and/or solving the problem do not work. The dissonance created by this ambiguity may lead students to question the validity of thought patterns and established perceptions of problems.

**Compassion.** In addition to their work examining the impact of service learning on adult identity development, Jones and Hill (2001) and Jones and Abes (2004) have also documented the potential of CSL to increase empathy and compassion in participants. Service learning provides opportunities for experiencing empathy and compassion for people with whom the students did not previously have a relationship. Each of the students interviewed in their research projects reported an enhanced appreciation for the lived reality of those they had encountered during the experience in the community. While the issue of small sample sizes continues to mitigate the efficacy of these findings, it is nevertheless noteworthy that 100% of the participants described this phenomenon.

While many definitions exist, compassion can be understood as being moved by another’s suffering and desiring to help (Lazarus, 1991). Through the use of the Compassionate Love Scale (Sprecher, & Fehr, 2005), which consists of 21 statements

answerable on a seven point Likert scale and provides a measure of altruism, Plante (2008) found that participants in CSL demonstrated an increase in compassion compared to those who did not participate. Plante's data was gathered from student participants in week-long alternative break experiences; the students took the Compassionate Love Scale survey before their service experience, immediately upon returning to campus, and then three months after the experience. While issues of selection bias moderate the results, the sample was sizeable and the results shown to be statistically significant.

This finding is echoed by the work of Bernacki and Jaeger (2008) which documented that service learning participants perceived that their coursework and the service experience had provided them with an enhanced ability to be more compassionate compared with those who did not participate in the course. These findings were drawn from students' self reports on pre- and post-CSL experiences. While the empirical research on the development of compassion in college students is thin, initial work indicates that CSL increases participants' sensitivity to the suffering of others as well as their desire to help alleviate that suffering.

Service learning is now accepted on almost all campuses and is widely recognized as a potential corrective to some of the most significant criticisms of higher education. The pedagogy has the potential to help students move beyond the collection of static, fragmented facts toward the ability to apply knowledge in different contexts while synthesizing information from various sources in order to re-frame emerging issues. These skills will be at a premium in the globalized, rapidly changing world of the twenty-first century. The consensus that has emerged in the literature regarding the value of service learning on the undergraduate experience is a platform for the more rigorous,

fine-grained, and contextualized study of how the pedagogy affects undergraduate students. As the pedagogy continues to mature, service learning practitioners and researchers should be able to go deeper in their evaluation of how service influences the academic and affective lives of those who experience it over the long term.

Measurement of affective outcomes presents a substantial challenge; especially because classic experiential designs are not possible, tracking changes in the interior lives of students will never be easy. Ineffable, personal influences are often almost impossible to isolate, usually difficult to assess, and often contested: different researches may have different understandings of the key components of constructs such as spirituality or compassion. There is a need for quantitative studies of large sample sizes – including a comparison of participants to non-participants – combined with qualitative studies that seek to illuminate the reasons and conditions for the impacts that occur. The work of Eyler and Giles (1999) in this area currently stands alone. Their work needs to be replicated and advanced. Studies should be designed to address the question: if service learning has a demonstrable impact on a large sample of students, how and why does it do so?

A second gap in the CSL research literature is the need for more focused and nuanced assessment projects that complement the major national research endeavors of Vogelgesang and Astin (2000); Astin, Sax, and Avalos (1999); and Eyler and Giles (1999). These studies consider the experience of more than 20,000 and 4,000 students respectively, each drawing data from students enrolled in numerous and diverse institutions across the country. While these national projects make a significant contribution, they ought to be complemented by mid-sized projects which study the



impact of service learning on hundreds or a few thousand students in a particular context. Avoiding the very small sample sizes that characterize some of the CSL research literature, new projects are needed which seek to measure the influence of service learning on an institution-wide basis. How are the participating students at a particular university impacted by service learning? How does this compare to similar institutions? How does it compare to institutions which are different in size, mission and orientation?

A third gap in the research literature is the lack of longitudinal studies. Projects which track and compare the actual behaviors – extending beyond commencement – of students who participated in service learning and those who did not are needed to make stronger claims about the potential of the pedagogy to influence positively civic engagement, moral and identity development, and compassion.

### **Conclusion**

Despite eloquent mission statements referencing the preparation of “leaders dedicated to compassionate service” or the education of “citizens and leaders of compassion,” Catholic colleges and universities, like their non-Catholic counterparts, have yet to conduct the empirical work necessary to know whether, and if so, how, students grow in compassion during their undergraduate course of studies. This dearth of empirical study is reflected throughout the student development literature and, to a lesser but still significant degree, the spirituality in higher education and community service learning literatures as well. It is a great pity – and an unfortunate missed opportunity – that “the impulse of one person to comfort another is studied less than almost any other major topic in general science” (Valliant, 2008, p. 153).

After reviewing the origins, evolution, and current state of the student development literature; the most recent critiques of American higher education including the need for a renewed role of spirituality; and the potential of research emerging out of the community service learning literature to institute reliable and valid methods for assessing ineffable, affective outcomes, it is evident that compassion has yet to be given the attention it deserves. Each of the three literatures lack an explicit focus on whether and how compassion can be cultivated in undergraduate college students. There is a distinct gap – in all three literatures – of empirical studies regarding whether or not universities which claim the goal of cultivating compassion are accomplishing that ambition.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to address the lack of empirical evidence regarding whether or not those Catholic colleges and universities which claim the cultivation of compassion in their students as a primary purpose are accomplishing that goal. The questions which guided this explanatory sequential mixed-methods investigation were: (1) To what extent are first-year University of San Diego students compassionate? (2) Do USD undergraduate students demonstrate change in their level of compassion during their first two years of study? (3) If so, to what extent can these changes be explained by select demographic characteristics (including sex, race/ethnicity, major, and type of high school attended) and various aspects of their campus experience? And (4) what do the students who demonstrate the most change in compassion say are the key personal characteristics and/or collegiate experiences that have motivated that change? How does their understanding or experience compare and contrast with the experience of students who do not grow in compassion?

In order to gain insight into the questions of how compassionate students are as they begin their college experience and of whether undergraduates change in their level of compassion during their first two years of study, I distributed a survey to 515 students during their first college semester (fall of 2010). I then administered a similar survey to the same students at the end of their second year of study (spring of 2012). The second version of the survey was identical to the first, except for fifteen additional questions designed to measure key aspects of their campus involvement during their first two years enrolled in college. Quantitative analysis was conducted on the data to determine the

students' level of compassion as they began college, whether their compassion level changed over their first two years in college, and if any such changes could be explained by students' personal characteristics and/or collegiate experiences. In order to gain insight into the question of what students say about how they do or do not change in compassion, the qualitative component of the research involved in-depth interviews with 20 students.

### **Site and Participant Selection**

I elected to study undergraduate students at the University of San Diego (USD) because it is well within the mainstream of both Catholic higher education and American private higher education more broadly. Across the landscape of American private higher education, USD has been consistently rated in the upper half of national colleges and universities by various ranking agencies. In 2011, for example, *U.S. News and World Report*, ranked USD number 97 out of more than 300 colleges and universities; *Washington Monthly* ranked USD number 64 out of 258 institutions and *Forbes* designated USD number 195 out of 650 national universities. These rankings, as well as the university's on-going accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, suggest that USD is firmly imbedded in the conventional American higher education system.

With approximately 50% of the undergraduate population self-identifying as Catholic, the university's student body is similar to the student population at the 220 Catholic colleges and universities across the country – where the mean percentage of Catholic students is 60%. Moreover, based on its history, mission, curriculum, student population, size, and aspirations, USD is similar to, and identifies itself with, the large

segment of Catholic, liberal arts institutions that strive to offer an excellent education and a holistic formation to a diverse study body. University of San Diego, therefore, presents a good case study for the many Catholic institutions of higher education to which it is comparable. Moreover, the University of San Diego was an appropriate research site in that the university's mission statement explicitly articulates the goal of "preparing leaders dedicated to compassionate service." As such, it is representative of the many Catholic colleges and universities in the United States that claim the development of compassion as a primary purpose.

I studied undergraduate students during their first two years on campus because that is the time when the largest proportion is most directly engaged with campus life. Since the vast majority of both first and second year students at many colleges and universities – including USD – live in residence halls on campus, they are more likely to be more influenced by campus programs, activities, and overall campus culture than are those third and fourth year students who commonly live off campus and/or study abroad. Focusing on the first two years of college also accounted for the critical importance of the initial impressions that students form upon arriving to campus and becoming oriented to the community.

### **Data Collection**

My original goal was to administer the first round of my survey instrument to the entire population of the USD class of 2014. When that proved impossible, I attempted to obtain a large and representative sample of the class. I recruited participants by working with so-called preceptor faculty members. Every first year, first semester student is required to enroll in a preceptor course, which combines aspects of a freshman seminar

course, academic advising, and a standard class. These courses are limited to 16-18 students, all of whom are entering first year students. In addition to teaching the course, the faculty members serve as the academic advisor for their students until they officially declare a major.

In August of 2010, I sent an email (Appendix A) to every preceptor faculty member asking to visit her or his class in order to distribute my survey. Of the 67 total preceptor faculty members, 32 (48%) accepted my request. I then visited the classes of those faculty members, yielding my sample of 515 students (out of a total population of roughly 1,150 students), a figure that represents approximately 45% of the class of 2014.

Careful analysis of the demographics of my sample indicates that it was a good heuristic for and roughly approximate to the overall population of the USD class of 2014. Of the 515 students in my sample, for example, 209 or 41% were males and 306 or 59% were females; this approaches the overall gender distribution at the university of 45% male and 55% female. A similar phenomenon occurred with the race/ethnicity demographics. Statistics obtained from USD's Office of Institutional Research and Planning indicate that 32% of USD undergraduates identify as students of color; in my sample, that figure was approximately 29%.

A more granular analysis, however, reveals several modest discrepancies in regards to the race and ethnicity demographics between my sample and the overall population of USD undergraduate students. For the purposes of this research, I used six categories to organize the students' race and ethnicity categories. These categories were drawn from the schema employed by the U.S. Department of Education as well as USD's Office of Institutional Research and Planning. Of the 515 students in my sample, 360

(69.9%) identified as White; 56 (10.9%) as Asian; 46 (8.9%) as Hispanic or Latino; 16 (3.1%) as Black or African American; 10 (1.9%) as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; and 2 (0.4%) as American Indian or Alaskan Native. Sixteen (3.1%) students indicated that they identified as “Other” and 9 (1.7%) declined to state their race/ethnicity identity. The percentages of each category in my sample and the overall USD percentages are presented in the following table.

**Table 3.1**

***Race/ethnicity demographics***

| Race/Ethnicity Category      | USD (Fall 2010) | Sample |
|------------------------------|-----------------|--------|
| Hispanic/Latino              | 15.9%           | 8.9%   |
| Black or African American    | 1.9%            | 3.1%   |
| American Indian              | 0.5%            | 0.4%   |
| Asian                        | 6.4%            | 10.9%  |
| Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 0.3%            | 1.9%   |
| White                        | 58.1%           | 69.9%  |
| Other                        | 10.7%           | 3.1%   |
| Unknown/Decline to State     | 6.2%            | 1.7%   |

Comparing the sample to the population of USD students indicates that my sample over-represented those who identify as White, Black or African-American, and Asian while under-represented those students who identify as Hispanic or Latino.

Another set of six categories was used to collect and organize the students’ responses to the question of their intended major. These categories were Business; Social

Sciences; Science and Pre-Health; Engineering, Mathematics and Architecture; Humanities; and undecided. The Social Science cluster included Psychology, Political Science, International Relations, Sociology, Anthropology, and Communications. The disciplines of Biology, Chemistry, Biochemistry, and Marine Science were placed together under the heading of Science/Pre-health. The Humanities category included Languages, Philosophy, Theology, Liberal Studies, Music, History, and Theater.

Of the 515 students in my sample 127 (24.7%) were Business majors; 119 (23.1%) identified as a major in the Social Sciences; 89 (17.3%) were pursuing a Science or Pre-Health course of studies; 78 (15.1%) were undecided; 60 (11.7%) were Engineering, Math or Architecture majors; and 42 (8.2%) identified with a major in the Humanities. A comparison of this distribution to the population of USD students is presented below.

**Table 3.2**

***Major/Intended Major Statistics (n = 515)***

| Major                 | USD (Fall 2010) | Sample |
|-----------------------|-----------------|--------|
| Business              | 25.6%           | 24.7%  |
| Social Sciences       | 16.9%           | 23.1%  |
| Science or Pre-Health | 4.5%            | 17.3%  |
| Undecided             | 39.4%           | 15.1%  |
| Engineering           | 4.3%            | 11.7%  |
| Humanities            | 9.4%            | 8.2%   |



As Table 3.2 demonstrates, in terms of major or intended major, my sample more closely represented the population than it did in its race/ethnicity composition.

Nevertheless, differences remained, especially regarding the percentages of students I surveyed who indicated a desire to major in the Natural Sciences or Engineering, as well as those who were undecided on their major. Given the rigor of Science/Pre-Health and Engineering majors, and the traditional rate which students transition from those majors to other courses of study, it was not surprising to find a greater percentage of first semester, first year students who self-identified as Science or Engineering majors.

To be sure, differences between my sample and the overall population of the class of 2014 did exist. My sample of 45% of the class, however, is large enough and similar enough to that population to generate relatively robust inferences regarding the compassion level of that class as its members began their USD experience.

My approach of working with faculty preceptors rather than individual students was intended to generate such a representative sample. Students' personal characteristics and previous experience with compassion and related constructs were not a part of their decision to participate in the study or not. Instead, the decision was the faculty members'. This method of recruiting participants, however, may still have been influenced by a bias introduced by the participating faculty members. It is possible that the professors who agreed to my request were different from those who did not. Those differences may align with disciplinary distinctions; of the 32 professors who allowed me to survey their classes, ten were from the Social Sciences; another ten were from the Humanities; six were from Science or Pre-Health; four were from Math and Engineering; and two were from the School of Business. Significant differences may also have existed in the personal

characteristics of the faculty; some of those who agreed to my research may themselves be more compassionate or interested in compassion. It is possible that they communicated that interest in subtle ways or otherwise influenced their students differently than faculty members who did not respond to my request to visit their classrooms.

In addition to producing a relatively representative sample, working with the preceptor faculty members ensured a high response rate for the first round of data collection. Since I distributed and collected the survey in person, and since the students were immediately allotted time during class to complete the assessment, more than 97% of the students in those classes completed and returned the survey. Administering the survey in person and during class time was especially important considering the fact that first semester students are surveyed frequently; without such a direct and personal appeal, many would have likely disregarded my request. I also hoped that by administering the survey in person, I would make at least a minimal connection with the students and thereby increase the likelihood of them remembering my project two years later when I asked them via email to complete the second round survey.

The survey I administered and collected in the fall of 2010 (Appendix B) consisted of 45 items with the majority of the questions calling for a response along a five-point Likert scale. The survey compiled questions from previously published research projects found in the literature whose psychometric quality had already been established. In particular, survey instruments designed by Plante, Lackey, and Jeong Yeon (2009); , Plante, and Lackey (2008); Dreher, Holloway, and Schoenfelder (2007); Raskin and Hall (1981); Raskin and Terry (1988); Plante and Boccaccini (1997); and

McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) were utilized. In addition to five questions that directly addressed compassion, the survey included a twelve-item narcissism scale. Since narcissism can be conceived of as the opposite of compassion (Watson et. al, 1984), this measure was included as a way of detecting convergent validity; if, as one would expect, the compassion and narcissism scores were negatively correlated, the validity of each of these aspects of the survey would be reinforced. In order to investigate students' levels of narcissism, I relied upon the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) which is based on the characterization of narcissism employed by the *Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders III* (DSM-III) (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). This definition of narcissism includes five components, including feelings of superiority, selfishness, disregard for others, lack of empathy, and the use of people for one's self gain. Since this analysis of the presumptive negative correlation between compassion and narcissism has not yet been unequivocally established, I included it as a part of this research project. The survey also included items that addressed the constructs of vocation, religiosity, and gratitude. Suggested by the literature, I included these constructs in the effort to ascertain their relationships, if any, to compassion.

I selected the compassion scale used successfully by Plante et al. (2009) because it was the instrument used in the only existing, focused studies on the development of compassion in undergraduate students. To develop their compassion scale, Plante and his colleagues extended the work of Sprecher and Fehr (2005), the creators of the Compassionate Love Scale. That scale assessed compassion by using twenty-one statements, each of which was answerable on a Likert scale. Through a series of studies, Plante and colleagues (2008, 2009) conducted factor analysis and were able to reduce the

21-question survey down to a five-item instrument. In addition to being parsimonious, Plante's survey is consistent with the frequently quoted definition first offered by Richard Lazarus (1991) which described compassion as the "state in which one is being moved by another's suffering, and wanting to help" (p. 289).

My professional role on campus facilitated my access to the research participants; my position and title offered legitimacy and facilitated access from both the preceptor faculty members and the students in the faculty members' classrooms. In the first round of data collection, I informed the students that I would be contacting them again during their second year of study. For the second round of data collection, I sent an email to the participating students (Appendix C), asking them to complete the second iteration of the survey via Qualtrics, an online survey software program. In order to increase participation rates, I offered an incentive to a student randomly selected from all those who complete the second survey.

A total of 198 students completed the second round survey in the spring of 2012. As previously stated, the second iteration of the survey was identical to the first, except for the addition of fifteen questions (Appendix D) designed to assess students' campus involvement. A summary of the demographics of that sample is presented in Table 3.3. In addition to sex, race/ethnicity and major or intended major, I tracked the type of high school attended by the students. Categorizing each student as having attended a public, Catholic, private or other religiously affiliated high school allowed me to investigate potential correlations between their compassion scores and their secondary education institution. This analysis was of special concern since the cultivation of compassion, or

goal similar to it, is included in the mission statements of many Catholic and private high schools.

**Table 3.3**

***Second Sample Demographics (n = 198)***

| Demographic    |                     | Number of Students | Percentage |
|----------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Sex            | Male                | 63                 | 32%        |
|                | Female              | 135                | 68%        |
| Race/Ethnicity | White               | 129                | 65%        |
|                | Asian               | 24                 | 12%        |
|                | Hispanic or Latino  | 25                 | 13%        |
|                | Black               | 5                  | 2.5%       |
|                | Native Hawaiian     | 6                  | 3%         |
|                | American Indian     | 1                  | 0.5%       |
|                | Other               | 5                  | 2.5%       |
|                | Decline to State    | 3                  | 1.5%       |
| Major          | Social Science      | 47                 | 23%        |
|                | Science, Pre-Health | 46                 | 23%        |
|                | Business            | 37                 | 19%        |
|                | Undecided           | 31                 | 16%        |
|                | Engineering         | 23                 | 12%        |
|                | Humanities          | 14                 | 7%         |
| High School    | Public              | 128                | 64%        |
|                | Private, Catholic   | 45                 | 23%        |
|                | Private             | 14                 | 7%         |
|                | Other Religious     | 8                  | 4%         |
|                | Homeschooled        | 1                  | 0.5%       |
|                | Unknown             | 2                  | 1%         |

A comparison between the two samples and the overall population of the USD class of 2014 is presented in the following table. Since USD does not publicize the type of high school its current students attended, the high school categorization is omitted.

**Table 3.4*****Comparison of first and second samples to population***

| Demographic    |                     | Population | 1 <sup>st</sup> Sample | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sample |
|----------------|---------------------|------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Sex            | Male                | 45%        | 41%                    | 32%                    |
|                | Female              | 55%        | 59%                    | 68%                    |
| Race/Ethnicity | Hispanic or Latino  | 15.9%      | 8.9%                   | 13%                    |
|                | American Indian     | 0.5%       | 0.4%                   | 0.5%                   |
|                | Asian               | 6.4%       | 10.9%                  | 12%                    |
|                | Black               | 1.9%       | 3.1%                   | 2.5%                   |
|                | Native Hawaiian     | 0.3%       | 1.9%                   | 3%                     |
|                | White               | 58.1%      | 69.9%                  | 65%                    |
|                | Other               | 10.7%      | 3.1%                   | 2.5%                   |
|                | Decline to State    | 6.16%      | 1.7%                   | 1.5%                   |
|                |                     |            |                        |                        |
| Major          | Business            | 25.6%      | 24.5%                  | 19%                    |
|                | Social Science      | 16.9%      | 23.1%                  | 23%                    |
|                | Science, Pre-Health | 4.5%       | 17.3%                  | 23%                    |
|                | Undecided           | 39.4%      | 15.3%                  | 16%                    |
|                | Humanities          | 9.4%       | 8.2%                   | 7%                     |
|                | Engineering         | 4.3%       | 11.7%                  | 12%                    |

As evidenced by Table 3.4, the most significant difference in the two samples came in the gender composition; the percentage of men participating in the second round of my study decreased by 9% (with a corresponding increase of 9% of women). The race/ethnicity demographic statistics were relatively stable, with the largest change the reduction by 4% of White students participating along with an increase of approximately 4% of those who identify as Hispanic or Latino. Similarly, the distribution of students' majors was relatively unchanged across the two samples; the one major shift was the 5% increase of participants majoring in Science and a corresponding decrease of 5% of participants majoring in Business.

Using the quantitative data generated from the two rounds of survey administration, I intentionally selected a mix of students to invite to participate in the qualitative portion of my research. Since my intention was to hear directly and in-depth from students regarding the way in which their college experiences either had or had not promoted their development of compassion, I purposefully reached out to students from four compassion profiles to participate in my interviews: (1) those who demonstrated an increase in compassion; (2) those who demonstrated a decrease in compassion; (3) those who were low in compassion and remained low; and (4) those who scored high in compassion at both points in time.

Based on student responses and willingness to speak with me, I interviewed a total of twenty students; six who demonstrated an increase in compassion, ten who demonstrated a decrease, and four whose level of compassion did not change significantly during their first two years of study. Among the four whose level of compassion did not change, I interviewed three who were high in compassion at both survey distributions. In addition, I interviewed the one and only student who scored low at both points in time.

Within each of the three groups of students (those who increased, those who decreased, and those who remained the same) I employed a form of maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990, p. 172), striving to include among the students in each group those with different majors, from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, with disparate campus involvements, and both women and men. This approach allowed me to consider “any common patterns that emerged” in the “core experiences and shared aspects” of the

students in the two categories (Patton, 1990, p. 172), though, of course, given the small size of each interview group, I was not able to generalize in the traditional scientific sense.

Each interview lasted approximately sixty minutes and was audio recorded. An interview guide (Patton, 1990) was employed to structure the conversations and to ensure that all of the relevant topics were addressed. The interview guide (Appendix E) began with general questions designed to elicit the perspectives of the students on a range of issues related to why those choose to attend USD, their decision of what discipline in which to major, and their overall campus experience. The interview guide then transitioned to a more focused consideration of the participants' involvement in a variety of campus activities including community service, alternative break and immersion experiences, student government and other leadership positions, retreats, multicultural organizations, and sororities and fraternities. Other topics covered during the interviews included the students' motivation for enrolling at USD; academic coursework; co-curricular involvements; roommates and other peer influences; and, especially, how each of these aspects influenced the student's understanding and practice of compassion. After the interviews were conducted, the audio recordings were transcribed to produce verbatim records of the students' responses.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the data in four distinct phases. First, to gain insight into the extent to which first-year USD students are compassionate, I reviewed the students' responses – from the first round survey administration – to the five questions which addressed compassion. Since each of those items were answerable across a five-point scale, the range of possible total compassion scores was five to twenty-five and the range of



average compassion scores was one to five (calculated by summing the five responses and dividing by five). On the basis of those average compassion scores, I categorized the 515 respondents into three groups. Those students who averaged 4.1 and above were considered high in compassion; those who scored between 2.5 and 4.0 were considered moderately compassionate; and those who scored between 0 and 2.4 were labeled low in compassion. I documented the number of students that were in each category. Using regression analysis, I then investigated potential correlations between compassion scores and the students' demographic characteristics (including sex, intended major, racial/ethnic background, and type of high school attended). I also identified potential correlations between students' compassion scores and their scores on the narcissism, vocation, religiosity, and gratitude measures. This first phase of analysis provided an overview of the class of 2014 as they began their USD experience, including how compassionate they were as well as how their compassion levels were associated with their demographic characteristics and their levels of narcissism, vocation, religiosity, and gratitude.

In the second phase of data analysis, in order to determine whether USD undergraduate students demonstrate a change in their level of compassion during their first two undergraduate years, I compared survey responses across the two points in time. For each of the 198 students who completed the second round of the survey, I calculated either a gain or loss in compassion by comparing each student's mean score on the five compassion items. By considering the changes in average compassion of all 198 students, I calculated the average compassion change. I also documented the number of students who were in each of the three categories of compassion (high, medium, and low) at the second round as well as the number and type that demonstrated a change between

compassion groups. Then, I specified the number of students who demonstrated change among the nine possible permutations (i.e., low to medium category, medium to high category, high to low category, remaining in low category, etc.).

Third, in order to gain insight into the extent to which these changes in compassion can be explained by select demographic characteristics and various aspects of the students' campus experience, I used regression analysis. By designating the change in compassion as the dependent variable and setting the demographic characteristics and campus involvements as the independent variables, I determined which of those variables helped explain the students' change in compassion. This third phase of the analysis provided insight into some of the personal characteristics and campus activities that were associated with changes in compassion.

Finally, to address the question of what students who demonstrated the most change in compassion said are the key personal characteristics and/or collegiate experiences that motivated that change, I compared and contrasted the transcripts from the twenty student interviews. Elements of the transcriptions were sorted; particular passages were assigned codes and grouped by theme. By "putting like-minded pieces together into data clumps," I worked to "create an organizational framework" (Glesne, 2006, p. 152). Initial coding categories derived from a review of the literature were employed as heuristics. These initial categories included: high school experiences and involvements; evidence of academic engagement; involvement with student government or other leadership positions; involvement with community service projects; peer influences; participation in sororities or fraternities; family of origin influence; and presence and/or influence of mentoring relationships. In addition to these initial codes –

reflected of those found in the student development literature – I employed descriptive and in vivo codes (Saldaña, 2009, p. 58-91). Sorting the data through the use of codes helped me “think with” the data, reflect on what I learned, make new connections and gain new insights (Glesne, 2006, p. 154). Based on this data, I attempted to generate grounded hypotheses regarding what aspects of campus life encourage the growth of compassion and which impede such development.

Since I conducted my study with students at the institution at which I am employed and on a topic about which I care a great deal, throughout the course of my research I kept a journal in order to help assess my level of subjectivity. The purpose of the journal was to serve as an intentional check on what I noticed and responded to during the interviews and the coding process. I relied on the four questions proposed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p. 55): What do you notice? Why do you notice what you notice? How can you interpret what you notice? How can you know that your interpretation is the ‘right’ one?

Having described in detail the methodology used in my study, including the site and participant selection, data collection, and data analysis, I am now prepared, in the two forthcoming chapters, to present the findings from my study and to suggest some implications of those results.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

Thus far, I have set the context for this study by describing the problem, reviewing the literature, and articulating the methods used in this research, a study designed to gain insight into whether students at a Catholic university which claims the cultivation of compassion as a primary purpose is accomplishing that component of its mission. Four research questions guided this inquiry; those questions included: (1) To what extent are first-year University of San Diego students compassionate? (2) Do USD undergraduate students demonstrate change in their level of compassion during their first two years of study? (3) If so, to what extent can these changes be explained by select demographic characteristics (including sex, race/ethnicity, major and type of high school attended) and various aspects of their campus experience? And (4) what do the students who demonstrate the most change in compassion say are the key personal characteristics and/or collegiate experiences that motivated that change; how does their understanding or experience compare and contrast with the experience of students who do not grow in compassion?

Employing an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, I considered quantitative data from more than 500 student surveys as well as qualitative data from twenty student interviews. This chapter presents the results of my research. First, I address the question of the extent to which first year, first semester USD students are compassionate. By reviewing survey responses from the first round survey administration – conducted during the students' first semester at USD – to the five questions which explicitly addressed compassion, I calculated an average compassion

score for each student as well as categorized the 515 respondents into one of three groups: high, moderate, or low in compassion. Based on the results of this first phase of data analysis, I present the number of students in each category, the overall average compassion score for my sample and the relevant correlations between compassion score and personal characteristics such as sex, race/ethnicity, major, and type of high school attended. As a corresponding way of investigating students' levels of compassion, I also considered their scores on a narcissism inventory; since narcissism can be considered the inverse of compassion, it affords an additional means of assessing the construct. Therefore, in the following pages I present the number of students whose responses to the narcissism inventory positioned them in the high, moderate, and low narcissism cohorts, as well as the overall narcissism average for all the students in my sample.

In a subsequent section of this chapter, I present a comparison of the survey responses of approximately 200 students at the start of their USD experience and at the end of their second year. This comparison addresses the question of whether USD students demonstrated change in their level of compassion across their first two undergraduate years. I present the total number of students who demonstrated change, the average change in the compassion metric used in this study, and an analysis of the direction and magnitude of those changes.

In the third phase of my data analysis, I investigate the extent to which changes in students' levels of compassion can be explained by select demographic characteristics and/or campus experiences. Regression analysis was employed to determine which, if any, demographic experience and campus experiences were correlated, in a statistically

significant way, with changes in compassion. These data are presented in the third section of this findings chapter.

Finally, I offer insights that emerged from my interviews with twenty students. Careful analysis of the transcripts of those interviews allowed deeper understanding than is possible by relying solely on quantitative measures of what those students who increased in compassion say are the key personal characteristics and college experiences that motivated such change.

### **How Compassionate are USD Students as They Begin College?**

Based on the first round of survey responses, drawn from a sample of 515 students, a total compassion score and a total narcissism score was generated for each student. The compassion portion of the survey included five items, each answerable on a five-point Likert scale. Those five statements included:

1. When I hear about a stranger going through a difficult time, I feel a great deal of compassion for him or her.
2. I tend to feel compassion for people, even though I do not know them.
3. One of the activities that provides the most meaning to my life is helping others in the world when they are in need.
4. I would rather engage in actions that help others, even though they are strangers, than engage in actions that would help me.
5. I often have tender feelings toward strangers when they seem to be in need.

After calculating a total compassion score for each student by summing their responses to the five items, I calculated an average compassion score for each by dividing

her or his total score by five. The descriptive statistics of the student responses to the compassion questions are presented in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**

*Descriptive statistics: First round compassion scores*

|                          | n   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------------|-----|---------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Total Compassion Score   | 515 | 5       | 25      | 18.97 | 3.026          |
| Average Compassion Score | 515 | 1.0     | 5.0     | 3.79  | 0.603          |

Using a tripartite system, I then categorized each student as high, moderate, or low in compassion. Those who averaged 4.1 and above were considered high in compassion; those who scored between 2.5 and 4.0 were labeled moderately compassionate; and those who scored between 0 and 2.4 were categorized as low in compassion. Based on this classification schema, 145 students scored high in compassion, 358 were moderately compassionate, and 12 were low in compassion. These findings are displayed graphically in Table 4.2

**Table 4.2**

*First round compassion profile*

| Category | Number of Students | Percentage |
|----------|--------------------|------------|
| High     | 145                | 28.2%      |
| Moderate | 358                | 69.5%      |
| Low      | 12                 | 2.3%       |
| Total    | 515                | 100%       |

As made evident in Table 4.2, the most striking finding from this phase of data analysis is that just 12 of the 515 students (a mere 2%) scored low in compassion. The much larger number (145) who scored high in compassion unequivocally overshadowed

the small number of students in the low compassion group. Moreover, the vast majority fit snugly within the moderately compassionate range. This first phase of analysis, therefore, revealed a portrait of entering USD students as, on the whole, considerably compassionate.

Thus, the three-fold categorization scheme presented a picture of the USD class of 2014 as considerably compassionate, and the overall average compassion score for all those members of the class who participated in my research reinforced that finding. That overall average – 3.79 – is evidence that, taken together, the USD students in my sample fell toward the upper end of the moderately compassionate grouping. This finding is consistent with the result of approximately 70% of the students scoring in that category. The overall average compassion score, therefore, provides additional confirmation that as they began their undergraduate experience the members of USD's class of 2014 who participated in this research were considerably compassionate.

Since narcissism can be conceived of as the opposite of compassion (Watson, et. al, 1984), it offers a complementary, though, of course, indirect way of assessing students' compassion levels. The narcissism portion of the survey consisted of twelve pairs of statements, one narcissistic and one non-narcissistic; students were instructed to indicate which of the two statements better described themselves. Those twelve statements included:

1. I really like to be the center of attention.  
It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention.
2. I am no better or no worse than most people.  
I think I am a special person.



3.     Everybody likes to hear my stories.  
          Sometimes I tell good stories.
4.     I usually get the respect that I deserve.  
          I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.
5.     I don't mind following orders.  
          I like having authority over people.
6.     I am going to be a great person.  
          I hope I am going to be successful.
7.     People sometimes believe what I tell them.  
          I can make anybody believe anything I want them to.
8.     I expect a great deal from other people.  
          I like to do things for other people.
9.     I like to be the center of attention.  
          I prefer to blend in with the crowd.
10.    I am much like everybody else.  
          I am an extraordinary person.
11.    I always know what I am doing.  
          Sometimes I am not sure of what I am doing.
12.    I don't like it when I find myself manipulating people.  
          I find it easy to manipulate people.

In the same way as I did for compassion, I relied upon the students' responses to the first round survey to calculate a total narcissism score (ranging from zero to twelve) as well as an average narcissism score for each individual. The average narcissism score

was determined by dividing each student's total score by twelve. The descriptive statistics for the narcissism measure are presented in Table 4.3. Two students failed to respond to the narcissism portion of the survey producing a sample size of 513.

**Table 4.3**

***Descriptive statistics: First round narcissism scores***

|                          | n   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------------|-----|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| Total Narcissism Score   | 513 | 0       | 11      | 4.02 | 2.34           |
| Average Narcissism Score | 513 | 0       | .92     | 0.35 | 0.20           |

As predicted, student responses to average compassion and average narcissism measures were inversely correlated. The negative correlation was robust (with a coefficient of -0.589) and significant (at the  $p < .001$  level).

Using a system analogous to the one utilized for compassion, I sorted each student into one of three groups. Those whose average narcissism score was less than .40 were considered low in narcissism; those who scored between .41 and .65 were considered moderately narcissistic; and those who scored above .66 were labeled as high in narcissism. Based on this three-part classification schema, 300 students fell into the low narcissism range; 169 were moderately narcissistic; and 44 were high in narcissism. These results are summarized in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4**

***First round average narcissism profile***

| Category | Number of Students | Percentage |
|----------|--------------------|------------|
| Low      | 300                | 58%        |
| Moderate | 169                | 33%        |
| High     | 44                 | 9%         |
| Total    | 513                | 100%       |

This second snapshot of the class of 2014 as they began their college experience mirrors the findings that emerged from focusing on their compassion profiles. In light of the demonstrated negative correlation between compassion and narcissism, the relatively small number of students who scored high in narcissism and the majority of students who scored low in narcissism are consistent with the compassion profile of first semester USD students. Similarly, the overall narcissism average for the 513 students in my sample was 0.35, a figure that falls comfortably within the low narcissism category. Both the narcissism profile as well as the overall narcissism average affirms the finding regarding the considerable level of compassion in the students who comprise USD's class of 2014.

Regression analyses conducted on this sample of 515 students indicated that students' average compassion scores were correlated at the  $p < .05$  level with several of the demographic variables included in the model as independent variables. As presented in Table 4.5, the F-stat of 12.697 at the significance level of  $p < .001$  for the model as a whole offered evidence for its efficacy.

**Table 4.5**

*Analysis of variance*

| Model      | Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F     | Sig.              |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|-------------------|
| Regression | 67.42          | 22  | 3.07        | 12.70 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual   | 118.27         | 490 | .24         |       |                   |
| Total      | 185.69         | 512 |             |       |                   |

The model summary of the correlation between average compassion score and all of the variables which I tracked is presented in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6*****Model summary: First round data***

| Model | R   | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-----|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .60 | .36      | .33               | .49                        |

While the  $R^2$  figure of .36 indicated that the model explained approximately 36% of the variation in the average compassion scores, an examination of the significance of each of the variables revealed that a number of the independent variables did not contribute to the model's explanatory power. Only the variables related to gender, Engineering majors, Native American ethnicity, average vocation, average narcissism, and average gratitude were significant. The model was therefore refined to include only these six significant variables and performed again. This refined model yielded an  $R^2$  of 0.32. The coefficients for each of these six statistically significant variables are presented in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7*****Coefficients for refined model***

| Model            | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig. |
|------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
|                  | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      |
| (Constant)       | 1.39                        | 0.22       |                           | 6.31  | .000 |
| IfFemale         | 0.22                        | 0.05       | 0.18                      | 4.55  | .000 |
| Engineering      | -0.17                       | 0.07       | -0.09                     | -2.38 | .018 |
| IfNativeAmerican | -0.95                       | 0.36       | -0.09                     | -2.65 | .008 |
| AvgVoc           | 0.45                        | 0.05       | 0.34                      | 8.29  | .000 |
| AvgNarc          | -0.42                       | 0.11       | -0.14                     | -3.67 | .000 |
| AvgGratitude     | 0.19                        | 0.05       | 0.17                      | 4.27  | .000 |

As demonstrated in Table 4.7, female students were, on average, more compassionate than their male counterparts; specifically, they were 5.5% more compassionate, a figure determined by dividing the coefficient (.22) by the total range of average compassion score (4.0). A similar calculation revealed that, as they began their college experience, those students intending to major in engineering were 4.3% less compassionate than their peers and those students who self-identified as Native American scored 24% less compassionate than other members of the class of 2014.

In light of the gender distribution in the high and low compassion cohorts, the statistical significance of the gender variable was not surprising. Among the 145 students who scored high in compassion, for example, only 26 (18%) were male with the other 119 (82%) female. Conversely, among the 12 students whose responses placed them in the low compassion cohort, ten (83%) were men and only 2 (17%) were women.

As was the case for gender and average compassion scores, there was a statistically significant correlation (at the  $p < .05$  level, however, rather than the  $p < .001$  level) between average narcissism scores and gender. The correlation was negative, suggesting that as they began college, female students tend to be slightly less narcissistic (by about 1.5%) than their male classmates. This relationship, definitively established by regression analysis, confirmed that which was suggested by the gender breakdown of the students in the low and high narcissism cohorts. Those gender distributions are presented in Table 4.8.

In conclusion, the average compassion and narcissism scores, as well as the compassion and narcissism profiles of my sample, provide robust evidence that as they

began their college experience, USD students were considerably compassionate – with female students more compassionate and less narcissistic than their male counterparts.

**Table 4.8**

***Gender Distributions for Low and High Narcissism Cohorts***

| Narcissism Cohort | Men       | Women     |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Low               | 103 (34%) | 197 (66%) |
| High              | 21 (47%)  | 23 (53%)  |

This initial finding sets the stage for the investigation of my second research question: Do USD students change in their level of compassion during the first half of their college experience?

**Do USD Students Change in Compassion During their First Two Years?**

While the first phase of analysis of my quantitative data indicated that as they began their USD experience the members of the class of 2014 that participated in my study were considerably compassionate, the second phase of data analysis yielded a more ambivalent result. Out of the original 515 students who made up the first sample, 198 responded positively to my request to take the survey for a second time in the spring of 2012. By comparing their survey responses across time – the first completed during the first semester of their first year and the second at the end of their second year – I was able to consider their change in compassion during their first two years of undergraduate study. This investigation revealed that while a sizeable number of students increased in compassion, a significant number decreased, with another, smaller group remaining at the same level.

**Table 4.9*****Changes in compassion***

| Movement   | Number of Students | Percentage |
|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Increased  | 99                 | 50%        |
| Status Quo | 29                 | 15%        |
| Decreased  | 70                 | 35%        |
| Total      | 198                | 100%       |

As evidenced by Table 4.9, half of the sample demonstrated an increase in compassion with an equivalent number of students either decreasing in compassion or remaining at the same level. These offsetting dynamics largely accounted for the finding that the overall change in average compassion for the 198 students who completed both surveys was a modest 0.5 (or 13%).

In order to gain a more detailed understanding of the dynamics of these three groups of students, I examined each in isolation. Among the students who increased in compassion, the average increase was 0.47. Of these 99 students, 66 were female and 33 male. The group of those students who demonstrated no change in compassion consisted of just three men and twenty-six women. Among the students who decreased in compassion, the average decrease was -0.53. Of these 69 students, 42 were female and 27 male. These gender distributions suggest what was confirmed by regression analysis: the students' average compassion scores on the second round of the survey were correlated with gender in a statistically significant way (at the  $p < .001$  level).

As an additional way of assessing compassion change in the 198 students who completed both iterations of the survey, I also examined their changes in narcissism. Ten

out of the 198 students did not complete the narcissism portion of the second survey; thus, the sample size was reduced to 188 students.

**Table 4.10**

*Changes in narcissism*

| Movement   | Number of Students | Percentage |
|------------|--------------------|------------|
| Increased  | 76                 | 40%        |
| Status Quo | 37                 | 20%        |
| Decreased  | 75                 | 40%        |
| Total      | 188                | 100%       |

As demonstrated in Table 4.10, the percentage of students who increased in narcissism was almost exactly balanced by the percentage that decreased, with 20% of the sample remaining the same. Of those who demonstrated an increase in narcissism, 25 were male and 51 were female; of the 75 who decreased in narcissism, 22 were male and 53 were women; and of the 37 who did not demonstrate change in narcissism, 11 were men and 26 were women.

In addition to investigating changes in compassion and narcissism scores, I documented the number who changed compassion category (low, moderate, and high) between the two rounds of survey administration. This analysis revealed that a total of 64 (out of the 198) or 32% of those who completed the survey for the second time changed compassion category. Moreover, of these 64, 35 (18%) moved to a higher compassion category; 30 (15%) transitioned to a lower category; and 133 (67%) did not shift category.

As a way of obtaining a more fine-grained understanding of these movements, I tracked the number of students who transitioned – or not – between each of the nine



possible permutations in compassion categories. Those figures are presented in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11**

*Changes in compassion category*

| Movement            | Number of Students | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Low – Low           | 1                  | 0.5%       |
| Low – Moderate      | 2                  | 1%         |
| Low – High          | 1                  | 0.5%       |
| Moderate – Low      | 4                  | 2%         |
| Moderate – Moderate | 97                 | 49%        |
| Moderate – High     | 32                 | 16%        |
| High – Low          | 0                  | 0%         |
| High – Moderate     | 26                 | 13%        |
| High – High         | 35                 | 18%        |
| Total               | 198                | 100%       |

Considering changes in compassion category in this way revealed several noteworthy findings, including the fact that only one student began and remained in the low category. Likewise, the most common movement between categories was moderate to high compassion; the plurality of students remained in the moderate category; and a relatively large number scored in the high compassion group at both points in time. Table 4.11, however, also makes clear that during their first two undergraduate years a non-trivial number of students (26, or 13% of the sample) who had scored high in compassion on the first survey fell back to the moderate category when they completed the survey for a second time.

Regression analyses conducted on the second round survey data revealed both similarities and differences from those analyses conducted on the data collected in the

first round. While the gender correlation continued to be statistically significant at the  $p < .001$  level, the significance of the Engineering majors and Native American ethnicity disappeared. In the survey data from the second iteration of the survey, however, significant correlations (at the  $p < .05$  level) appeared with Science majors as well as those students undecided on their major. Likewise, average vocation score (but not average narcissism or average gratitude) also continued to be a significant variable. Of the fifteen additional questions on the second round survey that attempted to assess students' campus involvements, the one variable that was statistically significant was participation in an immersion trip.

As I did with the first round regression analysis, the non-significant variables were dropped from the model and it was run again. The results of that calculation are presented in Table 4.12.

**Table 4.12**

*Model summary for second round refined model*

| Model | R   | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-----|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .48 | .23      | .21               | .58                        |

The coefficients presented in Table 4.13 denote that female members of the class of 2014 continue to be more compassionate than males – by approximately 11% – and those students who remained undecided on their major were about 10% more compassionate than their peers. Likewise, those students who participated in an immersion trip during their first two years were 5.5% more compassionate than their peers. Table 4.13 also indicates that in the refined version of this second round model, the Science variable was no longer significant at the  $p < .05$  level; the other four variables,

however, continued to be significant at either the  $p < .05$  or the  $p < .001$  level.

**Table 4.13**

*Coefficients for second round refined model*

| Model           | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig. |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
|                 | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      |
| (Constant)      | 2.67                        | 0.22       |                           | 12.28 | .000 |
| Female          | 0.44                        | 0.09       | 0.32                      | 4.92  | .000 |
| Science         | 0.21                        | 0.11       | 0.12                      | 1.86  | .065 |
| Undecided       | 0.39                        | 0.16       | 0.18                      | 2.45  | .015 |
| AvgVoc          | 0.24                        | 0.06       | 0.29                      | 3.91  | .000 |
| IfImmersionTrip | 0.22                        | 0.10       | 0.15                      | 2.26  | .025 |

a. Dependent Variable: AvgComp

Focusing on changes in average compassion scores and movements between compassion categories surfaced the finding that there is substantial change in the compassion levels of USD students across their first two years of college. The question thus arises: what are some of the variables associated with those changes?

### **To What Extent Can Changes in Compassion be Explained by Demographic Characteristics and Campus Experiences?**

In the third phase of my data analysis I focused on the change in compassion demonstrated by the 198 students who completed both rounds of the survey, and investigated the extent to which these changes could be explained by the students' demographic variables and/or campus experiences and involvements. Designating change in compassion as the dependent variable, regression analysis was again conducted with all the demographic and campus involvement variables. As illustrated in Table 4.14

changes in students' compassion scores were correlated with several of the independents variables. The F-stat of 2.04 at the  $p < .05$  level attested to the efficacy of the model.

**Table 4.14**

*Analysis of variance for change in compassion model*

| Model      | Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F    | Sig. |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|------|
| Regression | 21.30          | 30  | .71         | 2.04 | .003 |
| Residual   | 53.01          | 152 | .35         |      |      |
| Total      | 74.31          | 182 |             |      |      |

A summary of this model is presented in table 4.15

**Table 4.15**

*Model summary for change in compassion*

| Model | R    | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | 0.54 | 0.29     | 0.15              | 0.59                       |

The  $R^2$  figure of 0.29 indicates that the model accounted for approximately 29% of the variation in the changes in compassion scores. Closer examination of the coefficients of this regression model, however, revealed that only six variables were statistically significant at the  $p < .001$  or  $.05$  levels; those six included gender; Hispanic or Latino race/ethnicity; participation in community service-learning; immersion trip experience; community service participation; and membership in a sorority or fraternity. In order to examine more closely the influence of these six variables, the model was re-run excluding all variables except for those six. A summary of this refined model is presented in Table 4.16.

**Table 4.16*****Refined model summary for compassion change***

| Model | R    | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | 0.42 | 0.17     | 0.15              | 0.60                       |

The coefficients associated with these significant variables are presented in Table

4.17.

**Table 4.17*****Coefficients for refined compassion change model***

| Model              | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig. |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
|                    | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      |
| (Constant)         | -0.18                       | 0.09       |                           | -2.14 | .034 |
| IfFemale           | 0.17                        | 0.09       | 0.12                      | 1.82  | .070 |
| IfHispanic         | -0.24                       | 0.13       | -0.12                     | -1.80 | .073 |
| IfCSL              | -0.53                       | 0.20       | -0.37                     | -2.64 | .009 |
| IfImmersionTrip    | 0.65                        | 0.22       | 0.43                      | 3.01  | .003 |
| IfCommunityService | 0.34                        | 0.09       | 0.26                      | 3.65  | .000 |
| IfGreekLife        | -0.19                       | 0.10       | -0.14                     | -2.03 | .044 |

a. Dependent Variable: CompChange

As illustrated by Table 4.17, in the refined model the gender and Hispanic/Latino race/ethnicity variables were no longer statistically significant. Thus, changes in average compassion scores appear to be motivated by campus experiences rather than demographic variables or personal characteristics. Students' race/ethnicity, major, and type of high school attended did not influence the extent to which they demonstrated change in compassion during their first two undergraduate years. Instead, such changes seem to be attributable to university experience. In particular, students' involvement in

immersion trips and community service fostered their development of compassion. Those who participated in an immersion trip experience demonstrated a 16% increase in compassion compared to their peers who did not; those who volunteered for community service demonstrated a 9% increase in compassion. Inversely, students involved with Greek Life were 4.5% less compassionate than those who are not in sororities or fraternities. Perhaps most noteworthy, students who were required to participate in Community-Service Learning for one of their courses demonstrated a 13% decrease in compassion relative to their peers who were not compelled to do so.

As a second way of assessing compassion change, I investigated changes in average narcissism for the 188 students who completed the narcissism inventory as part of both survey administrations. Regression analyses conducted with narcissism change as the dependent variable and the demographic and campus experience variables designated as the independent variables failed to produce a significant model. Thus, it appeared that changes in average narcissism could be explained neither by personal characteristics nor by university experience.

Despite the finding that changes in average narcissism could not be explained by the variables I tracked, quantitative methods did unequivocally indicate that compassion change for the students in my sample was motivated by campus involvements and experiences – especially experiences with immersion trips, community service, Community-Service Learning, and Greek Life. While this is a substantial finding, it is enhanced and extended by a qualitative consideration of students' accounts of what did or did not foster their development of compassion.

### **What Do Students Say?**

Having addressed my first three research questions with quantitative data, I now turn my attention to the qualitative portion of my study. In the following section, I present the findings to my fourth research question: What do the students who demonstrate the most change in compassion say are the key personal characteristics and/or collegiate experiences that have motivated that change? And, how does their understanding or experience compare and contrast with the experience of students who do not grow in compassion?

I present the results to my investigation of this query in two parts. First, I offer detailed narratives of four USD students who had four differing compassion profiles. These accounts include the student who demonstrated the most dramatic increase in compassion as well as the individual who demonstrated the largest decrease. In addition to their stories, I offer in-depth accounts of the experience of a student who scored low in compassion as he began his college experience and remained in the low compassion cohort two years later, as well as an individual who demonstrated a modest increase in compassion. Reviewing the experiences of these four students will surface each of the major themes that emerged from all of the twenty interviews and, thereby, serve as a prelude for a more comprehensive and methodical analysis of those themes. After introducing my qualitative outcomes with the four student narratives, I pivot to a fine-grained presentation of the key themes which emerged from those twenty interviews.

#### **Four Student Narratives**

While not generalizable in the statistical sense, the stories of these four students serve as illustrative case studies. Two of the four – the woman who demonstrated the

most pronounced increase in compassion and the man who demonstrated the largest decrease – were selected because they were extreme cases. Similarly, the experience of the male student who remained in the low compassion cohort across his first two undergraduate years offers a unique perspective. The fourth student is a more typical case; she was among the thirty-two students who transitioned from the moderate to high compassion groups. While every student is unique, the stories of these four individuals cast light on the nuances and subtleties of the journeys of all the students in my sample and, in the process, illuminate the themes common to all the students in my sample.

**Jennifer.** A Psychology major from the Southeast, Jennifer comes from an exceptionally supportive and engaged family. She was homeschooled for eight years – during elementary and middle school – before attending a private, non-religiously affiliated high school. Her college education is being financed in full by an uncle whose only condition was that Jennifer attend a university outside her home state. Jennifer chose USD over New York University; those were the only two of the six schools to which she applied at which she could “see herself.” In the end, San Diego’s climate (she describes herself as “a sunshine state kind of person”) and USD’s size offered an attractive sense of comfort, leading her to the West Coast.

Jennifer’s decision to major in Psychology was the result of an unusual amount of exploration. Assigned to an Anthropology preceptorial class during her first semester on campus, Jennifer found that course engaging enough that when she was required to declare a major in order to participate in the Semester at Sea program during the fall of her sophomore year, she chose Anthropology. After returning to USD’s campus in the spring of her sophomore year with a newly felt desire “to work with people and with



kids,” however, she declared Sociology as her major. From the perspective of her third year, Jennifer acknowledged that her decision to study Sociology was made in haste. In her words, after returning from Semester at Sea she “wanted to pick something and be done with it.” The summer between her sophomore and junior years provided her with the time she needed to “relax and think about it” as well as to investigate more thoroughly the courses offered by different departments. This more intentional process led her to the realization that a Psychology major would prepare her well for her desired career working with children and allow her to study concepts and ideas in which she was most interested. Since she settled on her Psychology major later than is standard, during the semester in which we spoke she was enrolled in three department requirements: Introduction to Psychology, Research Methods, and Statistics. Jennifer described such an intense emphasis on Psychology courses as “overwhelming but good.”

Outside of her studies, Jennifer works part-time on campus in the office of Parking Services and serves as a guide with Outdoor Adventures (a second paid position). “Outdoor stuff,” such as hiking and kayaking are among her favorite hobbies; Jennifer also plays the piano and “loves sports.” Since her grandparents were born in Germany and she values her German heritage, she was briefly a member of the German Club. After dropping German as a minor, however, she ended her participation with the group. Beyond Outdoor Programs, Jennifer is not formally involved on campus, a situation about which she is conflicted. “I feel like I’m not using the resources that I could be,” she told me, “I could be getting a lot more out of college if I would involve myself more.” While her friends and roommates (including her current roommate who is extensively involved with the Women’s Center) are more active on campus, Jennifer struggles with

how to do more while maintaining her commitment to her academics. She stated at one point, “I think that school overwhelms me so much.”

A White woman, Jennifer has not attended any multicultural events while at USD. She explains her resistance to joining a sorority by saying, “I don’t party... so it’s just not my thing.” While at USD she has not engaged in community service, participated in an immersion experience, or assumed a leadership position such as Resident Assistant.

One component of campus life in which Jennifer has invested in a substantial way is study abroad. As a first semester sophomore, she visited twelve countries during a voyage with Semester at Sea. She chose to study abroad earlier than most USD students (who typically do so during their third year) because, in her words, “I was just too excited to wait.” A year later, her face noticeably lit up as she recounted her experience overseas. She “could talk about Semester at Sea all day” and claimed to “think about it every day.” Clearly, the experience was profoundly important to Jennifer and continues to shape how she understands herself and the world. “It broadened my horizons in general” she told me, “because it showed me the whole world, literally. I experienced cultures that were so different from here that I think it gave me like a better appreciation for America but also helped me realize that just because we have material things doesn’t make life better necessarily.”

Jennifer partially attributed the intense impact of the Semester at Sea experience to the lack of cell phones, Internet access and other technological outlets – and the resulting requirement to develop more intentional personal relationships. On the ship, “communication is all face to face... which builds a better community.” This community included students from around the world – “there were people from Brazil and Argentina

and China” – which enabled Jennifer to develop a significantly different and enhanced perspective.

While entering into concentrated personal relationships with other students from around the world was obviously meaningful for her, the aspect of her Semester at Sea experience about which Jennifer spoke most passionately was time spent in developing countries. In response to a question regarding particularly cherished memories, Jennifer enthusiastically and vividly told three stories: one about an experience in Ghana, one from India and the third about Vietnam. Jennifer’s experiences in Ghana and India were similar; both involved unexpected, mutual exchanges with local residents who extended to Jennifer extraordinary hospitality and generosity. In Ghana, as she and a friend explored the port city, they happened upon two villagers who, after a few minutes of conversation, offered to host them for a meal. “They just offered to cook us a meal of native food... and I just felt so at home,” she said. The highlight of her time in India came when Jennifer was given a bracelet as a gift from a poor boy who had volunteered to serve as an informal tour guide to her and her classmates. While the boy was unable to speak much English, he did manage to say, “A gift.” The experience of receiving this boy’s generosity, Jennifer reported, “broke my heart.” Finally, in Vietnam, Jennifer was deeply moved by her observation of and interactions with people “who are so giving and loving ... people who have next to nothing but who were the happiest people I’ve ever met in my life. You can just see joy on their face.” These three stories, and the richness with which she told them, were unmistakable evidence that Jennifer’s Semester at Sea experience was a crucial part of her college experience thus far. Likewise, her voyage

was clearly a principal factor in her dramatic increase in compassion during her first two years of undergraduate study.

Raised as and continuing to self-identify as a Christian, Jennifer's faith is extremely important to her. She regularly attends a church in the local community and participates in one of their Life Groups. Designed especially for college students, Life Groups meet once a week and offer a blend of fellowship and faith sharing. Between Sunday worship and her participation in the group, Jennifer dedicates two to four hours per week to the practice of her faith.

Despite her commitment to her faith, her formative experience abroad and her dramatic growth in compassion, Jennifer's responses to my requests to define compassion were uncertain and relatively simple. In her understanding, compassion is "reaching out to someone, showing that you care." Jennifer was unable to articulate fully or coherently a time when she felt compassion or a feature of her USD experience that has helped her grow in compassion. Despite the fact that she demonstrated a dramatic increase in compassion, and in spite of the profound impact Semester at Sea clearly had on her, Jennifer was not aware of what may have caused her development in compassion nor did she have a particularly sophisticated understanding of the construct.

When asked about her role models, mentors, and influential individuals in her life, Jennifer mentioned her parents because "they're always there for you... they're always going to love you and try to direct you in the best way possible." She also named her grandparents who migrated from Germany to the United States during World War II and thereby "showed so much courage." Similar to her mother and father, Jennifer described her grandparents as "very, very giving and loving and always wanting the best for you."

A third person she mentioned was the uncle who is paying for her college education.

When pressed to identify anyone at USD who she considers to be a role model or mentor, Jennifer paused before naming her roommate from her first year (who “is always reaching out to people... is very involved and very... sweet”).

While Jennifer’s substantial increase in compassion was certainly striking, it was not entirely unique. She was one of the 99 students who demonstrated an increase during her first two years at USD. Her experience, however, was dramatically different from the sixty-nine students who decreased in compassion.

**José.** In stark contrast to Jennifer – the member of my sample who demonstrated the greatest increase in compassion – José was the student who most significantly decreased in compassion. While Jennifer transitioned from the low to the high compassion cohort, José moved from the upper end of the moderate cohort to the low compassion group.

Born in Mexico, José moved with his family to the Northeast while he was an infant. He is a first generation college student majoring in Marketing with minors in Political Science and Italian. When he’s not concentrating on his academics, José enjoys attending concerts in the greater San Diego region, playing poker with friends and at local casinos and supporting the USD men’s soccer team. He lives in an off-campus apartment, located approximately 20 minutes from the university, whose primary merit is that it is inexpensive. His one roommate is not a USD student; José made his connection with her through the Internet.

While attending a public high school, José applied to 18 colleges. After being denied admission by his first choice, the University of Southern California, he accepted

USD's offer – without touring the campus. He described the two biggest factors in his decision to attend USD as “money and location.” USD provided a robust financial aid package and met José's criteria of being located in a warm location.

As he began his USD education, José participated in the Student Support Services Summer Bridge, a program designed to facilitate the successful transition to college of first generation students and students of color. A one-week intensive program, Summer Bridge enabled José to develop friendships with the other students in the program, intentionally connected him with a network of mentors and especially supportive faculty members, and fostered his sense of confidence in the university setting.

Notwithstanding his participation in the Summer Bridge program, José has only recently embraced his Latino identity. Before arriving to USD, he primarily thought of himself as a person from the Northeast; beyond that geographic affiliation, José had not engaged in any serious reflection on his social identity. While enrolled in an Ethnic Studies course during his first semester at USD, however, José's professor challenged him to answer the question, “What are you?” This task required José to sort through the established categories, consider the alternatives and intentionally select one with which he felt most comfortable. That process led him to his current pride in self-identifying as a first-generation Latino student. In characteristically bold language, he described his family's feelings about him being the first in his family to attend college: “They worked hard all their lives to make sure there was food on the table and, you know, a roof over our heads. It worked out pretty good.”

Distinct from Jennifer's campus experience, José is extensively involved in campus life. He currently serves as the president of a multicultural organization

dedication to supporting Chicano/a and Latino/a students as well as encouraging them to foster their cultural heritage. Through his Student Support Services connections, José secured a job working for TRIO/Upward Bound, a federally funded grant project designed to identify and provide services to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and to foster the academic success of first generation college students. José is also a disc jockey and writer for USD Radio and, most recently, ran unsuccessfully for the position of Commuter Senator for the Associated Students student government. Despite his failure to win the election, José's interest in student government is strong. He is particularly animated by a recent decision by university Dining Services to modify the meal plan. José is committed to rallying his fellow students to reverse that decision and to require the administration to be more responsive to student interests.

While the most striking aspect of Jennifer's interview was her description of her Semester at Sea experience, the most noteworthy portion of José's interview came in response to a question regarding his participation in community service. He answered the question by saying, "Community service isn't for me. Community service is when you work for free. In my situation, there's no time to do that." Without prompting, he elaborated by saying, "I don't want to sound selfish, but I don't really work for free. I can't afford it. Other people, they don't have to worry about working to be here. They can do community service and all that good stuff." José had a similarly negative reaction to questions about immersion trips and Greek Life; he explained his decision not to join a fraternity largely as a function of their focus on philanthropy, something in which he's not interested.

José's decrease in compassion was echoed by his increase in narcissism. When he completed my survey during the first semester of his first year, he scored in the moderately narcissistic category. By the end of his sophomore year, his narcissism score was such that he fit in the high narcissism group. Thus, the survey data confirmed Jose's surprisingly bold self-regard and lack of concern for others, an attitude most clearly summarized by his statement that "I got to be worried about me, my future."

In response to my invitation to define compassion, José used the words, "not being selfish" and offered the example of giving money to homeless individuals. He also said, "It's not a word that I personally connect with. It's not a word I personally go about trying to fulfill." When I shared with him the definition of compassion animating this study, he immediately mentioned that he has given money to "people standing on corners who are down on their luck and they could use a little bit of help. That's about as compassionate as I get."

As a participant in the Summer Bridge program, José was placed in a network of mentors. It was not surprising, therefore, that he referenced one of those mentors as one of his most significant role models. José described that individual, also a Latino man, as someone he can talk to "pretty much about anything... he gives me pretty honest opinions of what I should expect and where I'm headed. He's the one I identify with." A second mentor mentioned by José was one of his professors with whom he has taken two Philosophy courses. José greatly admires this professor's unconventional opinions and tendency to push students to consider unorthodox positions. In an Ethics course taught by this professor, José came to appreciate the merits of socialism and to question the extremes produced by capitalism. As he described his attraction to this professor's



approach, it became clear that José gravitates toward the unconventional and controversial, and that he may be in a stage of making meaning by challenging authority. José referenced this professor and his classes repeatedly throughout the interview, including as the aspect of USD which most encouraged him to think about people different from himself.

Interestingly, while José explicitly dismissed community service as something for other people, he also spoke with some sophistication and tenderness about homelessness and, especially, about veterans who are homeless. Despite his multiple statements rejecting compassion, José's benevolence to the homeless seemed to suggest that he had, without knowing it, felt compassion and responded to its urgings. Despite this, José was among the 69 members of my sample who decreased in compassion – as well as the 76 who increased in narcissism.

**Matthew.** While José's level of compassion declined dramatically during his first two years at the university, Matthew's USD experience has not elicited a change in his compassion status. As he began college, Matthew scored in the low category and, two years later, he remained in the low compassion group; he was the only student in my sample who began in the low compassion group and failed to demonstrate movement to either the moderate or high groups.

Originally from the Midwest, Matthew is an Economics major with dual minors in Math and Spanish. While earning a diploma from his public high school, he took an extensive number of Advanced Placement courses ("probably nine or ten") and thus arrived to USD with more than thirty college credits already fulfilled. With the running start of a full year's course work, he plans to graduate at the conclusion of his junior year.

Obviously intellectually gifted, Matthew is a member of the university's Honors Program. Despite his enrollment in Honors classes, however, Matthew does not appear to be seriously challenged by his college course load; in response to a question about how he spends his time, he referenced exercise, reading for pleasure, spending time with friends, preparing and eating meals, and watching television.

When deciding on which college to attend, Matthew was most interested in "the coasts," intentionally seeking an experience different from his Midwest childhood. University of Southern California (USC), New York University, Georgetown and University of California at Berkeley were among the schools to which he applied. His first choice was USC but Matthew ultimately decided to enroll at USD because of the more generous financial aid package he was offered by the university, the chance to be a part of the Honors Program, and the numerous opportunities to study abroad. It is therefore somewhat ironic that his quest to graduate in three years will prevent him from partaking in a study abroad experience.

A sports and fitness enthusiast, Matthew runs more than five miles most days, usually along the beach where he lives in an apartment with three roommates. He frequently plays golf, continuing with a sport to which he was extremely dedicated in high school. He describes himself as "confident" and "willing to put myself out there." During our interview he seemed completely at ease, with his long blonde hair and flip-flops making him appear very much at home in Southern California. While he describes himself as not overly involved, Matthew writes for the USD newspaper, is on the Executive Board of a business fraternity, served as a Preceptorial Assistant his sophomore year, and regularly participates in intramural sports.

Three particularly salient elements emerged from Matthew's interview: (1) the tension between his Economics major and his obvious passion for literature, (2) his inability to articulate a pivotal moment in his USD experience, and (3) his decision to move through his undergraduate experience as expeditiously as possible.

While majoring in Business and considering an MBA in the future, Matthew admits that he does not have "a burning passion for Business by any means. I'm interested in lots of things." Chief among those interests is reading. "I'm always reading a book. I just feel like there's so much you can learn from books that the classroom setting can't really teach you. So I read all the time." He is also "writing a screenplay, just for fun." Reflecting on potential alternative college paths, Matthew acknowledges that he would have been happy as an English or Philosophy major – "I would have been really happy reading and writing all day." At another point in the interview, when asked about influential people in his life, Matthew responded by mentioning all that he learns from the books that he reads and how he identifies with the characters in them: "I hope I don't sound crazy saying that I look up to these book characters. Those authors, they just know how people work so well. Even though the book was written 100 years ago it's perfectly applicable to today's world." Matthew hopes to read "the top 100 books of all time," finding in them insight into "existential questions" such as "what is happiness?" and "what is my legacy?" that seem to occupy much of his thinking. In spite of his passion for literature, he settled on becoming a Business major for practical reasons. "I felt like I would probably have been happier as an English major," he told me, "but it's, like, 'What am I going to do with that?'"

Matthew's obvious passion for literature and engaging with the existential questions that his reading often surfaces stands in stark contrast to his pragmatic decision to major in Business, as well as his trajectory to graduate early. Based on what he shared during the interview, it seemed as though he had not considered the fact that exploring the meaning of life is one of the primary reasons for attending a private liberal arts college. Perhaps more troublesome, by disconnecting his greatest interests from his coursework and overall college experience, Matthew seems to have sacrificed a unique opportunity for growing in self-awareness in order to maximize his future career possibilities.

Just as striking as the tension between his major and his ultimate interests was the fact that, despite being an unusually thoughtful young man, Matthew was unable to articulate a response to my question regarding a particularly pivotal moment in his tenure as a USD student. After considering the question for a few moments – “I guess I have to think about the answer to that one” – he eventually answered by recounting the story of a good friend whose father died of cancer the previous year. The loss was especially poignant because the death occurred just a few months after the initial diagnosis and because this individual is one of the Matthew's closest friends. While certainly tragic, it was noteworthy that Matthew was unable to identify anything in his own personal experiences that he would consider a pivotal moment.

The third and final prominent feature of Matthew's interview was the detachment, even nonchalance, with which he talked about graduating in three years. He described his situation in casual terms: “I'm going to graduate so right now I'm just kind of looking for a job.” When pressed, he mentioned the financial savings as his primary motivation

for finishing in three years: “I’m still probably going to get my masters, so I figured I’d just save some money for that.” Interestingly, though, he seemed completely devoid of any excitement about graduating early and almost entirely unsure of his future. In addition to the possibility of pursuing an MBA, Matthew also talked about multiple other desires. “I want to probably start my own business eventually... or just work in business. But I also really like Math, so if I got like a masters in Math or a masters in Actuarial Sciences...” Matthew seems to be hurrying to complete his college degree with little awareness of what he wants to do next – or of what he wants out of life. His intense focus on finishing early, thus, seemed discordant with the questioning and seeking about which he spoke most earnestly.

A White man, Matthew lives with a fellow USD student from Bulgaria and considers the diversity of his friends and classmates to be one of the most important parts of his college experience. During his first year, Matthew lived on a floor in a residence hall reserved for members of the Honors Program. In that living area he met people from around the world. “I lived with a kid from Egypt. Other kids on my floor were from... one was from the Philippines. One was from Uruguay. Another kid was African-American, so I was kind of thrown into a very diverse group right away. One of the guys I lived with was gay, too.” At his roommate’s invitation, Matthew attended a diversity dinner event last year; while he enjoyed it, Matthew’s inability to remember the name of the event seemed to indicate that he was not particularly impacted by it. Matthew described his decision to attend by saying, “It wasn’t something I would’ve gone to otherwise, really, but he [his roommate] wanted to go so I went with him.”

In response to my query about community service, Matthew referenced (with little enthusiasm) his work in high school for Relay for Life, a fundraising effort benefiting the American Cancer Society, as well as his family's monthly preparation of food for a soup kitchen. Matthew's portrayal indicated that while this service commitment is important to his parents, it is not significant to him. His Business fraternity occasionally engages in community service, but as with his attendance at the multicultural event, Matthew seems to participate without investing deeply. He was unable to name a specific project or cause that the fraternity supports. In his own words, Matthew explained his interest in community service by saying, "I do community service, but I don't do a lot of it." At another point in the interview, he stated, "It's not something that I actively seek."

Matthew defined compassion as "Putting the welfare of others above your own welfare. I guess that's kind of like altruism too but they're pretty related... I think a truly compassionate person gets joy from helping others." While his understanding, especially his reference to how it is similar to but distinct from altruism, is relatively sophisticated, the example Matthew offered of a time when he experienced compassion was not. The instance he shared came at the end of last academic year when he was "out of dining dollars" and thus needed a friend to buy him lunch. It was only later in the interview, when I prompted him to think about any experiences that may have encouraged him to consider those who are suffering that Matthew mentioned the homeless people he encounters on a daily basis at the beach near his apartment. Once prompted, Matthew continued reflecting for some time on the presence of homeless individuals in Southern California, a reality with which he was not familiar before coming to college. It was my impression that he had rarely been given the opportunity to speak about the incongruity

of the lavishness of living on the beach while noticing the homeless people who “go through our trash each night.” Moreover, the amount of time Matthew spent unpacking his thoughts on the subject contrasted with his initial inability to offer an example of compassion that somehow addressed that reality.

While Matthew was the one student I interviewed who scored low in compassion both times he completed the survey, his narcissism profile shifted from moderate to low. Such movement could suggest some growth in compassion.

**Elizabeth.** The fourth and final student narrative is that of Elizabeth, an African American woman from the Southwest majoring in Finance. While it was Jennifer who demonstrated the largest increase in compassion during her first two undergraduate years, the modest growth exhibited by Elizabeth (who transitioned from the moderate to high compassion group) was more typical of the students in my sample.

Elizabeth’s decision to enroll at USD was difficult. A serious athlete at her public high school, Elizabeth spent significant time and energy discerning whether she wanted to continue playing basketball in college – and, if so, where she could most productively do so. At her mother’s encouragement, Elizabeth used the common application web site (used by over 400 schools) to apply to a large number of colleges and universities. She applied to USD without knowing anything about the university and was somewhat surprised when she received a letter of acceptance. After receiving the letter, Elizabeth came to campus for an overnight visit, during which, she told me, “I just fell in love with the school. I was like, ‘I don’t want to play [basketball] anymore.’ I felt like it was God’s calling [to be a student at USD].”

This reference to God is characteristic of Elizabeth; her faith is important to her and she says that “religion is a big part of who I am.” She was raised in a Christian family and continues to identify as a non-denominational Christian. She describes the on-campus Catholic Mass which she attends each week as one of the most important aspects of her USD experience, especially for the calming impact it has on her and its tendency to leave her feeling confident and at peace for the week ahead.

Elizabeth lives with one other USD student in an off-campus condominium owned by her parents as an investment property; the condominium is located in an upscale neighborhood approximately 25 minutes from campus. In addition to her school work, Elizabeth dedicates 20 hours a week to her internship with an investment firm and works another six hours per week as a basketball scorekeeper and referee for a sports club in the local community. On campus, Elizabeth is on the Executive Board for her Business fraternity and serves as Link Peer Mentor, a program designed to assist first-year and transfer students from underrepresented populations with their transition to college. In previous years, she assumed leadership roles with Residence Hall Association and Torero Squad (the USD new student orientation team). During her sophomore year, she spent 12-15 hours a week volunteering with a tutoring program at a local middle school. While she plans to study abroad in Madrid, Spain in the spring of her junior year, Elizabeth is excited to return to campus for her senior year with a renewed focus on community service. In her words, “Senior year, I’m giving all my time to community service, not worrying about money and all that jazz.... It’s just going to be pure service. So I’m really excited for that.”



While considerably involved on campus, Elizabeth has chosen not to become a member of a cultural club or organization. She claims to “understand my culture and know who I am,” and so she “doesn’t feel the need to segregate ourselves and I guess that’s why I ... stay away from that sort of thing.” Nevertheless, Elizabeth regularly attends luncheons and other events sponsored by the Multicultural Center.

As her role models and mentors, Elizabeth named her parents. She spoke in especially glowing terms about her mother who “gave up her career to raise us.” Born in Jamaica, Elizabeth’s mother came to the United States as a child and was the first in her family to pursue higher education. After earning an advanced degree from Syracuse University, Elizabeth’s mother began a successful career as an Electrical Engineer. Accepting a job offer from a company in California not only brought her to the West Coast, it also facilitated her meeting Elizabeth’s father who also worked at the firm. After marrying Elizabeth’s father and starting their family, Elizabeth’s mother left her engineering job in order to concentrate on raising her three children. As those children matured, she became increasingly committed to organizations in her local community; currently she serves on the board of directors of a center for abused children. According to Elizabeth, her mother is “really passionate about community service. I feel like it was because of her upbringing. In that way she’s really influenced me.”

An executive at a defense contracting company, Elizabeth’s father is admired by his daughter for both his work ethic and his professional success: “He travels all over the world. He’s just a really diligent worker and he’s a really good leader. I’ve watched him, sat in on his meetings. He’s just like a terrific person to listen to.”

While Elizabeth clearly admires her father, she also feels a great deal of pressure from his high expectations. “My dad is one of the biggest pushers ever,” she told me. “I mean I love him to death but he pushed me not to play basketball.” He also “pushed her” to major in Engineering, but Elizabeth neither enjoyed nor was adept at Math and Physics. “I don’t get Physics”, she said. “How am I supposed to get Engineering? And then, working at Raytheon... I basically did not want to do that but I did it for two years and hated every day of it.” Eventually, she told him, “No, I’m not doing this.” While Elizabeth has been able to claim her desire not to pursue a career in Engineering, her father’s influence and expectations for professional success led her to the Finance major.

The obvious stress created by her parent’s expectations led me to probe by asking, “If money was no object, what would you study?” Elizabeth immediately and enthusiastically answered, “Sociology. I’m really big into like crime and deterrence of juveniles going to prison. I know some kids are troubled and it’s something I really want to work with.” Interestingly, on the survey she completed in the fall of her first year on campus, Elizabeth designated her major as Sociology. Thus, it appears she is pursuing a course of studies different from that in which she is most interested. While Matthew’s decision to major in Business seemed to be in conflict with his literary passions, Elizabeth’s situation is perhaps even more distressing. She has a clear sense of what discipline she would like to study and what career she would like to pursue, but has trimmed her desires and conformed her plans in order to meet the standards of her parents.

Elizabeth spoke at length about her uneasiness with this situation, especially her frustrations with her Business courses. In those classes, she said, “I’ve never talked about ways that we could like prevent homelessness... It’s always ways to get more

revenue, more income, how do we get profit?” In response to my question about any aspect of her USD experience which has prevented her from growing in compassion, Elizabeth answered, “The Business School.”

This disconnect between her academic pursuits and her deepest values and interests largely explains Elizabeth’s excitement about devoting herself to community service during her senior year – a time when, at least in her imagination, the tension will be reduced if not eliminated. Freed from the demands of her current internship, Elizabeth anticipates having more time to serve and to explore additional ways of doing so. Focusing on community service during her final year seems important to Elizabeth as a way of balancing the more self-interested orientation of her Finance major; how she will achieve this balance beyond her time in college is of keen concern to her. In response to my query about aspects of USD that have encouraged her to think about the difference she wants to make in the world, she spoke about feeling as though the university was “trying to do two things at once, which is hard.” Reflecting on the messages she has received regarding the importance of making a difference and of making money, she shared: “How am I supposed to put these two together... because, to be honest with you, I am trying to please my parents. I obviously want to make them proud of me but at the same time, am I doing something that’s going to make me happy and am I doing something that’s going to be worthwhile?” As was the case with Matthew, it seemed as though Elizabeth has not had many opportunities to talk about the multiple, divergent influences in her life or to explore ideas for how to navigate the subsequent tensions. The one exception to this came in response to my question about a pivotal moment in her college experience. Elizabeth answered by referring to the retreats she has attended.

Those weekends “made me think about all those questions that I was saying earlier and really, really digging into who I am and what I want to do in my life,” she told me.

Elizabeth recounted an end-of-the-year ceremony with the children whom she tutored as a time when she felt compassion. The gathering included the presentation of thank you letters to Elizabeth and the other participants in the tutoring program. She remembers it as “the cutest thing and it just made me think that maybe I really did show them compassion, really just showed them that I cared.” Elizabeth defined compassion as “having intense care for something that you know you’re not going to get a personal gain for.” To a degree unusual among the students in my sample, Elizabeth’s definition and experience of compassion aligned.

As previously mentioned, Elizabeth’s modest increase in compassion was more common than the drastic increase in compassion demonstrated by Jennifer, the decrease in compassion demonstrated by José, or the status quo results over time evidenced by Matthew. Elizabeth was one of the 32 students (out of the 198 who completed both surveys) who demonstrated such movement during her first two years on campus. As expected, her development of compassion was mirrored by a slight decrease in narcissism.

Elizabeth’s narrative is, quite naturally, different from that of Jennifer, José, Matthew, and the other sixteen students with whom I spoke. While each student’s story is unique, the detailed accounts of how these four have navigated their first two years as USD undergraduates highlight a number of common challenges and opportunities. More importantly, these four stories illuminate the key leitmotifs that emerged from my twenty student interviews. The journeys of these four students offer a distinctive glimpse into the experiences of all the students who participated in the qualitative portion of my

research. I now turn to a focused consideration of the major themes surfaced by those interviews.

### **Key Themes**

Each of the twenty interviews I conducted was recorded and transcribed. By carefully reviewing the transcriptions, I was able to compare and contrast the students' comments, sort common elements and assign them codes. Descriptive and in vivo codes (Saldaña, 2009, p. 58-91) as well as those extant in the student development literature, allowed me to create an organizational framework for the large amount of data that emerged from speaking with the students. The most critical component of this organizational schema was the listing of major themes common to all the interviews; those themes functioned as conversation shards that came together to create a meaningful portrait of the students' experiences and perspectives. In the following section, I present seven of the most critical themes. While the students spoke of many topics beyond the seven discussed below, these seven themes emerged as the areas in which those who increased in compassion seemed to most clearly differ from those who did not.

**Campus involvement.** The student development literature is replete with well-known studies documenting the extent to which a student's involvement in campus life largely shapes her or his college experience (Astin, 1977, 1993; Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). My interviews unambiguously demonstrated the on-going relevance of this dynamic. The involvement levels of the students who grew in compassion were noticeably different, both in quantity and in quality, from those who did not. Table 4.18 demonstrates that, in

general, students who demonstrated an increase in compassion were remarkably involved in campus organizations and activities.

**Table 4.18**

*Campus involvement of students who increased in compassion*

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Daniel   | "I do research in the [Chemistry] department. I am involved in the Chemistry Club pretty heavily... I'm currently the vice-president of that and that's a lot of community service and outreach as well. I'm pretty involved with Phi Delta Epsilon which is the Pre-Med fraternity. I've been the Community Service Coordinator for the fraternity since my freshman year... We go to St. Vincent de Paul occasionally... we go to the Kearny Mesa Convalescent Home." |
| Michelle | "I am an Alpha Chi Omega. I do Founders Chapel Choir and Women's Ensemble... I do Search community. I play intramural soccer... I met my roommate last year during Preceptorial Assistant training."  |
| Larry    | "I'm involved with Leaders of Tomorrow, as well as the Leadership Advisory Board...which is a brand new student organization on campus founded to help promote the leadership minor on this campus. You know, being the founder of Leaders of Tomorrow, I'm putting more of my focus into that."  |
| Diana    | "Some extra-curricular activities include executive board involvement with MEChA and AChA, the Women's Center, the United Front Multicultural Center, tutoring at Montgomery Middle School, Migrant Outreach, SSS, Ethnic Studies Organization, and McNair Scholars."   |
| Anna     | "I do lots of things on campus. I played on the club soccer team. I participate in a lot in University Ministry. I play violin; I play in Founders Chapel Choir but I also play in the chamber music groups here. I was active in the soup kitchen for awhile..."   |
| Katie    | "I am the Philanthropy Chair of the Honor Student Board, and I've been a member since I was a freshman. I am a member of the Finance Club..."   |
| Bill     | "Freshman, sophomore year, I was actually in 13 clubs. Now, I am in Beta, the social fraternity. I'm in Phi Delta Epsilon which is a pre-Med fraternity. I'm a part of Shelter San Diego. I have worked with University Ministry. I have a job on campus in the Center for Health and Wellness Promotion..."  |

Even among this group of involved students, Bill stands out as extraordinarily active. During his first two years he claims to have been in "thirteen clubs" before scaling back a bit to his current commitments to his social fraternity, the pre-medicine

fraternity, a community service club, University Ministry, and his on-campus job. His portfolio of involvements after “pulling back” remains impressive and continues to significantly exceed that of many of the students who did not grow in compassion.

In addition to the quantity of involvements, the students who demonstrated an increase in compassion spoke about their activities expansively, often without prompting, and with notable passion and enthusiasm. In response to my opening prompt (Please tell me a little about yourself.), Diana stated her majors (English and Ethnic Studies) before immediately continuing by saying, “My involvement at the University of San Diego includes, but is not limited to, student organizations, service and volunteer work, undergraduate research, community outreach, immersion trips, and study abroad.” Similarly, Elizabeth introduced herself by stating her major (Business) and then immediately listing her interests and activities: “I like to do a lot of community service. I’m trying to get more involved with University Ministry.” In contrast, Michael, a student whose compassion score decreased, responded to my opening query by saying, “I’m from New Jersey. I’m a junior here. I’m a Psychology major, a Spanish minor, but I’m on a Pre-Physical Therapy path so I’m doing my prerequisites for that. That’s about it.” I had to probe multiple times, and eventually ask directly, about any co-curricular activities or organizations, in order for him to address directly his campus involvement. This disparity – with the students who increased in compassion incorporating their campus involvements in their descriptions of themselves and those who did not limiting their self-introductions to their hometown and studies – was remarkably consistent across the twenty interviews.

Beyond being less forthcoming about their involvements, the students who did not grow or decreased in compassion were noticeably less active in campus life. Table 4.19 summarizes how some of those students described their engagement with campus life.

**Table 4.19**

***Campus involvement of students who decreased in compassion***

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Rosibel | "I didn't really get involved my freshman year. I had a class during dead hours. I commuted and I didn't really connect well with a lot of student or I just didn't think of myself as a Torero."   |
| Michael | "Well, four days a week I meet up with a bud and we go to the gym for an hour and a half and then at night it's usually just homework. And then later at night we'll sometimes have an intramural game or something like that. The Pre Physical Therapy Club is only once every other week so aside from that and then the weekends, we go to the beach..." |
| Ralph   | "I work out a lot, go to the beach, catch a movie when I can but that's basically it... I was involved [freshman year] but didn't really follow through on any of them [organizations or activities]."  |
| Thomas  | "I spend 30 hours or so a week playing on the football team. I'm in Fiji, a fraternity on campus. I live down at the beach so I'm always going down to the beach, going to the water and stuff. I love music. I'm really into music and cars as well."  |
| Andrew  | "When I first got to campus, the first semester, I wasn't involved in anything. Second semester I ran for and got voted in as Treasurer of a newly formed organization, the Student Veterans Organization... I'm a part of the Accounting Society... I usually come to school, take care of what I need to take care of and come home."                     |
| Leslie  | "I participate in campus a lot through my sorority... we have sisterhood events every week. We get together, do bonfires or like this week we're doing pumpkin carving. Besides that, not too much."  |
| Holly   | "I have a job at the Torero [Book] Store so that's probably my biggest part of being at USD is my job there. Other than that, I've tried going to a lot of different club meetings and nothing ever really stuck."  |
| Mariann | "It's usually just school, work, not a lot of time for other stuff."  |
| Jocelyn | "I was on the eBoard of Pride. I dabbled in every medical club my freshman year and decided that they weren't for me. I was in the medical fraternity and you know, all the other clubs. I just kind of – but I didn't make any connections I was anticipating so I left all of them. Yeah, I don't do too much on campus."                                 |



Jocelyn is a particularly intriguing example of a student who is not currently involved in campus organizations and activities. As a first year student she “dabbled in every medical club... and decided they weren’t for me.” She also served briefly as a member of the Executive Board for Pride (the campus GLTBQ support group) before growing frustrated and resigning. After failing to make any significant connections through her co-curricular involvements, she withdrew from campus life and moved off-campus to live with her boyfriend who is not a USD student. Her responses to my questions made it clear that her connection to the university is tenuous; beyond what is necessary to fulfill her academic obligations, she spends little time on campus and appears to be largely un-effected by and uninterested in the larger campus events or culture.

Ralph’s experience is similar. In response to my question about how he spends his time when he’s not in class, he referenced “working out, going to the beach and catching a movie.” During his first year on campus he was marginally involved but, in his own words, “didn’t follow through” with any of those activities or organizations. While not a part of any official campus organizations, Ralph seems to be enjoying his college experience. Ralph is largely occupied by his studies and in the free time that he does have, enjoys relaxing and socializing on his own. His experience is analogous to Jocelyn’s in that he is moving through his undergraduate studies largely independent of a direct and/or deep connection to campus life.

Rosibel’s experience is also quite enlightening. Despite the fact that she is a part of the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC), a commitment that typically requires more than twenty hours a week, she claimed to “not really connect with a lot of

students” and admitted to “not thinking of myself as a Torero.” Her motivation to participate in NROTC was largely financial; as a first generation college student and the child of a single mother, Rosibel saw the scholarship as one of the only ways she could afford to attend a private university. Her Biology major and a future career in medicine are her greatest interests. In contrast, NROTC is mainly a way to finance her education and to move toward her ultimate goals.

While the difference between those who are extensively involved (such as Elizabeth, Diana, and Bill) and those who are not (including Jocelyn, Ralph, and Rosibel) are clear and significant, campus involvement is not a binary, either/or phenomenon. Every student with whom I spoke referenced some involvement; several of those who decreased in compassion have done so in spite of time-consuming and intensive commitments. José, the student who demonstrated the largest decrease in compassion, for example, is the president of a student multicultural organization and Thomas dedicates an enormous amount of time to the varsity football team. Thus, the difference is not in the presence or absence of campus involvement; instead, the difference appears to be the quality and intensity of, and personal investment in, the activities. As we saw, Matthew is a member of the Executive Board of a Business fraternity and Michael is the president of the Pre-Physical Therapy Club. Neither Matthew nor Michael, however, exhibited much passion for those commitments. For both, their participation seemed perfunctory and largely driven by a pragmatic desire to build their resumes. The way in which they described those activities was in stark contrast to the way in which Anna and Diana spoke about their campus involvements. Anna, for example, communicated a great sense of enthusiasm about the variety of activities with which she has been involved

(club soccer, chamber music group, University Ministry, community service) and explicitly referred to those involvements as a key aspect of her USD experience.

Similarly, Larry listed only two commitments – Leaders of Tomorrow and the Leadership Advisory Board – but articulated in compelling ways how those commitments are central to his undergraduate experience.

The comments of the students with whom I spoke were clear evidence that the texture of campus involvement of those who increased in compassion is different from those who decreased. Engagement with campus life, however, seems to function as a threshold. Simply being a member of campus clubs or organizations does not cause the development of compassion; being actively involved in campus life, however, appears to be a critical and necessary – but not sufficient – step in the process.

**Community service experience.** Community service is a particular type of campus involvement. For the purposes of this study on the cultivation of compassion, it was of special interest. In light of the definition of compassion which undergirds this research – “being moved by the suffering of another, and desiring to help” (Goetz et al., 2010, p. 351; Lazarus, 1991, p. 289) – it was not surprising that the students I interviewed who increased in compassion had substantially different experience with community service than those who did not increase or who decreased. Table 4.20 presents the comments regarding community service of those who increased in compassion.

In addition to the amount of service activities mentioned by students such as Daniel, who spoke at some length about the four different community agencies with which he has volunteered, the specificity of these students’ responses was noteworthy.

Each of these individuals offered the name of the agency they had served. Michelle, for example, spoke about the “Psychiatric Hospital” and Katie referenced “Father Joe’s.”

**Table 4.20**

***Community service experience of those who increased in compassion***

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Elizabeth | “I like to do a lot of community service... I did the tutoring program last semester through CASA, which was really cool. Senior year, I’m giving all my time to community service, not worrying about money and all that jazz.”  |
| Anna      | “All through my entire life we’ve been doing community service ...when I started going to the soup kitchen that first couple of times were absolutely incredible... When we were younger we went to a nursing home every month and did a mass there for the residents and as we got older my sister and I would play our instruments. When I was 11 I started raising guide dogs for the blind...I went to Haiti, before the earthquake, and played soccer with kids.”  |
| Bill      | “Community service has been huge for me personally. Shelter San Diego is a club dedicated to it. I’ve done a lot with Habitat for Humanity. I’ve done a lot of stuff through University Ministry, whether it be TJ Trips... making homeless packs, going and actually you know, delivering stuff down to the homeless, soup kitchens.”  |
| Daniel    | “I used to, last year, I volunteered at the Children’s Hospital, Rady. I’ve worked with kids ever sense I was in middle school and it’s just been... a huge part of my life... We go to the Ronald McDonald House a lot. We go to St. Vincent de Paul occasionally. We go to the Kearny Mesa Convalescent Home. Then also, freshman year, I did a lot with a kind of Meals on Wheels type thing. It’s always been a passion of mine to like really just like get out there and be able to use my – whatever I can do to help the rest of the people around me.” |
| Michelle  | “With choir we go to the Psychiatric Hospital every December and May. And I can’t tell you how much I love that. It’s such a rewarding experience... I’ll do like philanthropy events which is where we raise money for domestic violence. I really love that.”   |
| Katie     | “I did a lot in high school. I was in National Charity League... we made thousands of boxes for the troops. I’m the philanthropy chair with the Honor Student Board. I went to help at Father Joe’s my freshman year.”  |

Likewise, each of these students referenced their overall commitment to or the personal impact of community service. According to Anna, “All my life I’ve been doing community service.” Bill stated, “Community service has been huge for me personally.”

This combination of specific details regarding the service they've done and explicit reflection on why and how that service fits into their life is drastically different from the statements of those students who did not increase in compassion.

Among the students who decreased in compassion, José, Matthew, and Ralph explicitly stated their lack of enthusiasm for and resistance to community service. In this regard, their comments are uncommon in their honesty but may represent the feelings of others who were less forthcoming. While Matthew admits that service is “not something” he “actively seeks,” Ralph conceded that he is “skeptical” and “cynical” about community service because “half the kids” are only there “for their resume.”

As demonstrated in Table 4.21, other students who did not increase in compassion were not as resistant to community service and referenced their experience with such activities, but did so in a more ambivalent manner than those students who grew in compassion. Leslie, for example, commented that her sorority “would do, I don’t know, a couple of events during the semester. We had, like, little Halloween festivals for them [Camp Fire USA]. We did service days through that. Our philanthropy hours would count by the things we’d put on campus so we would put on the volleyball tournament and then donate the proceeds to a children’s hospital, things like that.” The way in which she described this service in general terms (“a couple of events during the semester”) and her acknowledgement that much of it involved donating money rather than establishing relationships in the community are striking. Holly’s comments were also salient. After first answering that she had not done service while in college she later remembered that she had. “I actually did have a community service type thing at USD. I can’t believe I forgot about this but I only did it freshman year. It was the Best Buddies Club.” While

she was able to remember the name of the program, it's important to note that the experience did not come readily to mind when specifically asked about such experiences.

**Table 4.21**

***Community service experience of those who did not increase***

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| José    | "Community service isn't really for me. I don't want to sound selfish but I don't really work for free. Because I can't. I can't afford to work for free."  |
| Matthew | "I do community service but I don't do a lot. It's not something I actively seek."  |
| Ralph   | "I feel with community service I come kind of like, I guess, like skeptical of it or cynical of it because it's like, 'Should I go to these things?' I'm like half the kinds are just like 'I don't want to be here. I just need this for my resume...' So I tend not to do it unless I get something I really want to do."                                       |
| Thomas  | "I did a little bit in high school... I had to do some for my college applications. And then I've done a little bit with Fiji, but not much outside of that."   |
| Andrew  | "I would have to say no. I can't think of anything significant. I did a lot in the Navy because I was with community relations. High school? Again, not so much."   |
| Michael | "Well, for one of the classes I'm taking, we're required to go offsite to an elementary school with little kids, and just help tutor them. At first I was like 'Oh, man, this is going to be terrible.' Because I'm not, you know, not that interested in that kind of thing. But after my first few times I really started to enjoy it."                         |
| Rosibel | "There's been a few through the business fraternity. You have to do like a minimum number. I can't recall the hours but I did a soup kitchen and there's a few community service hours you have to do for ROTC. I did Relay for Life for that... It's just Saint... I don't know, it was downtown or somewhere."  |
| Leslie  | "We would do, I don't know, a couple of events during the semester. We had like little Halloween festivals for them [Camp Fire USA]. We did service days through that. Our philanthropy hours would count by the things we'd put on campus so we would put on the volleyball tournament and then donate the proceeds to a children's hospital, things like that." |
| Mariann | "Well, not technically. I work through CASA for my Work Study. I work with the kindergarteners and 4 <sup>th</sup> graders at Holy Family School up the street. I would love to do more. It's just time commitment."  |
| Holly   | "In high school, yes. Not at USD... I actually did have a community service type thing at USD. I can't believe I forgot about this but I only did it freshman year. It was the Best Buddies Club."  |

The resistance to and ambivalence about community service from these students seems to be connected in some way to their lack of growth in compassion. Participating in fewer service activities, for example, afforded them fewer opportunities to be moved by the suffering of others. Moreover, their comments indicate that they have “desired to help” less often and less intensely. In short, whether cause or effect – or some combination of cause and effect – involvement or lack of involvement with community service appears to be an important component in the compassion story being told here.

Interestingly, several of the students who did not increase in compassion did speak about homelessness and experiences with homeless individuals. In response to my question about what aspects of USD have encouraged them to think about those who are suffering, both Matthew and José reflected at some length on their encounters with homeless people at the beach or elsewhere. For example, even though José claimed not to “personally connect with” compassion, he acknowledged giving money to people on street corners. Similarly, the presence of so many homeless people near his apartment at the beach generated a lot of questions for Matthew: “Why do they live like that when there are kids who can drive \$100,000 cars? Why is there that huge discrepancy?”

The experiences described by Matthew and José may suggest that other students in my sample are also likely to have observed suffering at some point and may have been impacted by it to some degree. Without participating in the kinds of service opportunities (and the opportunity to reflect on those experiences that community service programs almost always incorporate) that the students who increased in compassion referenced, however, those observations have not had the same influence. Seeing and/or contemplating suffering at a distance does not have the same potential to elicit a desire to

help as do many community service experiences. In this regard, community service appears to be a particularly powerful way of cultivating compassion. By creating opportunities for students to spend time and develop relationships with people who are suffering, community service is a unique motivator of compassion. It is, therefore, not surprising that those who did not participate in service tended to not grow in compassion.

**Financial pressures.** José's comments about community service point to the third theme: financial pressures. Especially relevant – and revelatory – was his statement, “I can't afford to work for free. Whereas, other people, they don't have to worry about working to... to be here. They can do community service and all that good stuff.” His concern with being successful as a student and, subsequently, as a professional precludes him from dedicating time to other-centered activities. He is convinced that his peers who engage in service activities are those who are not confronted by similar financial pressures. While it is impossible to know the details of José's financial situation or discern whether he can truly “afford” to do community service, the fact that he does not believe that he can is a significant finding. The significance of this discovery is amplified by the manner in which it was echoed in the comments of the other first-generation students in my sample.

In addition to José, there were three other first-generation students among the twenty I interviewed. Like José, two of those students decreased in compassion. Also similar to José, both of those students cited financial pressures as an impediment to more active involvement in campus life as well as a barrier to participation in community service activities. Mariann, for example, has lived off-campus with her extended family for all three years of her undergraduate experience. While that arrangement has benefited



Mariann financially it has also facilitated her assistance with providing childcare for her sister and her cousin, both of whom have young children. In addition to fulfilling family responsibilities, Mariann works at least twenty hours a week at a beauty supply store, leaving her with little time for cocurricular activities. It is not surprising, therefore, that she told me, “It’s usually just school, work, not a lot of time for other stuff.”

Rosibel’s situation is similar. She enrolled in NROTC in order to receive the scholarship it provides and which she stated is essential to her ability to attend USD. During her first year, she lived at home and commuted to campus because “I didn’t want to put that extra financial strain on my mom.” Commuting left her feeling disconnected from campus life and created a major obstacle to getting involved. Now that she has completed her first year of NROTC and, thereby qualified for housing through the NROTC scholarship, she has moved to an on-campus residence hall. During her sophomore and junior years, Rosibel has joined the Business fraternity and a multicultural organization – yet the vast majority of her time continues to be focused on her studies and NROTC commitments.

While their particular situations vary, the comments of José, Mariann, and Rosibel indicate that their time as undergraduate students has been significantly shaped by their current financial circumstances. José’s comment that community service is for other people, those who can afford it, is characteristic of these three students; paying tuition appears to represent such a financial stress that they feel unable to do much more than meet their basic obligations. Moreover, the experience of being immersed in a community of privilege has clearly impacted them, at least in part by convincing them that achieving the material success that they see represented in the lives of their peers will

be possible only if they do not spend significant time and energy on extra-curricular activities such as community service.

The experience of the other first-generation college student – Diana – was different. Diana confronted financial challenges and family obligations similar to those of José, Mariann, and Rosibel. When it came time to select a college, Diana “did not have the heart to leave my single mother and three younger sisters” who live in San Diego. Determined to stay close to home, Diana was close to accepting an offer from a public institution when she received notice that she had been awarded a Gates Millennium Scholarship. The news was “a blessing that came in what seemed to be a hopeless circumstance... It changed the trajectory of my life,” leading her to enroll at USD. Since the Gates Scholarship fully funds Diana’s education she does not feel the need to work part-time and thus has ample ability to participate in campus clubs, organizations, and activities. She was clearly one of the most involved students with whom I spoke. Likewise, the scholarship paid for her participation in Semester at Sea; as a result, she was the only one of the four first-generation college students who had studied or who plans to study abroad.

Undoubtedly, the Gates Scholarship has greatly enhanced Diana’s college experience and made it very different than it otherwise would have been. Without that scholarship, it is likely that her experience would have been more similar to those of the other three first-generation students. Those students’ struggles with fulfilling family obligations and meeting financial commitments constrained their engagement with campus life. This disconnection induced by their current financial situation appears to be a contributing factor in their decrease in compassion.

While the financial pressures articulated by José, Mariann, Rosibel, and Diana were obviously intense, many of the students with whom I spoke alluded to financial concerns. In fact, anxieties about finances were voiced by most of those I interviewed. A distinguishing characteristic emerged, however, in how those students who increased in compassion spoke about those concerns differently from those who did not. Those who demonstrated an increase in compassion most often referenced financial realities without being controlled by them. Those students who did not grow in compassion, in contrast, spoke of concerns about their future financial situations and admitted that those concerns were largely influencing their current decisions.

Matthew was the student who most dramatically and clearly was impacted by financial considerations. Attention to his future career path and earning potential led him to declare a Business major even though his great passions are Literature and Philosophy and, as he said, he “would have been really happy reading and writing all day.” In response to my question about what led him to choose his Business major, he admitted that it was almost exclusively a pragmatic decision based on “what he was going to do with” that major after graduation. Moreover, Matthew was the student striving to graduate in three years in order to save money for graduate studies, even though he does not have a clear idea of what he wants to study in graduate school.

Michael’s comments revealed a similar concern. “I want to, you know, I don’t know, just go off and help people. But, like you got to think practically, and when I say practically I mean, like, almost economically.” That concern with practically has led Michael to a Pre-Physical Therapy major. His decision is especially intriguing in that he acknowledged a desire to help people as well as in light of the fact that his failure to be

more involved in community service or to consider alternative vocations were largely due to his focus on achieving material success. At another point in the interview, Michael admitted that while physical therapy wasn't "my dream job ... out of everything that I've come across thus far, it is something that interests me."

Several students who increased in compassion also mentioned financial concerns, in either a direct or an opaque manner. Bill, for example, explained his intended career path by saying "I've known for a long time that I wanted to do the whole doctor thing... I love their lifestyle." While he is considering his future earning potential, he also seems to be striving to find a way of continuing the service orientation he began in high school and developed in college. In other words, Bill's desire to be a doctor appears to blend his desire to "do a lot of good" with practical thinking about how he will earn a living.

The experiences of Anna and Daniel echoed that of Bill. Both Anna and Daniel are Science majors who are extensively involved, have impressive records of community service, and demonstrated an increase in compassion. Moreover, both have considered medical school. Anna, however, describes her dream job as "living in the jungle, chasing beetles and frogs for the rest of my life, and working with endangered species, but that's kind of unrealistic. I'm also interested in sustainable development in third world countries." Thus, while acknowledging the need to be "realistic," Anna's imagination is wide open to her future work and career. In this regard, she could not be more different from Matthew or Michael.

Rather than pragmatism or practicality, Daniel explained his decision to major in Science in terms of enthusiasm and curiosity: "Ever since I was little, I've been really interested in Science and, especially, Life Sciences." This interest flourished while he

was in high school: “When I took Science classes in high school, I really, really liked it. Like, I just loved everything about it.” While officially a Pre-Med major, Daniel spoke about considering other graduate programs in Chemistry or Bio-chemistry: “There’s still kind of a lot up in the air for me.”

To be sure, Bill, Anna, and Daniel are pursuing courses of study that very likely will offer numerous opportunities for well-paying employment and financially secure lifestyles. Their journeys differ from others in my sample, however, in that they are pursuing fields in which they are sincerely interested; in fact, the passion of both Anna and Daniel for their Science classes is palpable. Moreover, the comments of all three revealed thinking about “realism” in the context of their greatest interests and reflection on what would for them constitute a good life. Their attention to financial realities is in the background; for José, Mariann, and Rosibel, such attention is front and center.

**Disorienting experiences.** The fourth key leitmotif which arose from my twenty interviews was the importance of disorienting experiences. Jennifer’s description of her Semester at Sea voyage – especially her time in developing countries – serve as a particularly rich example of the potential influence of such experiences. Her time in Ghana, India and Vietnam impacted her greatly, leaving her different than she was when she began her journey. Such “disorienting dilemmas” (Mezirow, 1999), require students to reassess what they know about the world, about themselves and about how they fit into the world. Often, these incidents surprise participants; they commonly produce sufficient dissonance so as to compel participants to reflect repeatedly and in depth on the experience. While Jennifer’s Semester at Sea voyage was paradigmatic of such a

disorienting dilemma, the vast majority of the other students who increased in compassion described a similar experience, as evidenced by the comments in Table 4.22.

**Table 4.22**

*Disorienting experiences of those who increased in compassion*

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Jennifer  | "They just offered to cook us a meal of native food, and I just felt so at home...In India, it's definitely the most different place from here, but there were some incredibly sweet people...and it, like, broke my heart... In Vietnam, the same thing... I could talk about Semester at Sea all day."   |
| Michelle  | "I went to Tijuana to give out Christmas boxes. You put tons of things in them. And that was really a great experience because I got to just see what real poverty is like because I've never had that...I did Habitat for Humanity, and that was the best week of my life by far. Nothing's ever topped it, even to this day. I've been to Florence and Spain, but that experience was just so great."    |
| Anna      | "Our family's been very active with Haiti. I've been to Haiti. I've also been to South Africa and just kind of seen situations there and I think that's really what sparked my interest in sustainable development in third world countries."  |
| Diana     | "Essentially, studying abroad has expanded my dreams significantly, I have been broken from seeing the poverty, racism and exploitation from learning more about the U.S. foreign policy and how other larger economies continue to perpetuate the oppression in the Southern Hemisphere... I am a new and better person because of study abroad. Travelling is definitely a transformational experience." |
| Bill      | "It was in high school that I took a two-week trip with Habitat for Humanity down to New Orleans. That was pretty incredible. You're able to get a whole new feeling of empathy so you know, it means a whole lot more than staying there for a few hours and serving the homeless in a shelter."  |
| Daniel    | "I've done a few mission trips to Mexico...It was a house building mission in Tecate... I think it definitely changes everybody that goes on it. It's been a big part of who I am."  |
| Elizabeth | "Even working down at the school that I was talking about... the coordinator was telling me that a lot of these kids, like, their families will sleep in their cars..."  |
| Larry     | "I was sitting in the back of the IPJ, tears in my eyes, don't know where I'm going in life, things like that. Boom! I say it was from God."   |

In Table 4.22, comments by eight of the nine students who increased in compassion described an experience in high school or college that caused such disorientation. For most, this shift came as a result of contact with people in poverty or otherwise in need. While Jennifer's disorienting experiences took place in Ghana, India, and Vietnam, other students spoke of profound and transformative moments in Tijuana, Tecate, Haiti, South Africa, New Orleans, and San Diego.

Jennifer's shared her stories of her time in developing countries – and why her interactions with people there were so important to her – with unmistakable passion and intensity. A year later, it was obvious that those experiences retained enormous power. A similar dynamic occurred with each of the other seven students who experienced their disorientating dilemmas. While speaking styles differed and the level of detail varied, it was evident when the students were talking about disorienting experiences. Regardless of how long ago they had occurred, when students described these experiences, they did so in vivid terms.

Larry's disorienting experience was different. It arose as a result of his decision to quit the varsity football team, a choice that required him to reconsider his identity. When he spoke about sitting behind a building on the USD campus with tears in his eyes, he described the reason for his strong emotions as confusion because he "didn't know where I'm going in [his] life." The familiarity and certainty of life as an athlete was giving way without an immediate replacement. While very different from and perhaps not as dramatic as encountering poverty in the developing world, Larry's experience suggests that these disorienting dilemmas can occur on campus as well as off, in the midst of ordinary college life, and not only as a result of extraordinary events.

In significant contrast to the disorienting experiences described by eight of the students who increased in compassion, only one of the twelve students who either decreased or did not change in compassion spoke about such an experience. That student, Andrew, is a non-traditional student who served in the Navy for more than nine years before enrolling at USD. As a part of his military service, Andrew visited eighteen countries, including developing nations such as India, Thailand, Brunei, Indonesia, and Djibouti. While stationed in Djibouti for six months, Andrew was assigned to “community relations,” a duty that required him to “go and talk to locals about improving their conditions” while also “fostering communication.” This extended experience – as opposed to his other, short-term experiences with poverty – allowed Andrew to “interface with people on a more personal level and, you know, see their stories.”

Despite the obvious potential of such an experience in Africa to disorient him, the manner in which Andrew recounted it was different from the way in which the students who increased in compassion talked about their disorienting experiences. The culture of the Navy and Andrew’s obligation to fulfill his role likely contributed to a different level of engagement with and reflection on all that he saw and heard in Djibouti. It is also conceivable that the importance of the experience has faded as Andrew has transitioned into civilian life, enrolled in college, and navigated a number of other important transitions. While it is not possible to discern why he did not seem to be as affected by this potentially disorienting experience as other students with whom I spoke, it was obvious that the experience’s impact on him was less profound.

In light of the clear dichotomy between the role of disorienting experiences for those who increased in compassion and those who did not, their contribution to the



cultivation of compassion is unambiguous. This finding reinforces and complements the demonstrated positive correlation between compassion change and participation in an immersion trip, experiences designed purposefully to be disorienting for their participants.

While only one of the twelve students with whom I spoke and who did not increase in compassion described what could have been a disorienting experience, the vast majority did speak in similar terms about another aspect of their college experience. I now turn to that theme.

**Satisfied but not challenged.** One of the earliest and most influential student development theorists, Nevitt Sanford (1966), suggested that both challenge and support are necessary to foster students' growth. Without sufficient challenge, students may feel safe and satisfied but will not usually develop (Evans et al., 2010). Disorienting experiences are, by definition, challenging. The lack of these moments in the experience of those who did not increase in compassion was a significant finding. In addition to the absence of disorienting experiences, the comments of those students indicated an overall low level of challenge in their college experience; Matthew and Michael are particularly cogent examples of this dynamic.

The honors student planning to graduate in three years, Matthew, spoke at length about his love of reading literature as well as his daily routine of exercise, watching television, preparing and enjoying meals and "just casual activities." He mentioned that he was "writing a screenplay, just for fun." While he referenced spending time on homework, he did so only in passing and without conveying a sense that it required a significant amount of time or energy.

Matthew lives in an apartment at the beach, located just a few blocks from the ocean. In describing the decision-making process which led him to USD, Matthew spoke about “the quality of life” that comes from having “the ocean right down the street.” Through his extensive descriptions of his leisure activities, plans to graduate early, lack of engagement with his Business major, minimal campus involvement, and resistance to community service, Matthew’s life appears to be exceedingly comfortable and almost entirely without challenge. At no point in the more than sixty minute interview did he mention anything about his undergraduate experience that caused him significant stress or which required him to reconsider his assumptions about the world or his identity. In fact, when asked directly about a pivotal moment or crisis point in his college experience, Matthew was unable to offer anything from his own life, choosing instead to respond with the story of the death of a friend’s father.

The absence of challenge in Matthew’s description of his college experience was echoed in Michael’s experience. A Psychology major, Michael hopes to pursue a career as a Physical Therapist and currently serves as the President of the Pre Physical Therapy Club. He described his involvement in that organization, however, in a functional way; rather than articulating a sense of enjoyment or meaning from the club, his participation in it seemed to be motivated by concerns about his future career and a desire to bolster his resume. Beyond that one formal campus involvement and his participation in intramural sports, the vast majority of Michael’s time is dedicated to studying, exercise, surfing, and enjoying time with friends. He is clearly serious about his course work, dedicating time each day to his studies; in fact, he lived on the honors floor during his first year. But the activity he referenced the most is “working out.” He enthusiastically

described, in detail, his exercise routine, a program that stretches across every day of the week. On the weekends, in addition to exercising, Michael usually “goes to the beach to relax with friends.” Minimally involved on campus and having not participated in an immersion trip or community service, Michael nevertheless emphasized his satisfaction with his USD experience: “Right now I just want to enjoy the time that I have here... I really enjoy being here.” When asked if he has studied or plans to study abroad, Michael indicated that he is “a creature of habit” and prefers to remain in San Diego because “I’m really happy here.” In multiple ways and on multiple occasions, Michael stressed how satisfied he is with the way his life is arranged; he seemed intentional about not disturbing the enjoyable college experience he has established. Like Matthew, he appears to have constructed a college experience deliberately devoid of challenges.

This pattern of a low level of challenge was evident in several of the other students who did not demonstrate an increase in compassion. Like Michael, Leslie is also a serious student; she was one of her high school’s valedictorians and indicated that she continues to dedicate significant time week to her academic coursework. When she is not in class or getting ready for class, Leslie is usually engaged in an activity with her sorority. “We get together, do bonfires or, like, this week, we’re doing a pumpkin carving,” she told me.

Similar to Michael, Leslie was attracted to USD because of its location: “I’ve always grown up loving the beach. I love the weather. I just love the atmosphere.” When I asked a probing question to try to get a fuller sense of how she spends her free time, Leslie responded by saying, “I like working out. I like going to new places, like restaurants.” Much like Michael and Matthew, Leslie seemed very satisfied with her

USD experience, yet was unable to articulate any way, with the exception of her course work, in which her college experience has challenged her.

Jocelyn is an additional example of a student who did not increase in compassion and who did not appear to be challenged by her USD experience. After being modestly involved on campus during her first year but finding such involvement unsatisfactory, she has largely retreated from campus life, moving away geographically as well as emotionally. While Jocelyn spent three weeks studying abroad in Spain during her second year, she expressed great frustration with the structure of the program and her experience of it. She responded to my question about how she spends her time outside of class by mentioning “hanging out with friends” and “my boyfriend;” “sometimes we’ll go play soccer but, I’m not going to lie, I’m a huge fan of” television.

Similarly, Holly also talked about spending her free time by “catching up on television shows,” “doing crossword puzzles,” and “going to the gym a lot.” While she was studying abroad in Ireland when we spoke (via Skype), she has yet to participate in community service or an immersion trip, assume a leadership position or become a member in any other campus organizations – opportunities that typically present challenges and, therefore, opportunities to grow.

Ralph’s experience is analogous to the other students discussed in this section. In response to my question about how he spends his time when he’s not in class, he referenced “working out, going to the beach, and catching a movie.” During his first year on campus, he was marginally involved but, in his own words, “didn’t follow through” with any of those activities or organizations. While not a part of any official campus organizations, Ralph, nevertheless seemed to be enjoying his college experience greatly.

He spoke at length about the enjoyment he finds in spending time with his friends and his roommates in their off-campus apartment.

This pattern of low challenge but high satisfaction extended to the other students with whom I spoke who did not demonstrate an increase in compassion – with two exceptions. The first was Thomas, the member of the USD football team. In one sense, the more than 30 hours a week he dedicates to playing a college-level varsity sport presents a substantial challenge. As he described his university experience, however, it became clear that while football is time-consuming, it is also profoundly familiar and comfortable. The opportunity to continue with the sport is largely what led him to enroll at the university; his commitment to it has essentially foreclosed any other serious campus involvements. Moreover, his success and status as a starting player on the team has narrowed his focus to the extent that he described the most significant aspect of his college experience as selecting his Communication major. The choice of one's major field of study is, of course, important. It stands in striking contrast, however, with the challenges and disorienting experiences described by the students who did increase in compassion as the most defining aspects of their college experience.

The second exception to the pattern of high satisfaction and low challenge emerged from the first generation college students in my sample. As previously presented, their interviews offered ample evidence of challenge, primarily caused by financial concerns. The three first-generation college students who were most stressed by financial anxieties gave voice to a much lower level of satisfaction than students such as Matthew, Michael, and Leslie. Based on their interviews, it appears that their college experiences have been overloaded with challenge with insufficient levels of support.

This imbalance, although quite different from the other students I interviewed who did not increase in compassion, is nevertheless a disparity that disrupts the combination of support and challenge advocated by Sanford, as well as and countless theorists and practitioners since, as the best way to promote student development.

While the experience of the three first generation students differs from the others with whom I spoke, the commonality among the students who did not demonstrate an increase in compassion was clear: Each of these students reported a disparity between their level of challenge and support; this imbalance appeared to be related to their lack of development in compassion.

**Influence of peers.** The sixth noteworthy theme which distinguished the experience of those who demonstrated an increase in compassion from those who did not was the influence of peers. Specifically, many of the students who increased in compassion described the role that their friends and classmates have played in encouraging that development.

Table 4.23 summarizes some of those comments, and provides evidence that eight of the nine students who demonstrated an increase in compassion spoke about the positive influence of their peers. The comments of Michelle, Bill, and Jennifer were particularly striking. Michelle expressed admiration for her friend who dedicates time each work to volunteering at a downtown non-profit that provides food to the homeless. This friend's commitment to service has had an unequivocal influence on Michelle's college experience, encouraging her to find ways that she can incorporate such service and dedication in her own life. Michelle's reference to the "three hours" that her friend

spends going “out of her way” in order to volunteer points to the fact that Michelle feels as busy and pressed for time as most college students. Instead of relying on her full

**Table 4.23**

*Peer influences of those who increased in compassion*

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Michelle  | “My friend, . . . , she goes and does the, she hands out sandwiches to the homeless and I didn’t know about that and I just thought, ‘You know what? For you to go out of your way to do that for three hours is incredible.’”  |
| Bill      | “The thing that has made the biggest impact [on me] has been being able to get to know the people who have the same common goals and aspirations of helping those who need help...there is this group of us who would go do it [community service] which showed me that, you know, there was a lot of people who want to do good and so that was a great way to see that there’s a lot of people that want to see change, which is always great.”             |
| Jennifer  | “I’m close to my roommate now who actually went on Semester at Sea this Spring, so it’s kind of a lot easier for us to understand each other because it [Semester at Sea] changes you so much that you, like, you know, you’ve experienced things that other people don’t quite understand... My roommate from freshman year... she’s always reaching out to people... she’s influenced me to you know, continually kind of step outside of my comfort zone.” |
| Daniel    | “I have a few really close friends [at USD] but I came from a really close, tight-knit group of guys. Me and all my friends, like close, tight-knit group of friends, we were all really involved in the church back at home so that was – it kind of like holds us together still...   |
| Diana     | “All of us are very academically oriented and involved in too many activities, roles, events, etc. We lift each other up... We all understand each other and are very aware of oppression, poverty, and discrimination... Apart from my mother, my friends are my force and strength. I feel loved, respected, and understood around them...”   |
| Larry     | “My executive board [of a student organization]... my roommates, the way they’ve influenced me is that, well, they kind of shaped who I am. They’re influencing me in that they challenge me to actually grow.”   |
| Anna      | “My really close friends have been my roommates... and then there is a group of four boys that I hang out with. We play soccer... They’ve all been wonderful, so I’ve been really fortunate.”   |
| Elizabeth | “My roommate... we’re both from Arizona. My sophomore year, I was like kind of going with the crowd, partying and like stuff that probably wasn’t best and she just really helped me recognize that like it’s not all like about that – that’s not what college is about...”  |

schedule as an excuse for not doing service, however, Michelle draws inspiration from her friend to make volunteering a priority.

Bill described a similar phenomenon. One of the most extensively involved students with whom I spoke, Bill's response to my question about the aspects of his college experience that have been the most defining and important focused on the community of friends that surround him. That group includes "a lot of people who want to do a lot of good."

Jennifer's comments echoed and reinforced this theme. She spoke about finding understanding, support, and encouragement from her roommate who more recently completed her own voyage with Semester at Sea. The presence of this person in Jennifer's life has played an important role in keeping Jennifer connected to her disorienting experiences in Ghana, India, and Vietnam. All three of these students – Michelle, Bill, and Jennifer – articulated clearly the manner in which their peers had influenced them to be involved with the activities which fostered their development of compassion. While it is possible that they would have grown in compassion without the positive influence of their peers, the role of these friends in their lives was unmistakable.

To be sure, those students who did not demonstrate an increase in compassion do have friends and those friends seemed to be important to them. Table 4.24 presents their responses to my questions about their closest friends, the most influential people in their lives, as well as the influence of those friends and individuals.

While the vast majority of students who did not grow in compassion were able to speak with some depth about their close friends and the influence those individuals have had on their lives, sharp differences between their experience with friends and those who



Table 4.24

*Peer influences of those who did not increase in compassion*

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Leslie  | "My closest friends... three of them I met through the sorority. One of them I met on a campus tour here actually... I cheered [on the cheerleading squad] in high school and a couple other girls cheered in high school so we do have like things that we shared in common before we lived together... The one I consider my best friend... she's a good listener. She is funny. We have a lot of fun together. We have a lot of the same interests." |
| Ralph   | "My two best friends go here... we're all pretty easygoing, pretty friendly I guess and, like, I don't know. I've never thought about it this way I guess, but it's like we're different but we get along really well."   |
| Andrew  | "I'm the kind of person... I don't tend to let them make a lot of influence on me, whether it's at USD or otherwise my entire life, you know? So I don't really know how they would have influenced me."  |
| Mariann | "I'm not sure. Maybe just to be a good friend. I don't know."   |
| José    | "My closest friends here on campus are from SSS, Student Support Services... I've learned to be more open-minded... I pretty much opened up my mind to new cultures and their practices, their foods. Especially their foods."  |
| Rosibel | "... my roommate last semester... is kind of a reminder that everything happens for a reason so whatever happens to you now which probably sucks, it'll get better..."  |
| Jocelyn | "... well they both keep me more sane, as I think all good friends so, right?"  |
| Holly   | "I think we're all pretty similar and we can do something very simple and have the best time ever... helped me so I don't feel like I have to go put myself out there and do like kind of like party all the time... we're not afraid to be ourselves around each other.... I'm really happy that I've found you know, like five people who I really connect with and I feel like I can be myself no matter what."                                      |
| Matthew | "My roommate wasn't born in America. He was born in Bulgaria. He's given me more insight into different cultures... other friends, a lot of my friends are very motivated. They want to do well in life."   |
| Michael | "We all choose to do honors housing... we all just really like, you know, got along really well and had the same kind of work ethic... The three of us, we're very different but we're similar where it counts... four people living together where you don't have too many conflicts and, like I said, the work ethic is really a big part of it, I think."  |
| Thomas  | "I think they influence the other people that I meet... just always hanging out with them, common friends, stuff like that. I'd say they influence me in my study habits."  |

did increase in compassion emerged. Notably, the students who did not grow in compassion typically spoke of their friendships in less enthusiastic and more superficial terms. Jocelyn's comments about her friends helping to "keep her sane" and Ralph's response that "we're different but we get along really well" contrast with the descriptions provided by Daniel and Diana. Daniel reported that the influence of his "close-knit, tight group of friends" helps "hold him together." Likewise, Diana said of her peers: "I feel loved, respected, and understood around them." Thus, it appeared that the friendships enjoyed by Daniel and Diana were richer than those Jocelyn, Ralph, and others who did not grow in compassion reported and/or that Daniel, Diana, and others who did increase in compassion were able to appreciate and perceive the positive influence of their peers more so than those students who did not increase.

The stories of José and Larry offer a compelling example of this contrast. When José cited the influence of his peers in helping him develop a more open mind, he explained that openness by telling a story about trying Indian food for the first time. Larry, in contrast, spoke about his friends "influencing me in that they are challenging me to actually grow." While being introduced to new cuisine is good, it represents a significantly less profound influence than being challenged to grow. Mariann's comments were also striking in this regard. Her inability to articulate any way she has been influenced by her peers offered evidence that she may not have been as intensely influenced – or is not as aware of such influence – as some of the other students with whom I spoke.

Matthew's responses to my questions about peer influences were particularly salient. In commenting on how his closest friends have influenced him, he said, "A lot of

my friends are very motivated. They want to do well in life.” While he did not specify what he meant by *doing well*, he appeared to be speaking about material success. If this interpretation is accurate, the influence of his peers was dramatically different from those of Bill; while Bill’s peers encourage him to explore volunteering and affirm his desire to engage in community service, Matthew’s peers appear to exert pressure to achieve material success. This influence is consistent with Matthew’s choice of major – Business – despite his passions for reading and writing as well as his thinking about the future. Matthew’s friends appear to have limited his aspirations by endorsing customary cultural assumptions about success.

Thomas offered a final insight into the role of peer influences. In answering a question about how his friends have influenced him, Thomas offered, “They influence the other people that I meet.” This was a subtle but critically important finding. Students’ closest friends form a network of peers; in doing so, these individuals either expand or limit the possibilities for challenge. Students such as Matthew who are immersed in a network of peers who “want to do well in life” have drastically different college experiences than those like Bill who finds himself connected to people “who want to do a lot of good” and “want to see change.” Similarly, Larry’s friends have pushed him to grow while Ralph is connected to those with whom “he gets along with really well” and those with whom she “has a lot of fun with” surround Leslie. Larry’s friends present challenge to a substantially greater degree than those of Ralph and Leslie. Thus, the peer networks in which students are embedded reinforce and amplify many of the themes previously mentioned as key difference between those who demonstrated an increase in compassion and those who did not.

**Experiences of compassion.** The seventh and final theme that distinguished the experiences of those who grew in compassion from those who did not surfaced from their descriptions of moments when they had experienced compassion. Toward the end of my interviews – after investigating a range of issues related to their decision to attend USD, how they decided on their major, their campus involvements, their role models, and mentors and a number of other issues – I asked a series of questions explicitly focused on compassion. These queries included the students’ definition of the term, their opinions about aspects of USD that have helped or hindered their development of it, and an example of a time in their life when they felt compassion. While the students I interviewed offered a wide range of understandings of compassion (some of which were quite thoughtful and others of which were rather superficial) a clear distinction did not emerge between the definitions offered by those who increased in compassion and those who did not.

Some students who failed to demonstrate an increase in compassion provided very compelling definitions of the term, including definitions that aligned with the understanding of the construct that undergirds this research. Leslie, for example, described compassion as “feeling for others, understanding their situation in life, and then helping them with whatever they’re going through.” On the other hand, Jennifer (the student who demonstrated the greatest increase in compassion) defined compassion in these terms: “Reaching out to someone, showing that you care... actually showing that you want to get to know someone.” Thus, it appeared that compassion is much more than a cognitive construct. One can, like Leslie, understand what it is but not necessarily feel

it. Conversely, someone like Jennifer can experience it without understanding it or being able to articulate its core dynamics.

Rather than in their definitions of compassion, the students who demonstrated an increase in compassion differed from those who did not in their descriptions of moments in which they have experienced compassion. Table 4.25 offers a compilation of the responses by those who did not grow in compassion.

As evidenced in the table, six of the eleven students who did not increase in compassion struggled to remember and/or articulate a moment when they experienced it. Thomas, for example, said that he couldn't recall such an incident "off the top of my head," Ralph needed time to "try to think of a specific example," and Mariann, rather than offering an answer, responded by saying, "I don't know. What do you mean?"

In addition to those students who had difficulty composing a definition of compassion, several offered strikingly simple and superficial experiences. Holly, for example, spoke about feeling compassion when she made birthday cards for people and, as already mentioned, Matthew claimed to have experienced compassion when a friend bought him lunch on two occasions. Both of those examples miss the definition of compassion that guides this study; moreover, those descriptions seem to refer to experiences of a different construct, perhaps generosity or kindness.

A careful review of the responses offered by the students who did not demonstrate an increase in compassion also revealed that their responses were often vague. Michael, for example, talked about "anytime when, you know, when I see someone struggling with something or, you know, maybe they might be upset with something" but he did not specify any moment when this actually occurred.

**Table 4.25*****Experiences of compassion by those who did not increase***

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| Thomas  | "Not off the top of my head, not that I have right now. I'll try and think about that one."  |
| Ralph   | "I mean, I definitely have before. I'm trying to think of a specific example. Yeah, I mean, I guess the Meals on Wheels example. Like you go to these houses and you see these people in like really, really rough shape... I felt compassion towards those people, trying to help them out, brighten up their day a little bit I guess."  |
| Leslie  | "My friend... her father actually just passed away a couple months ago so it was kind of sudden and unexpected and I cancelled what I was doing. I flew back home over the weekend so I could be with her during this really rough time... I just wanted to be there and try to take her mind of the situation in any way I could."  |
| Andrew  | "I'm not sure... I think I can point back to my time in Africa. You know we did those English sessions... The entire bus ride home you're like 'Wow! That's, there's a lot more to life than just you know, what a lot of people think in their little shell, you know?'"  |
| Mariann | "I don't know. What do you mean?... I kind of feel like SSS [Student Support Services], we're kind of like a large family. I don't know how to explain it. You just like want to help each other out and like would go out of their way for one another."  |
| José    | "It's not something, it's not a word I personally connect with. It's not a word I personally go about trying to fulfill. You know when you're driving and you give money to the people standing on corners."   |
| Rosibel | "I can't give you like an exact scenario but I'm sure this has happened to me before where a situation happens and then I think one thing and then, ... I guess I could give you a scenario... my roommate has a very strained relationship with her mother..."  |
| Jocelyn | "I think it's part of the world, I mean, it's everyday actions, it's the text I got last night. It's... it's the fact that everyone is holding on to society. There wouldn't be a society if it weren't for compassion..."   |
| Holly   | "I think when I made birthday cards for people, when I make – anything that I write – I feel a lot of compassion when I write for people, whether it's an email or like I sent postcards or definitely a birthday card."   |
| Matthew | "At the end of last year I was out of dining dollars so I had a friend give me lunch like two times."  |
| Michael | "... anytime when, you know, when I see someone struggling with something or, you know, maybe they might be upset with something, just kind of going out of your way to comfort them or reach out to them because you appreciate who they are and just appreciate their existence... it's hard because you know, we're kind of sheltered in this and not just the college experience but in the USD experience." |

Similarly, José, after first stating that he doesn't identify with the word *compassion*, used as his example a moment of feeling compassion giving "money to the people standing on the corners" without describing a particular instance when he did so. Thus, a similar dynamic emerged for these students' descriptions of their experience of compassion as with their experience of community service. As they did when talking about community service, those who did not demonstrate an increase in compassion spoke generally and without the sort of specific details that would indicate the experience carried a profound impact. Even Andrew, who had the extended experience in Africa, described it in general, somewhat uncertain terms: "I think I can point back to my time in Africa. You know we did those English sessions... The entire bus ride home you're like, 'Wow! That's, there's a lot more to life than just you know, what a lot of people think in their little shell, you know?'" While this account indicates that Andrew's experience of the English sessions was significant, it is noteworthy that he did not refer specifically to any of the people he met or what he learned about them.

Two students who did not develop in compassion, Leslie and Rosibel, spoke about experiencing compassion for friends enduring family difficulties. For Leslie, it was a friend grieving the death of her father; for Rosibel, it was a friend's difficult relationship with her mother. While both incidents were surely painful for the friends involved, it is notable that they both are local examples. In other words, while Leslie and Rosibel were able to articulate examples of when they felt compassion, they did so by relying on personal experiences with close friends.

In contrast, the accounts offered by the students who did increase in compassion, presented in Table 4.26, included a greater level of detail and were often linked to

specific encounters with specific individuals, many of who were not friends or family members.

The enhanced specificity of these students' responses was especially apparent in the comments of Katie and Bill. Katie spoke about a particular high school teacher and of her grandmother while Bill referenced a specific individual he met while engaged in community service. Similarly, Elizabeth described a particular moment (the thank-you ceremony at the end of the year) as well as the emotions connected to it.

Overall, the responses offered by the students who did demonstrate an increase in compassion included more references to emotions. Katie described how she felt about her teacher and how she feels when she witnesses people, especially the elderly, being mistreated. Michelle spoke about her heartache as she listened to other people's difficulties and crying every year on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Even those who did not directly reference emotions, such as Anna, Elizabeth, and Jennifer, did speak in poignant terms. Anna, for example, talked about wanting to bring a "joyful touch" to the homeless individuals she serves. Elizabeth referred to the students' presentation of thank-you cards as "the cutest thing" which caused her to reflect on her role in their lives. The combination of specific, clearly remembered details and the emotions connected to particular moments seemed to be an important aspect of the descriptions of experiences of compassion offered by the students who demonstrated an increase.

Finally, the examples offered by those who did grow in compassion often include interactions with people beyond the students' circle of family and friends. In this regard, Michelle's response was especially striking. In her response to my question, she used language remarkably similar to one of the questions on the compassion survey



**Table 4.26*****Experiences of compassion by those who did increase***

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Katie     | “One of my teachers was arrested for drunk driving in a very public manner... I feel for him and I feel horrible for the pain he’s probably feeling right now ... I was very close to my grandmother so if I see someone making fun of old people and being rude, it literally kills me... seeing people in a vulnerable state, being teased or being pushed is something that’s really – it’s hard for me to handle... like, nursing homes, it gets me really worked up.” |
| Michelle  | “When I was in high school I went on a retreat and we would sit in a chair like this one, we called it the healing chair... I would hear stories of kinds who tried to overdose... I just felt for them so much and it just breaks my heart and I find myself crying... I cry every September 11 <sup>th</sup> because I just feel so bad for the families that were lost, the children that were lost. I tend to feel compassion for people I don’t even know.            |
| Anna      | “Every week when I go to the soup kitchen I really, you know, I really do want to help those people and be a part, if just for a moment, of their lives and somehow bring a joyful touch to their life.”   |
| Bill      | “Last year at Interfaith Shelter, I was serving a gentleman, a very nice guy, very relatable. I had a great conversation with him. He was asking about USD, about my major. I told him I was Pre-Med and she said, ‘So you spend a lot of time in Shiley Center?’ And I said, ‘How do you know about that?’ Turns out, he was one of the engineers who helped design the building... I wanted so badly to be able to change where he was.”                                 |
| Larry     | “I’ve given money to the homeless. I’ve done a lot of things. I’ve spent time with people just to get to know them.”   |
| Jennifer  | “When people have reached out to me, like when I’ve had different periods of struggling here, when things you know, haven’t been going the way I was expecting. I’ve had friends who are willing to sit and talk to me about it or help me whatever way is possible.”  |
| Elizabeth | “At the school, like the final day that I was there, they all wrote cards and thank you letters to me and each of them were like ‘I don’t know how I’m going to do math now...’ It was the cutest thing and it made me think maybe I really did show them compassion, really showed them that ... I cared.”  |
| Diana     | “It is an everyday phenomenon... I try to incorporate compassion and empathy into my daily life.”  |
| Daniel    | “I’ve definitely found that a lot through the community I had during the summers... it’s like a draining job that you definitely need other people to support you and definitely other people to be there for you and I think that goes for even when you’re not, you know, in a stressful situation.”   |

instrument: “I feel compassion for people I don’t even know.” Based on all of the interviews, feeling compassion for people one doesn’t know appeared to be a distinguishing characteristic between those who increased in compassion and those who did not.

### **Summary of Findings**

The seven themes that emerged from the qualitative portion of my research – campus involvement, community service experience, financial pressures, disorienting experiences, satisfied but not challenged, influence of peers, and experiences of compassion – complement and extend the findings from my quantitative research. These seven themes, present in various ways and to different degrees in the four in-depth student narratives offered at the beginning of this section, offer critically important data on what the students in my sample experience, understand, and say about their USD experience as well as their changes in compassion. In this way, these themes come together to round out the picture that emerged from my quantitative findings.

Altogether, this research has revealed that (1) as they begin their college experience, USD students are considerably compassionate; (2) a majority of these students do demonstrate change in their level of compassion across their first two undergraduate years, with half of my sample demonstrating an increase, 35% demonstrating a decrease, and 15% demonstrating no change in compassion; (3) these shifts in compassion are correlated with community service, immersion trips, community service learning, and membership in fraternities and sororities; and (4) among those interviewed, seven key themes account for the difference between the students’ who demonstrated an increase in compassion from those who did not.

Having addressed each of my four research questions, I now turn to a discussion of those findings before offering a set of implications for both additional research and practice.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

Despite the urgent need for sustained compassion in today's world and the massive amounts of research conducted on the impact of college on students, almost no empirical work has been done on whether undergraduate students grow in compassion during their time in college. This explanatory mixed methods study was designed to begin to address this lacuna, particularly the dearth of empirical evidence regarding whether or not those Catholic colleges and universities which claim the cultivation of compassion in their students as a primary purpose are accomplishing that goal. Toward that end, this study investigated whether University of San Diego students demonstrated change in compassion across their first two undergraduate years. The research questions which guided this study included: (1) To what extent are first-year University of San Diego students compassionate? (2) Do USD undergraduate students demonstrate change in their level of compassion during their first two years of study? (3) If so, to what extent can these changes be explained by select demographic characteristics (including sex, race/ethnicity, major, and type of high school attended) and various aspects of their campus experience? And (4) what do the students who demonstrate the most change in compassion say are the key personal characteristics and/or collegiate experiences that have motivated that change; how does their understanding or experience compare and contrast with the experience of students who do not grow in compassion?

The experience and perspective of more than 500 students was investigated using quantitative methods; based on those quantitative results, the experience of twenty students was considered in-depth using qualitative methods.

The findings to these research questions were explicated in detail in chapter four. After providing a brief summary of those findings here, I turn to a discussion of those findings, organized in two parts to address both the quantitative and the qualitative aspects of the study. I then offer several implications for further research and for enhanced practice, including a set of grounded hypotheses on how Catholic universities can best cultivate compassion in their students. I conclude this chapter and this work with an articulation of its limitations and significance as well as a closing assessment.

### **Summary of Findings**

As presented in chapter four, this research found that as they began their undergraduate experience, USD students were considerably compassionate. Their overall compassion average was 3.79 (out of 5.0) and an overwhelming majority was classified as either high or moderately compassionate; a mere 2% scored in the low compassion cohort.

Since narcissism can be conceived of as the inverse of compassion, it was investigated as a complementary way of assessing the construct. The overall narcissism average for those members of the USD class of 2014 who comprised my sample was 0.35, a figure indicative of a low level of narcissism. In a dynamic which mirrored average compassion scores, only 9% of the sample scored in the high narcissism group. Therefore, taken together, the results from the compassion and narcissism instruments offered robust evidence for the students' considerable level of compassion as they began their college experience.

In order to address my second research question – Do USD students demonstrate change in their level of compassion during their first two years? – I relied upon survey

responses from 198 of the original 515 students who agreed to take the survey for a second time at the conclusion of their sophomore year. By comparing their survey responses across time – the first completed during the first semester of their first year and the second at the end of their second year – I was able to consider their change in compassion during their first two undergraduate years. This investigation revealed that 50% of those students demonstrated an increase in compassion, 35% decreased in compassion, and 15% remained at the same level. The overall average change in compassion for these 198 students was an increase of 13%.

My third research question focused on the demographic characteristics and campus involvements associated with changes in students' compassion levels. A series of regression analyses conducted with the quantitative data revealed that changes in average compassion were associated with four campus experiences: community service, immersion trips, Greek life, and community service learning. Specifically, involvement with community service and immersion trips was positively associated with changes in average compassion while participation in Greek life and community service learning were negatively correlated with compassion change. None of the demographic variables were associated with compassion change in a statistically significant way.

Based on the results of the quantitative portion of this research, I purposefully selected twenty students to speak with in person. Those extended interviews allowed me to consider more deeply and naturally than was possible using quantitative instruments the experience of those who increased and those who decreased in compassion. Based on this qualitative research, seven key themes emerged as distinguishing those students who demonstrated an increase in compassion from those who did not: (1) campus involvement,

(2) community service experience, (3) financial pressures, (4) disorienting experiences, (5) satisfied but not challenged, (6) influence of peers, and (7) experiences of compassion. With this summary of the findings as context, I now turn to a discussion of those findings.

### **Discussion of Findings**

In order to unpack the results of this research, I divide this section into two parts. The first treats the quantitative portion of the study, while the second addresses the qualitative component.

#### **Quantitative Findings**

Through investigating the first three research questions with quantitative methods, a series of findings emerged. Having presented those findings in detail in chapter four, in this space I will discuss five aspects of those findings. These five aspects include: (1) change in compassion, (2) convergent validity, (3) the role of personal characteristics, (4) the role of campus involvements, and (5) participation rates in campus life.

**Change in compassion.** The fundamental question this study was designed to address was whether or not USD students demonstrate change in their level of compassion across their first two undergraduate years. Quantitative methods yielded a unequivocal answer to this question: the vast majority of students do change in compassion, although not all who change do so in the preferred direction. The percentage of students who demonstrated an increase in compassion was equal to the percentage that either decreased or remained the same.

This finding is one of the most significant to emerge from this research; it offers evidence that the university is accomplishing its mission of cultivating compassion in half

of its students. In light of the fact that USD students tend to be considerably compassionate before arriving to campus, this record is impressive. At the same time, the university appears to be failing to accomplish its mission of cultivating compassion in students half of the time. A 50% success rate might be considered acceptable for an ancillary goal. If the cultivation of compassion is truly a part of the university's mission, however, a 50% success rate appears less adequate. Few universities would be satisfied with only half of their graduates demonstrating improvement in critical thinking or communication skills. If the cultivation of compassion in all students is a central objective of the University of San Diego, this research suggests that the institution has both a proven record of success as well as substantial room for improvement.

**Convergent validity.** The establishment of a clear and definitive negative correlation between compassion and narcissism was a second important result of this research. Such an inverse relationship had been suggested by the literature (Watson et. al, 1984) but had yet to be unequivocally established. Based on my data, the negative correlation between the two constructs was both strong and clearly statistically significant (with a coefficient of -0.59 and a significance level of  $p < .001$ ).

In addition to establishing further this inverse relationship, this research adds to the validity of the compassion instrument employed therein. In light of the negative association between narcissism and compassion, the average narcissism scores of the students in my sample offer additional evidence that the compassion instrument is effective in assessing compassion. This validation suggests that the parsimonious compassion survey developed by Plante and his colleagues (2009) could be used productively in a range of other contexts, including as part of institution-wide surveys



required of entering or graduating students. Such usage could dramatically expand the extant empirical knowledge of the effectiveness of various institutions in cultivating compassion.

**Personal characteristics.** Based on the wealth of research documenting differences in college experiences and outcomes between female and male students (Davis, 2002; Davis & Wagner, 2005; Harper, Harris III, & Mmeje, 2005; Kellom, 2004; Lipka, 2010; Ludeman, 2004; Sax, 2007, 2009) it was not surprising that this study pointed to the unambiguous impact of gender on the development of compassion. This work reinforced and extended much of the existing research by demonstrating that the women in my sample were consistently more compassionate than their male counterparts. On both occasions when the survey was administered, gender was associated in a statistically significant way with average compassion. More specifically, as they began their college experience, female USD students were 5.5% more compassionate than their male classmates; at the end of their sophomore year, the USD women in my sample were 11% more compassionate than the USD men. Thus, the differences in compassion levels, significant at the start of college, became more pronounced during the first two undergraduate years. This troubling finding will be addressed again as a part of the implications for both further research and practice.

Beyond gender, the only demographic variables that were significantly associated with students' compassion scores were those related to race and ethnicity. In regression analyses conducted on the first round survey data, students who self-identified as Native American were measured to be substantially less compassionate than their White classmates. This surprising finding merits further consideration. The small number of

Native American students in my sample – 2, a mere 0.4% – may have affected, at least in part, this correlation. It is also possible that the five questions addressing compassion suffer from a subtle cultural bias that articulates compassion from the perspective of privilege rather than that of a traditionally underrepresented and often underserved population. In other words, those who identify as Native American may understand compassion differently than those who composed the definition of the term which undergirds this research.

Finally, it is also possible that as they began college, the two Native American students in my sample were motivated differently than other students. It could be the case that their life experiences led them to view their college education as an opportunity to advance their prospects of material success for themselves, their families, and their communities. Such an orientation could explain their lower scores on the compassion instrument which probed students' concern for others, even at their own expense.

A second negative correlation between average compassion score and a race/ethnicity variable emerged from the regression analyses conducted to investigate the demographic and campus involvement variables associated with changes in average compassion scores. In the unrefined model, which included every demographic and campus involvement variable, the Hispanic/Latino race/ethnicity variable was significant at the  $p < .05$  level. More specifically, Hispanic/Latino students demonstrated an 8% decrease in compassion relative to their White classmates. While the significance of this correlation disappeared in the refined model (which included only the six statistically significant variables), it may nevertheless indicate a noteworthy, if indefinite, finding.

The experience of the 25 students who self-identified as Hispanic/Latino and who completed both rounds of the survey may resemble, to varying degrees, the perspective of the four first-generation college students I interviewed – all of whom identified as Hispanic or Latino. Each of those students spoke about the role of financial pressures in their lives and the manner in which those pressures shaped their attention and ambitions. It is plausible that this quantitative finding is connected to the qualitative finding best expressed by José when he spoke of not being able to “afford” to do community service. The negative correlation between the Hispanic/Latino variable and change in average compassion (an association not present at the start of their undergraduate experience), may suggest that something about those students’ time at USD – perhaps the experience of being immersed in a campus culture that often feels remarkably privileged – moves them to be less likely to grow in compassion. Conceivably, their first two years left them with the impression that, if they were to keep up with and achieve the level of material success they see represented in the life of their peers, they need to be focused on their own achievements. Much like the findings related to gender and Native American race/ethnicity, this result deserves additional study.

An additional variable related to personal characteristics which deserves mention was that related to intended major and/or actual major. While one may have reasonably suspected a correlation between students’ major field of study and compassion level, the quantitative data – by and large – did not support such conjecture. In the first round data, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between those students who indicated their intended major as Engineering and their average compassion score. Specifically, those who intended to major in Engineering were 4.3% less compassionate

than their classmates. This correlation did not appear in the second round data or in the analysis of change in average compassion.

Nevertheless, it may indicate that students who arrived to the university intending to major in Engineering were different from their peers; they may have been attracted to the technical orientation of that field or more interested in the often high paying jobs it can offer. It is possible that this correlation faded over the first two years due in part to the traditionally high number of students who find Engineering classes so challenging that they switch majors, or because their initial desires were informed by their overall college experience. Regardless, it is unquestionably notable that variables measuring other intended majors or actual majors were not significantly correlated, either positively or negatively, with compassion.

In a similar manner, at no point in time in this research did a statistically significant correlation exist between compassion and type of high school attended. Since some Catholic and other religiously affiliated high schools have mission statements that refer to the promotion of compassion and other, related goals, this was a moderately surprising finding.

**Campus involvements.** In the second round survey, I asked students to indicate whether they had participated in various aspects of campus life. These data allowed me to investigate potential connections between student involvement and their changes in average compassion. As previously stated, four activities were associated with such change – community service and immersion trips were positively correlated with compassion change and Greek life and community service-learning were negatively correlated with compassion change. Given the definition of compassion which guided

this study – “being moved by the suffering of another, and desiring to help” (Goetz et al., 2010, p. 351; Lazarus, 1991, p. 289) – it was not surprising that community service and immersion trips were positively correlated with growth in compassion. Both of these activities intentionally bring students into contact with people who are suffering and usually incorporate reflection on the experience. Given that structure, the stimulation of compassion is a relatively intuitive result.

In contrast, the negative correlation between community service-learning and change in average compassion was quite unexpected. This research suggests that requiring students to spend time in the community as a part of one or more of their classes may be counterproductive. While my data does not offer explanations into why this was the case, it could be that students, on the whole, experience a CSL requirement as one more task to accomplish in their already very busy lives and therefore fulfill their community service-learning requirements in a dutiful way without much, if any, personal investment. This mechanical approach of obligation fulfillment likely differs substantially from the experience of those students who voluntarily seek out and make community service a priority. The surprising nature of this finding, as well as the manner in which it challenges some of the existing research on the impact of CSL (Bernacki & Jaeger, 2008; Jones & Abes, 2004; Jones & Hill, 2001), deserves additional attention – consideration which will be provided below in the section on implications for further research.

In contrast, the statistically significant negative correlation between membership in Greek organizations and change in average compassion was not unexpected. Many students are attracted to fraternities and sororities because of the social opportunities

which they offer and facilitate. To be certain, membership in such organizations does not cause students to be less likely to grow in compassion; the extensive commitment required to be a part of them, however, likely complicates or forecloses students' involvements in aspects of campus life that do promote compassion. Of course, there are significant differences between individual fraternities and sororities. It could, therefore, be worthwhile to investigate whether the students who belong to certain chapters are more likely to grow in compassion than those who belong to other groups. At the aggregate level, however, my data is clear: those involved with Greek life at USD decreased in compassion by 4.5% compared to their peers who are not members of fraternities or sororities.

**Participation rates.** As an unintended result of tracking students' involvement in a campus life, my research offered a glimpse into the frequency with which USD student participate in a variety of activities. Among the activities that I investigated, the largest percentage of students (44%) had participated in community service. Other relatively prevalent activities included leadership positions such as Resident Assistant or Preceptorial Assistant (40%), Greek life (31%), community service-learning (28%) immersion trips (28%), and study abroad (23%).

Among the participation rates I reviewed, the one which surprised me most was community service. I did not expect to discover that less than half of the students in my sample had participated in community service during their first two years at USD. This finding was unexpected due to the significant number of campus departments, offices, and organizations designed to facilitate community service opportunities, the way in which community service is often highlighted as a distinguishing characteristic of the

university, and because of the positive manner in which so many students speak about their service experience. I suspect the lower than expected rate is in large measure driven by the challenging nature of USD courses and the fullness of students' schedules. While it is appropriate for students to prioritize academic work ahead of community service, I question whether students truly do not have time to volunteer or whether they simply choose to focus on other co-curricular activities, social events, and/or recreation. While my data does not provide any indications of reasons for the 44% participation rate in community service, that rate may indicate that many USD students talk about community service more than they actually practice it.

Having reviewed these five aspects of the quantitative findings, I now pivot to address the findings which emerged from the qualitative portion of my research.

### **Qualitative Findings**

In order to explore my fourth research question – What do the students who demonstrate the most change in compassion say are the key personal characteristics and/or collegiate experiences that have motivated that change? – I conducted in-depth interviews with twenty students. Having presented the detailed results of those interviews in chapter four, I now offer a discussion of those results in two movements. In the first, I reflect on the qualitative findings which echoed those of the quantitative portion of this study; in the second movement, I unpack the qualitative findings which extend the quantitative findings by providing additional insight.

**Echo of quantitative findings.** As highlighted in chapter four, among the students interviewed, those who increased in compassion differed from those who did not

in terms of their community service experience, their endurance of disorienting dilemmas, and their overall level of campus involvement. These qualitative findings – especially the importance of community service and disorienting experiences – resonated with and reinforced the statistically significant correlations established between community service, immersion trips, and compassion change. Similarly, the quantitative finding of a negative correlation between Greek life and compassion change provided additional support for the important role of disorienting experiences, the opportunity for which is often limited by the extensive commitments required by membership in a fraternity or sorority.

The comments of students such as Bill, Anna, Daniel, and Michelle illustrate and support the correlation between change in average compassion and community service. Each of those three students spoke in detail and at length about their service experiences and about how they have incorporated those experiences into their meaning making process. Similarly, the positive relationship between disorienting experiences – such as immersion trips or certain types of study abroad – and compassion change was illuminated through the experiences of Jennifer, Diana, and Larry. Jennifer, in particular, spoke with both eloquence and passion as she described her transformative experiences in Ghana, India, and Vietnam. Larry's comments revealed that disorienting experiences that take place on campus can be equally as significant as those which occur around the world.

In contrast, the collegiate experience of those students who did not develop in compassion could be characterized as satisfying but not challenging. The accounts provided by Matthew, Michael, and Leslie offered examples of such configurations. Each of these three students emphasized their satisfaction with their USD experience but



did not articulate any aspect of that experience which has required them to overcome a serious challenge. By intentionally structuring their college life to maximize satisfaction and minimize challenge these students have inadvertently limited opportunities for their fullest development.

The quantitative finding of a negative correlation between participation in community service-learning and compassion change was not explicitly echoed in the qualitative results. When the students I interviewed spoke about their community service experience it was not always clear if they were referring to voluntary service activities or CSL requirements, or a mix of both. Among the students who spoke most compellingly about the impact of their community service experience, however, (students such as Bill, Anna, Elizabeth, and Daniel) it was evident that they were referring to voluntary community service projects. In this way, at least, the interview data did echo the survey data: voluntary community service is associated with increases in compassion.

One final area of convergence between the quantitative and qualitative portions of this research concerns race and ethnicity. The intersection of the two facets of this research suggest that race and ethnicity may serve as proxies for (or be inherently intertwined with) socio-economic status. The comments of José, Mariann, Rosibel, and Diana – the four first-generation college students I interviewed – offer support to the hypotheses I offered above regarding the way in which students who identify as Hispanic or Latino face greater financial pressures and experience the USD campus differently than the White students in my sample with whom I spoke. It would not be surprising for students struggling with financial stress, including the dissonance caused by being immersed in a privileged campus environment, to demonstrate lower compassion or

compassion change scores. Dynamics such as these likely played a role in the two regression models that indicated negative correlations between students who identified as Native American and Hispanic/Latino and compassion.

In the qualitative results, as was the case with the quantitative results, the pivotal role of disorientation or disequilibrium is unmistakable. The larger importance of the concept is evident by the consistency with which it surfaces in the student development literature – Erickson (1959/1980) wrote of “crises,” Kegan (1982) thought in terms of “truces,” Pizzolato (2005) used the term “provocative moments,” and Merizow (1999) imagined “disorientating dilemmas.” In the absence of such key moments, students such as Matthew, Michael, and Leslie appear to be missing out on the potential depth and power of the university experience. Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study suggest that universities which aspire to cultivate compassion in their students can likely do so by leveraging and expanding the influence of disorienting experiences. Moreover, colleges and universities which strive to cultivate compassion ought to be wary of uncritically adopting an overly customer-service orientation which marginalizes and/or minimizes their ability to challenge students most significantly.

**Extend quantitative findings.** While several of the key themes which emerged from the student interviews echoed and confirmed the quantitative results of this research, other qualitative findings extended the quantitative results by offering additional insight. Specifically, the interviews provided evidence of the important role of on-campus mentors, family influences, and campus culture.

Among the twenty students I interviewed, 17 named family members as their greatest mentor and/or role model. The consistency of this finding was remarkable.

Without being prodded, only two students offered the name of an individual employed by the university; even when I followed up with a question about an on-campus mentor or role model, only four students provided the name or description of a particular person. (It was noteworthy that all four of these students were among those who demonstrated an increase in compassion.) This very clear lack of university mentors and role models was a surprising, and important, finding. Like many medium size, liberal arts, Catholic universities, USD strives to provide students with a high degree of individualized attention. Based on the responses of the students I interviewed, however, the university appears to be falling short of facilitating in-depth, personal connections between students and faculty or staff.

This lack of on-campus mentors and role models may be related to my strong impression that several of the students shared with me experiences, ideas, and questions that they had only rarely, if at all, discussed with their peers or anyone else. Matthew, for example, shared his observations of and interactions with homeless individuals at the beach near his apartment in a way that led me to believe that he had not discussed the issue with anyone else. Similarly, he talked at length about the “existential questions” he explores through his reading, but he failed to name any interlocutors with whom he explores those questions. José also reflected at length about his encounters with homeless individuals, especially at street corners, and his uncertainty about how to respond. Elizabeth described in poignant terms the tension she experiences in striving to please her parents (especially her father) while also being true to her own desires. Matthew, José, and Elizabeth were particular cases, but the overall impression was unequivocal. Many of the students with whom I spoke seemed to have few opportunities

to reflect on their college experience or their desires for the future with on-campus mentors or role models.

One exception to this pattern was Daniel (who demonstrated an increase in compassion). Daniel spoke at length about his relationship with, respect for, and influence of his professors in the Chemistry department. At the beginning of the interview, in response to a general question about his campus experience, Daniel shared that he does a significant amount of research in the Chemistry department. He described his work with a particular Chemistry professor by saying, “It’s just like me and him in the lab. I get like one-on-one experience.” Later in the interview, Daniel’s first response to my question about the mentors and role models in his life was “my dad.” When I asked about people on campus, however, he immediately and passionately spoke about the professor with whom he does research as well as a second professor he has had in class. It was obvious that Daniel has benefited from his extensive relationships with his professors, and that he was aware of being influenced in this way.

The striking absence of on-campus mentors and role models for most of the students in my sample suggests that USD could better serve its students by becoming more of a mentoring community (Parks, 2000). The “network of belonging” (Parks, 2000, p. 135) that such communities provide have the potential to encourage students’ exploration of life’s big questions, the questions Matthew seemed to be wrestling with on his own and with which Daniel seems to be receiving great guidance. Without trusted campus conversation partners, many of the students I interviewed seemed to be missing out on opportunities to use their imagination in exploring the big questions that will shape their future, especially questions of meaning, purpose, and faith (Parks, 2000, p. 138).

The finding that the students with whom I spoke are firmly connected to their families was not surprising. The ubiquity of cell phones, text messages, and internet access make frequent communication easy and inexpensive. There may be, however, a significant disadvantage to this dynamic. While the vast majority of parents desire what is best for their children, their concerns about prospects for future employment and material well-being may exert a substantial pressure toward an exclusively pragmatic orientation. This pressure, potentially felt daily (or even multiple times each day), may impede students' ability to hear and respond to their own deep desires, to engage their imagination about what kind of life they want to live, and to take responsibility for navigating a path consistent with their desires as well as attentive to the realities of the marketplace. Without at least one person on campus with whom they can talk honestly, students may struggle to make sense of their university experience as fully as they otherwise might. Without at least one person on campus with whom they can reflect and make meaning of their college experience, the loving but pragmatic voices of parents – and the influence of the marketplace – can drown out students' deepest desires and highest aspirations.

The critical importance of students' peers was a third critical finding that emerged from the qualitative portion of the study and which extended the quantitative findings. The important role of a students' peers was best articulated by Thomas in his statement "They influence the other people I meet." In other words, a student's friends comprise a network which surrounds that student and powerfully shapes her or his university experience. That network functions as a delivery mechanism for a particular culture, defined by Clifford Geertz (1973) as "a pattern of meanings embodied in symbols"

through which students come to develop their “knowledge and attitudes toward life” (p. 89). While faculty and administrators often speak about and attempt to influence campus culture, the remarks of the students in my sample suggest that cultures are constructed by the individuals by whom they are surrounded. Thus, students are likely to adopt the attitudes shared and communicated by their peers about all aspects of campus life, including community service, immersion trips, Greek life, and the development of compassion.

Since the growth of compassion is counter-cultural, the insight that students are shaped by and respond to the cultures they construct (often unintentionally and unknowingly) as much as by the culture the university faculty and administration attempt to construct is especially important. For the 18 years prior to arriving to campus, students receive a steady stream of powerful messages through popular culture that fulfillment lies in achieving material success and that the purpose of life is to enjoy it. Likewise, during high school and college students receive a steady stream of powerful messages that the benefit of attending college in Southern California is the access to the beach and all of the pleasures associated with it. The university’s desire to educate leaders dedicated to compassionate service directly contradicts those messages. Therefore, peers are needed to communicate the importance and value of compassion so that it can become a part of the “knowledge and attitudes” communicated by campus cultures. The students in my sample who demonstrated growth in compassion appeared to be influenced by their peers in this way. Universities which seek to cultivate compassion in their students, therefore, need to enlist the help of students to do so, amplifying and leveraging their ability to communicate with their peers about the importance and value of that goal.

While some aspects of the qualitative findings echo the quantitative findings, and other aspects of the qualitative findings extend the quantitative findings, it was noteworthy that none of the qualitative results contradicted the quantitative results. This consistency offers additional evidence for the robustness of both the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Having discussed both the quantitative and qualitative findings, I now present a series of implications for further study and enhanced practice.

### **Implications for Further Research**

The most direct implication for additional research is the continued study of the students in my sample as they approach graduation in the spring of 2014. Since the data I have analyzed was collected when the participating students were half-way through their college experience, it would be instructive to reassess their compassion levels as they near the conclusion of their USD education.

It would also be useful to track these individuals beyond commencement, striving to assess how they do or do not demonstrate compassion as they begin and continue to negotiate adult responsibilities. Such a longitudinal approach would allow insight into the durability of the compassion changes measured by this study as well as the potential impact of compassion levels on decisions related to family, career, civic engagement, and a range of other important dimensions of adult development.

It would also be beneficial to repeat this research with other USD class cohorts. By gathering data from representative samples of other graduating class years, the quantitative findings which emerged from this study – especially that the class of 2014 was considerably compassionate when they began college and that 50% of those students

increased in compassion – would become more meaningful. Collecting data from subsequent classes would allow comparisons to be made across time, yielding insight into if and how widely compassion levels of USD classes fluctuate.

Similarly, it would be beneficial to replicate this research at other Catholic colleges and universities as well as at public institutions. Doing so would likely produce valuable knowledge as to how different types of universities attract different kinds of students as well as offer directions for future research into which institutions are most effective at cultivating compassion. These data would enable more helpful comparisons to be made than are currently possible with the findings from only one class year at one university.

An intensive, more granular understanding of the function and impact of community-service learning experiences is a fourth direction for further research. Different arrangements of CSL, especially placing students at a variety of community agencies, could be studied fruitfully to determine which placements have positive impacts on students and which tend to lead students toward obligation fulfillment. Specific faculty members in certain disciplines may be more effective in incorporating CSL into their courses in ways that foster compassion. In order to assess these potential variations, additional research should be done on a large and representative sample of students participating in community service-learning.

Additional research is also needed on gender differences in the development of compassion. In light of the findings of this study that USD women were more compassionate (at least as the term was defined operationally by the instrument utilized) than their male counterparts when they began college and that that variance increased



during the first two undergraduate years, gaining insight into the interventions which are effective in fostering compassion in male students would be incredibly beneficial. It is plausible that the activities and opportunities currently available – including community service and immersion trips – do not appeal to or engage male college students at the same level and in the same way as female college students. Alternatively, it could be that the types of service and locations of the trips could be adjusted to better attract and engage male students. College men may also benefit from different formats and means of reflecting on and making meaning of their experiences. These and other studies specifically focused on gender differences are necessary to address the gender gap in compassion which this research documented.

Finally, more research is necessary in order to better understand if and how race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status impact the development of compassion. The efficacy of the compassion instrument used in this study should be assessed to determine if it adequately measures compassion in those who identify as People of Color and/or who identify as members of lower socio-economic class backgrounds. Targeted research efforts with samples that include majorities of students of color, for example, could offer important insights into whether those students understand compassion differently than the students who typically comprise research samples at private, Catholic colleges and universities.

### **Implications for Practice**

The importance of campus involvement signals the need to identify ways of more fully engaging a greater proportion of students in the life of the campus during their first year of study. The comments of the students I interviewed revealed a clear dynamic: if

students are not connected to campus life during their first year, it is possible they will drift away, with less and less connection to the university beyond what is necessary for graduation. Moving off-campus for sophomore year is often the first step in a gradual but steady withdrawal from campus life, a movement frequently followed by a semester or more studying abroad, off-campus internships, and – at least by the start of senior year – a focus on the job search or graduate school application processes. Students not engaged in the life of the university early in their first year are also more likely to be dissatisfied and consider transferring to another institution. Thus, USD and similar universities ought to continue to explore and implement best practices of facilitating students' connection to specific individuals on campus – faculty, administrators, and student leaders – who can guide them to the campus activities in which they are most interested and through which they will be most likely to develop to the fullest.

A second implication for enhanced practice is for faculty who incorporate community service learning in their courses to experiment with arrangements that provide students with options and thereby increase their opportunities to select the placements in which they are most interested. By asking students to select from a menu of community engagement opportunities, faculty may be able to foster a connection between students and the populations and agencies in which they are most interested. This practice would potentially avoid the creation of resentment in students at having to take on an additional requirement or the perception that CSL is simply one more requirement to check off.

Based on the results of this study – and of the overwhelming evidence in the student development literature – greater attention to male students is warranted. Specific

programs to engage college men in community service or immersion trips, for example, should be created. The details of these programs ought to be informed by additional research into how best to connect with college men. Ideally, faculty and administrators should be given release time to focus on the creation of such programs; some individual or group should be focused on the importance of gender differences on an ongoing basis rather than merely when other duties permit. This person or group could convene larger gatherings in which members of the university community learn from one another about the most promising practices for enhancing the success and fullest possible development of male students.

A fourth implication for enhanced practice is to continue the process of reimagining and restructuring study abroad which has begun at USD and many other colleges and universities. This emerging reformation should include more opportunities for disorientating experiences. Jennifer's experiences in Ghana, India, and Vietnam through her Semester at Sea voyage were clearly transformational; her experience contrasts sharply with the traditional study abroad experience of studying in industrialized countries, usually in Europe, and remaining almost entirely in the role of tourist. More experiences in the developing world that provide students with the opportunity to see, feel, and experience radically new perspectives would foster more students having experiences similar in their educational effectiveness to Jennifer's.

Fifth, colleges and universities would benefit from intentionally relying on student leaders to shape and communicate campus culture. By selecting, forming, and motivating students to communicate to their peers – in their argot and via their preferred media – the importance of compassion, institutions of higher education will maximize

their chances of success in constructing cultures which value the growth of compassion in their students.

Sixth, colleges and universities which claim the cultivation of compassion as a part of their mission should dedicate additional resources to community service and immersion trips. The data in this study unequivocally indicates that those two activities are most strongly associated with the development of compassion. Community service and immersion trips, however, present issues related to scale; the quality of any one experience is compromised when it grows too large. The most effective experiences often involve relatively small groups which facilitate each participant's personal investment. Thus, rather than creating large-scale, standardized experiences, universities should instead invest the resources necessary (including additional staff as well as additional programmatic opportunities) so that more students can choose to participate in attractive, meaningful, and transformative community engagement experiences.

Finally, USD (and institutions like it) should explicitly incorporate the measurement of compassion into regular, ongoing assessment efforts. The surveys that students are required to take as they begin college and as they graduate ought to include some instrument that measures compassion. The likelihood of any institution achieving the goal of cultivating compassion will be dramatically enhanced if data is widely available regarding how it is progressing on this important outcome. Rather than continuing the current practice of hoping for the best, a "mission scorecard" could be created that would consist of information summarizing student scores on measures related to each of the institution's core values. Such a scorecard would also serve to

situate the development of compassion in the context of the other key components of the university's mission.

Monitoring the development of compassion in students could also assist USD (and institutions like it) to articulate, maintain, and enhance its Catholic identity. A number of scholars have argued persuasively that the ultimate criterion of a university's Catholicity is the quality of students it graduates (Kolvenbach, 2008; McCormick, 1994). Thus, rather than remaining trapped by the inevitable controversies emerging from the tensions associated with the pursuit of truth, Catholic colleges and universities might instead focus their energy, resources, and attention on the personal development of students in a truly distinctive and counter-cultural manner. This focus ought to include the provision of abundant opportunities for each student to develop to her or his fullest, not merely cognitively but holistically, as well as a robust effort to graduate compassionate individuals ready and willing to exercise leadership in order to address our world's most pressing challenges.

### **Limitations**

Despite the clarity and relevance of this study's findings, this research does suffer from several limitations. First among these is that the results of this research are limited to the USD class of 2014. This study of the USD class of 2014 cannot serve as the basis for inferences regarding all USD students or graduates. While the class of 2014 was similar in composition to other USD cohorts, it is plausible that some meaningful differences exist, especially between the class of the 2014 and those in the distant past or future. Moreover, my findings are not generalizable to college students in general or to

students at other university campuses. Because USD attracts certain kinds of students, those selection effects have inevitably influenced my sample and constrain my findings.

Similarly, selection effects also potentially influenced this research at three other moments and in three other ways. First, when I initially requested to visit the classrooms of the preceptor faculty members, those who accepted my request may have been more compassionate or more interested in compassion than those who did not. Although I visited the classrooms early in the semester, presumably before the faculty members would have been able to communicate their endorsement of compassion, those potential differences in the faculty members may have subtly biased the students in my sample. Second, and more problematically, in the spring of their sophomore year I sent an email request to the 515 students who completed the survey two years prior. The 198 students who completed the survey for a second time are likely different from those who chose not to do so. The third and final way in which selection effects may have biased this research is that the students who accepted my request to be interviewed may be different in meaningful ways that those who did not.

A third limitation of this research is that, since this is not a classic experimental design, I am only able to suggest correlations and associations between particular aspects of a student's collegiate experience and changes in her or his level of compassion. I am not able to establish any cause and effect relationships. In other words, I cannot claim that participation in community service or immersion trips caused an increase in compassion. I can only suggest that participation in such activities was clearly and significantly associated with such change. It may be the case, however, that the association has more to do with compassionate people being attracted to immersion trips

and community service activities than such experiences causing people to become more compassionate.

Fourth, my study depended on self-reported information. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were generated by what students said – in either written or oral form – rather than what they did or what others said about them. It is likely that, at least to some degree, the responses offered reflected the students' aspirations and self-concepts more than their actual behavior.

Fifth, my study has been influenced to an unknown degree by social desirability effects. For many students, the questions on the surveys and in the interviews intimated a preferred answer. It is likely that some percentage of the students were influenced to an indeterminable degree by a desire to provide the socially acceptable response.

Similarly, the results of my research may be biased by my professional role on campus. It is possible that the students who responded to my request to take the second round survey did so because they recognized my name. It is also possible that the students who responded to my request for an in-depth interview were influenced by their knowledge of me or of my role. More generally, it is possible that the students' responses, both on the survey and in the qualitative interviews, were subtly influenced by their willingness and ability to provide candid responses to someone in an official position at the university.

Finally, my results are partial; all of the students in my sample were only halfway through their college experience at the time of this research. My ultimate interest is in how the standard four years of college impacts the development of compassion. In addition, shifts in compassion may require even more time than the traditional four years

of college to take hold; experiences during college may lead to changes in compassion years later. This study, then, is only a first step. It provides preliminary data for further study and comparison.

### **Significance**

Despite these limitations, this research study contributes to our understanding of how undergraduate students change during their first two years on campus. For the past forty years, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) has documented a tremendous amount of information about American undergraduate students. As a result, we know a great deal about how students' study habits, social lives, political affiliations, and attitudes on a wide range of issues change during college. Only recently, however, has the HERI research begun to address ineffable outcomes such as spiritual beliefs, values, and compassion. This lack of empirical data is present throughout the student development, spirituality-in-education, and community service-learning literatures. Therefore, this research complements and extends the excellent work already done by focusing on a heretofore under-examined construct – compassion.

This study also provided insight into *how* students are encouraged to grow in compassion, what programs and activities provided that encouragement, and which seemed to impede such development. Moreover, it presented students' campus experience, in their own words, including their reflections on what aspects of campus life encouraged and complicated their growth in compassion. Finally, this research study has led to an enhanced understanding of how the University of San Diego, and perhaps



universities similar to it, might structure their co-curricular offerings in order to better meet their goal of cultivating compassion.

### **Closing**

Jennifer's story is the story of what is possible for Catholic colleges and Universities – and, for that matter, all colleges and universities that wish to promote the development of compassion. In her words, Semester at Sea “broadened my horizons because it showed me the whole world.” Such a transformation of horizons so as to include the entirety of the world's reality is at the heart of what a university – especially a Catholic university – ought to accomplish. Whether the result of study abroad, community service, immersion trips, classroom learning, on-campus programs, or some other aspect of university life, Catholic higher education should offer abundant opportunities for students to experience the same sort of profound change that Jennifer described.

While in Ghana, Jennifer was surprised and delighted to be invited to a home cooked meal. During her time in India, she received an unexpected, heart-felt gift. And in Vietnam, she met people who were “so giving and loving... people who have next to nothing but have joy on their faces.” These three experiences appear to have motivated her dramatic increase in compassion, and to have led her to a new awareness of her relationship with others around the world.

Boyle (2010) wrote, “Compassion is always, at its most authentic, about a shift from the cramped world of self-preoccupation into a more expansive place of fellowship, of true kinship” (p. 77). Jennifer experienced such a shift. Through her interactions in Ghana, India, and Vietnam, Jennifer has entered a more expansive way of living

characterized by fellowship, kinship, and solidarity. In this way, Jennifer serves as a model for what is possible.

The cultivation of compassion – the feeling of being moved by the suffering of others and desiring to help – has the potential to address the suffering which defines the lives of so many around the world. Catholic colleges and universities have recognized the opportunity to promote this sense of solidarity and compassion in their students and thereby better connect the education they offer with the reality of today's interconnected world. Many of those colleges and universities have articulated this important goal as central to their educational mission. It is, therefore, appropriate for those institutions to begin to assess how well they are achieving this urgently needed objective. Such measurement is essential to ensuring that the goal is more reality than rhetoric.

Students like Jennifer, benefiting from broadened horizons and mindful of their connection to people around the world, are needed now more than ever to take up the work of addressing the world's unjust, unnecessary suffering. If Catholic colleges and universities can scale Jennifer's experience to the approximately 900,000 students who study at those institutions each year, they may be able to bring relief to the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty around the globe. Those people, our sisters and brothers, often have little choice but to wait. We, on the other hand, have the choice – and the chance – to change history.

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**Appendix A**  
**Email to Preceptor Faculty**

**From:** Michael Lovette-Colyer  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 31, 2010 2:16 PM  
**To:** Truc Ngo  
**Subject:** Special Request

Hello, Dr. Ngo,

I hope you are well as we prepare to begin the academic year. I'm writing today with a special request: as a part of my doctorate studies in SOLES, I am hoping to collect some data on our freshly-arrived first-year students.

The purpose of my dissertation is to explore the impact of USD on our students, with a particular focus on compassion, gratitude, vocation and faith. It is my hope to survey as many members of the new class as possible this fall – and then to follow up with an identical survey instrument in the spring of their second year. This research design will enable me to examine individual as well as aggregate changes across those two years and to search for correlations between any shifts and the activities and programs our students have been involved with during their time on campus.

In case you would like to review it, I have attached a copy of my survey instrument to this email. I have received IRB approval for this research.

I am hoping that you might be willing to allow me to visit your Precept class (Intro to Engineering) for 10-15 minutes sometime in September. During that visit, I'll explain my research and then distribute the survey for the students to complete with pencil or pen. Of course, I will distribute an informed consent form with the survey and emphasize that they do not have to complete the survey and that it will have no impact on their class grade.

If you'd be OK with me visiting your class, please let me know what day and time would work best for you.

Thanks very much for considering my request. Have a good afternoon.

Michael

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**Appendix B**  
**First Round Survey**

Study Code # \_\_\_\_\_

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by choosing the appropriate number on the scale.

|  | 1<br>Strongly disagree | 2<br>Disagree         | 3<br>Neither agree<br>nor disagree | 4<br>Agree            | 5<br>Strongly agree   |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. When I hear about a stranger going through a difficult time, I feel a great deal of compassion for him or her.                | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. I tend to feel compassion for people, even though I do not know them.   | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. One of the activities that provides the most meaning to my life is helping others in the world when they need help.           | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. I would rather engage in actions that help others, even though they are strangers, than engage in actions that would help me. | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. I often have tender feelings toward strangers when they seem to be in need.   | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Please answer the following questions using the scale below. Indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

|  | 1<br>Strongly disagree | 2<br>Disagree         | 3<br>Neither agree<br>nor disagree | 4<br>Agree            | 5<br>Strongly agree   |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. If I were independently wealthy, I wouldn't bother attending college.                               | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. I get a sense of personal satisfaction completing projects and solving problems that come up.       | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. My daily routine is often so tedious that I feel I'm just putting in time until the end of the day. | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. I sometimes get so involved in my work and studies that I lose track of time.                       | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |



|   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 5. My major motivation in attending college is the ability to make more money after graduation. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. My primary consideration in selecting my major will be the future salary level.              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. I have a calling that enables me to develop my skills and talents in a meaningful way.       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. In my daily life I often feel connected to larger patterns of joy and meaning.               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. I see my future career as a way to make a positive difference in the world.                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. My spiritual beliefs and convictions are strong.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 11. Developing a meaningful philosophy of life is important to me.                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 12. Integrating spirituality into my life is one of my key concerns.                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Read each pair of statements below and place an "X" by the one that comes closest to describing your feelings and beliefs. You may feel that neither statement describes you well, but pick the one that comes closest. Please complete all pairs.

1. ☐ I really like to be the center of attention  
☐ It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention
2. ☐ I am no better or no worse than most people  
☐ I think I am a special person
3. ☐ Everybody likes to hear my stories  
☐ Sometimes I tell good stories
4. ☐ I usually get the respect that I deserve  
☐ I insist upon getting the respect that is due me
5. ☐ I don't mind following orders  
☐ I like having authority over people
6. ☐ I am going to be a great person  
☐ I hope I am going to be successful
7. ☐ People sometimes believe what I tell them

- \_\_\_ I can make anybody believe anything I want them to
8. \_\_\_ I expect a great deal from other people  
\_\_\_ I like to do things for other people
9. \_\_\_ I like to be the center of attention  
\_\_\_ I prefer to blend in with the crowd
10. \_\_\_ I am much like everybody else  
\_\_\_ I am an extraordinary person
11. \_\_\_ I always know what I am doing  
\_\_\_ Sometimes I am not sure of what I am doing
12. \_\_\_ I don't like it when I find myself manipulating people  
\_\_\_ I find it easy to manipulate people

Please answer the following questions using the scale below. Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement for each statement.

|  | 1<br>Strongly<br>disagree | 2<br>Disagree         | 3<br>Neither agree<br>nor disagree | 4<br>Agree            | 5<br>Strongly<br>agree |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. My religious faith is extremely important to me.                | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 2. I pray daily.   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 3. I look to my faith as a source of inspiration.                  | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 4. I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life. | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 5. I consider myself active in my faith or church.                 | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 6. My faith is an important part of who I am as a person.          | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 7. My relationship with God is extremely important to me.          | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 8. I enjoy being around others who share my faith.                 | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 9. I look to my faith as a source of comfort.                      | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 10. My faith impacts many of my decisions.                         | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |

Please answer the following questions using the scale below. Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement for each statement.

|   | 1<br>Strongly<br>Disagree | 2<br>Disagree         | 3<br>Neither agree nor<br>disagree | 4<br>Agree            | 5<br>Strongly<br>agree |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. I have so much in life to be grateful for.   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 2. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.  | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 3. When I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for.   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 4. I am grateful to a wide variety of people.   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 5. As I get older, I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history. | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 6. Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |

Please tell me about yourself by answering the following questions.

Was your high school

- ☐ Public  
☐ Private  
☐ Private, Catholic  
☐ Private, other religiously affiliated

What is your expected year of graduation? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your sex?

Female ☐ Male ☐

What is your major or intended major? \_\_\_\_\_

What racial or ethnic background do you most identify with?

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native  
☐ Asian  
☐ Black or African American  
☐ Hispanic or Latino  
☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

- ☐ White
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

## **Appendix C**

### **Email invitation to Students for Second Round**

Dear Student:

My name is Michael Lovette-Colyer and I am the Director of University Ministry here at the University of San Diego. Like you, I'm also a student; I'm working toward my doctorate in Leadership Studies in SOLES.

You might remember me. Two years ago, during your first semester on campus, you completed a survey I administered during your precept class.

I'm writing today to ask that you take **15 minutes** to complete the same survey for a second time. Just like the first time, your answers will be strictly confidential. I'm the only one who will ever see your individual responses.

The purpose of these surveys is to measure how the USD experience impacts students like you. I'm hoping you will assist me in trying to determine how you think and feel about some important topics as well as how effective the university is in accomplishing its mission.

As a token of my appreciation for your time, all students who complete the survey will be entered into a raffle. Two winners will each receive a brand new iPad 3 (or the equivalent value of \$500 in cash).

If you're willing, I would like to ask you to complete the same survey one final time, during your senior year, just before you graduate. The idea is to see how, if at all, your thoughts and feelings change during your time on campus.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 619.260.4251 (or [mlovettecolyer@sandiego.edu](mailto:mlovettecolyer@sandiego.edu)) or my Dissertation Advisor, Dr. Fred Galloway at 619.260.7435 (or [galloway@sandiego.edu](mailto:galloway@sandiego.edu)).

I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study. By doing so, you will be helping me better understand your reality as well as helping the university improve to better serve students like you.

Thanks so much! Good luck preparing for finals.

Peace,

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 San Diego, CA 92110  
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**Appendix D****Additional Questions on Second Round Survey**

1. Have you been enrolled at USD for all of your first 2 years of college?
2. During your first two years at USD, have you participated in community service-learning?
3. If you have participated in community service-learning, how many courses have you taken that include such a requirement?
4. During your first two years at USD, have you participated in an immersion trip?
5. If you have participated in an immersion trip, how many have you participated in?
6. During your first two years at USD, have you participated in a community service project?
7. If you have participated in a community service project, what was/is the name of the organization with which you volunteered?
8. During your first two years at USD, have you participated in a retreat sponsored by University Ministry?
9. Have you participated in a retreat sponsored by another department or office?
10. During your first two years at USD, have you participated in student government?
11. During your first two years at USD, did you join a fraternity or sorority?
12. During your first two years at USD, did you play a varsity sport?
13. During your first two years at USD, did you assume a student leadership position such as Resident Assistant or Preceptorial Assistant?
14. During your first two years at USD, did you study abroad?
15. At this point in your college experience, how satisfied are you with USD?  
(answerable on a five point Likert scale with 1 being not at all satisfied and 5 being completely satisfied)



**Appendix E**  
**Interview Guide**

1. Please tell me a little about yourself? (Such as where you're from, what your major is, what activities you're involved with at USD, that sort of thing.)
2. Why did you decide to attend USD? (What kind of high school did you attend? And, what, if anything, about our high school experience led you to choose USD?)
3. Can you tell me a little bit about how you decided on your major?
4. In what ways, if any, do you think that major has impacted who you are?
5. When you're not in class and not studying, how do you spend your time? Has that changed over time?
6. Beyond your class work, what sort of extra-curricular activities have you been involved with on campus? Has that changed over time?
7. Who are your closest friends? (Who are your closest friends at USD?) How would you say they have influenced you? Has this changed over time?
8. Who do you live with? How would you say they have influenced you?
9. Have you participated in any community service activities while at USD? Are you familiar with the programs that exist on campus? How about during high school?
10. If you have participated in community service activities, what was your motivation for doing so? If you have not, any idea why you haven't?
11. Have you participated in any immersion trips on campus? Are you familiar with the programs that exist on campus? Did you participate in any immersion trips in high school?
12. If you have participated in immersion trips, what made you want to do so? If you have not, any idea why you haven't?
13. Have you, or do you plan to, study abroad? If so, how do you think that experience did (or will) affect you?
14. Have you served in any student leadership positions on campus? If so, how do you think that experience or those experiences have impacted you?
15. Have you been a part of any multicultural events or organizations while at USD?
16. Are you a part of a sorority or fraternity? If so, how do you think that has impacted your campus experience?

17. Who would you say are your most significant role models or mentors? What have you learned from them?
18. Who would you say are the most influential people currently in your life?
19. During your time at USD, have you been involved in a dating, romantic relationship? If so, for how long?
20. During your time at USD, have you experienced any significant crises or pivotal moments? If so, what were they?
21. What would you say has been the most important, defining aspect of your time at USD thus far?
22. What, if anything, about your time on campus has encouraged you to learn about and think about people who are different from yourself?
23. How would you define compassion? How do you see yourself fitting into that definition?
24. What, if anything, about your time at USD has encouraged you to learn about and think about people who are suffering?
25. Can you offer any examples of times when you felt compassion?
26. Have any aspects of USD helped you to grow in compassion? Or, have any aspects of USD prevented you from doing so?
27. What, if anything, about your time on campus has helped you to think about what difference you'd like to make in the world?