ABSTRACT

MORIN, SHAUNA MARIE. At the Intersection of Institutional Religious Identity and Worldview Diversity: Exploring Students’ Sense of Belonging at a Catholic University. (Under the direction of Dr. Alyssa N. Rockenbach).

This dissertation study explored the intersection of institutional religious identity and worldview diversity within sectarian higher education. Specifically, it employed case study and portraiture to qualitatively examine how students with different worldview perspectives engaged in social justice programs at a Catholic university. It also illuminated whether and how participants learned about Catholic Social Teaching (CST) through their social justice involvement. Finally, this research investigated students’ experiences within the campus environment in light of their encounters with social justice and CST. Five dimensions of campus climate—historical, compositional, organizational, behavioral, and psychological—provided a guiding framework for this research. Particular attention was given to the ways in which students with distinct religious, nonreligious, and spiritual beliefs perceived the psychological climate of their university and exhibited a sense of belonging therein. The study revealed that participants from a variety of backgrounds perceived their campus climate to be welcoming of diverse worldviews. Students experienced sense of belonging through involvement in myriad on- and off-campus social justice communities, but exposure to CST was somewhat limited. An innovative format was used to depict and discuss these findings. First, emergent themes were highlighted in a comprehensive portrait of the research setting. Second, practical and theoretical implications were presented in the context of two standalone manuscripts. Finally, the overarching significance of the study was summarized in a culminating chapter of the dissertation.
At the Intersection of Institutional Religious Identity and Worldview Diversity:
Exploring Students’ Sense of Belonging at a Catholic University

by
Shauna Marie Morin

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Research and Policy Analysis

Raleigh, North Carolina

2017

APPROVED BY:

_______________________________  ________________________________
Dr. Alyssa N. Rockenbach       Dr. Susan C. Faircloth
Committee Chair

_______________________________  ________________________________
Dr. Joy G. Gayles              Dr. Audrey J. Jaeger
DEDICATION

To my parents…

For teaching me how to love well

For modeling selflessness, generosity, and unrelenting hard work

For wholeheartedly supporting every one of my endeavors, great or small

For instilling in me an enduring faith in God, with whom all things are possible

…I offer my deepest and most profound gratitude.
BIOGRAPHY

Shauna Marie Morin is a Mainer by birth (and by affinity), but over the course of her 36 years she has lived on both coasts and in many places in between. She credits her nomadic upbringing—as well as her family—for teaching her to embrace new opportunities, of which there were many during her growing-up years. As an adult, Shauna’s educational and professional pursuits have led to an array of wonderful communities, colleagues, and friends, all of which (and whom) are near and dear to her.

In 2012, Shauna began her doctoral journey at NC State University, pursuing a Ph.D. in Higher Education. Since that time, her research interests have evolved to include community engagement, religious and spiritual development, and interfaith diversity in college. These interests first took root during Shauna’s undergraduate career at the University of Notre Dame, where she was immersed in conversations and programs grounded in faith and social justice. After college, Shauna completed a year as an AmeriCorps member with the Sisters of St. Joseph in Hartford, Connecticut, and then earned her M.Ed. in College Student Affairs from Penn State University. Her professional roles include three years as the service-learning coordinator at Juniata College in Pennsylvania, and four years as the associate director of student life at Hope College in Michigan.

In her personal life, Shauna enjoys traveling, baking, volunteering, public radio listening, and participating in her faith community at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Raleigh. She is also a great lover of hikes, potlucks, campfires, game nights, and all things Irish (including her beloved Fighting Irish!). In short, she is an enthusiastic participator in any activities that allow her to live and laugh with the many good people in her life.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am humbled and honored to have completed this dissertation under the direction of four exceptional scholars. During my first semester as a Ph.D. student, Dr. Joy Gayles introduced me to the fundamental tools of research and scholarship, thus equipping me to design, conduct, and make meaning of data from the study presented here. It was in Joy’s class that I drafted the first of many (many, many!) iterations of my dissertation research proposal and—with her support and encouragement—embarked on a path toward investigating social justice and sense of belonging in a Catholic higher education context. In my second year of coursework, Dr. Susan Faircloth gave me an invaluable opportunity to spend a semester in class with her, refining and improving the methodological approach I had selected to guide my study. Since then, Susan has been an ongoing source of creativity and expertise in the realm of qualitative research.

Dr. Audrey Jaeger has been a mentor and sounding board since the earliest days of my doctoral program. She has continually motivated me to make the most of my experience at NC State via teaching, collaborative research, and service to the profession. Furthermore, AJ has recognized, appreciated, and nurtured my desire to situate myself—my values, faith, and commitment to social justice—within my research. As my dissertation chair, Dr. Alyssa Rockenbach has been a steadfast role model, advocate, cheerleader, and friend. She has invited me to be part of impactful research projects that broadened my horizons and deepened my understanding of scholarship in our field. She has also invited me to her house for dinner to talk about the “big questions” of life that broaden all our horizons and deepen our understanding of one another. Above all, Alyssa has been unfailing in her commitment to
my personal and professional success, and has been instrumental in shaping this rich and transformative chapter of my life.

In the four weeks I spent at Ignatian University collecting data for my dissertation, I had the privilege of meeting 14 exceptional students who are—and are becoming—the change they wish to see in the world. The stories they shared with me are the heart and soul of this research. I was also fortunate to meet with six staff members at the university, all of whom were generous with their time and honest in their assessments of worldview diversity, religious identity, and social justice at their institution. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to an esteemed colleague who has spent many decades working in Catholic higher education and is presently a faculty member at Ignatian. She facilitated my visit to campus and connected me with all the right people; recommended resources germane to my study; and lent her critical eye to the first three chapters of my dissertation to ensure the Catholic dimensions of my proposal were thorough and accurate.

I was not very far along in my graduate program when I began to understand how important it is to surround oneself with like-minded professional peers when on the long and winding road that leads to a doctorate. My fellow students in NC State’s Higher Education Program, as well as colleagues from the multi-institutional HCAS and IDEALS research teams, have profoundly shaped my growth and development as a scholar during the past five years. Their intellectual gifts, tenacity, kindness, and humility have been—and continue to be—truly awe-inspiring. Relatedly, I would be remiss not to express sincere thanks to the many master’s students at NC State whom I have had the pleasure of teaching over the years.
Their patience and enthusiasm enabled me to build skills and confidence in the classroom, and their constructive feedback challenged me to continually improve as an instructor.

Some additional expressions of gratitude are due to dear friends whose love and affirmation have buoyed me at various stages of this doctoral process. To Colleen, a fellow Domer who is among the strongest of strong women in my life, thank you for talking through the tiniest seed of a research idea with me three years ago. My dissertation study was born over brunch, amidst one of our marathon heart-to-hearts, and for that I am grateful. To Katy, Malia, and Megan, my dearest Notre Dame gals and the kindred-est of spirits, thank you for lifting me up, cheering me on, and bringing such joy to my life throughout this adventure. You are like family to me and I would be lost without you. To Kate and Lillie, two treasured and faith-filled friends, thank you for bookending this experience with such warmth and grace. I could not have made the leap from working girl to graduate student without Kate’s enthusiastic support, and I never would have survived the final months of dissertating without Lille’s thoughtfulness and delectable home-cooked meals. You are both proof that God knew what He was doing when He led me to Hope College. Last but not least, thank you to Becky—my confidant and partner in crime at NC State—for always being there and for always being you. There is no one else I would have chosen to walk this road with me; your friendship tops the list of gifts I have received from pursuing a doctoral degree.

My final words of thanks belong to my family, as I would not be who I am or where I am without them. Tara, I might be the big sister, but you are the one with big shoes to fill. You inspire me to live boldly, embrace the winding, less-traveled road, and always enjoy the ride. Dad, you are the consummate provider and the rock of our family. Your measured
advice, sound reason, and boundless compassion have helped me stay the course on this journey—and every journey—in my life. Mom, you taught me how to write and you taught me that I should never settle for anything less than my best. You loved, laughed, and listened for five long years as I made my way to the finish line in this doctoral program—empathizing in moments of adversity and rejoicing in my successes—and I could not have done it without you. I love you all to the moon and back.

*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................. xi

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................ xii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 1

Why Sectarian Higher Education Matters ................................................................. 5
Exploring Sense of Belonging at a Catholic University .............................................. 7
Emphasizing Social Justice and Catholic Social Teaching ......................................... 9
Sense of Belonging within a Campus Climate Framework ........................................ 11
Methodological Overview .......................................................................................... 16
Contributions of the Study ......................................................................................... 17
  Theoretical Significance ....................................................................................... 18
  Complements to Existing Research .................................................................... 19
  Implications for Practice ..................................................................................... 19
Looking Ahead ............................................................................................................. 20

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................................................... 22

The Religious (and Secular) Landscape in Higher Education ................................... 24
Interfaith Engagement and Pluralism ......................................................................... 27
Institutional Religious Identity: Challenges and Opportunities ................................... 30
Rationale for Studying a Catholic University ............................................................ 34
  Commitment to Diversity .................................................................................. 35
  Struggle to Preserve Religious Identity ............................................................ 36
  Catholic Social Teaching as a Valuable Tool ....................................................... 38
Grounding the Study in a Campus Climate Framework ............................................ 40
Putting it All Together ............................................................................................... 42

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................... 44

Case Study and Portraiture ........................................................................................ 46
Researcher as Instrument ......................................................................................... 48
  Origins of Subjectivity ...................................................................................... 50
  Philosophical Assumptions ............................................................................... 52
Site and Participant Selection ................................................................................... 53
Data Collection .......................................................................................................... 58
Focus Groups and Individual Interviews ................................................................. 59
  Parameters for Focus Groups .......................................................................... 60
  Follow-Up Conversations ................................................................................. 60
  Staff Interviews ................................................................................................. 61
# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. *Participant Definitions of Social Justice* .................................................................92  
Table 2. *Overview of Participant Characteristics* .................................................................126
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Model of Campus Climate for Worldview Diversity.................................14

Figure 2. Summary of the Problem of Interest and How It Informs the Study Purpose ...15

Figure 3. Organizational Framework for the Literature Review................................23

Figure 4. Modified Model of Campus Climate for Use in a Sectarian Context..........164
CHAPTER 1

The combination of our religious devotion and our religious diversity puts us at the crossroads of the most profound crisis currently facing humanity. Virtually every religious and ethnic community in the world is represented in America, including ones that are at war elsewhere ...

I believe America can prevent those tensions from taking root here. But I think we have to be far more intentional about nurturing the alternative to interreligious conflict. This means that we have to take religious diversity seriously, and engage interreligious engagement in a very intentional way ...

The question is: Which institution is going to lead the way? I think the answer is obvious: higher education. (Eboo Patel, 2007, p. 5)

In recent years, the confluence of shifting religious commitments and increased worldview\(^1\) diversity in the United States has set the stage for new religious realities in our country. In a nation long characterized by a Protestant majority, the number of self-identified Christians as a proportion of the U.S. public is on the decline, falling 7.4 percent from 2007-2014 (Pew Research Center [PRC], 2015). This decrease stands in stark contrast to a notable 16.7 percent rise in the number of religiously unaffiliated persons in the U.S. who now comprise more than one-fifth of the U.S. population (PRC, 2015). These statistics could suggest that religion\(^2\) is losing its place and relevance in our society, especially given that “fully 18 percent of American adults were raised in a religious tradition and now describe themselves as unaffiliated” (PRC, 2015, p. 35). However, these findings alone fail to paint a complete picture of today’s religious landscape. After all, fully seven in 10 U.S. adults still

---

\(^1\) **Worldview** represents a guiding philosophy on life that is informed by one’s religious beliefs, spiritual views, and/or secular perspective (Rockenbach, Mayhew, Kinarsky, & Interfaith Youth Core, 2014).

\(^2\) **Religion** is “a shared system of beliefs, principles or doctrines related to a belief in and worship of a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator(s) and governor(s) of the universe” Love, 2001, p. 8).
claim an affiliation with Christianity, and it appears that membership in evangelical Christian denominations is growing in real numbers despite its decline proportionally (PRC, 2015). Additionally, non-Christian religions are gaining ground, with Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and other religious minorities accounting for 5.9 percent of individuals in the U.S. This may be due in part to religious communities’ successful retention of children into their adulthood: 80 percent of U.S. adults who were raised in the Hindu faith still identify with the tradition, and Muslims (77%) and Jews (75%) are close behind (PRC, 2015). In short, the breadth of religious participation in the U.S. is growing ever more extensive and is expanding to include a host of minority faith traditions, yet this expansion is taking place within a national context that is increasingly informed by secular worldviews.

The trends emerging at the national level with respect to religion and worldview diversity are mirrored on many of today’s college and university campuses (Eagan, Stolzenberg, Ramirez, Aragon, Suchard, & Hurtado, 2014; Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2004; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Schmalzbauer, 2013). We know that a growing number of students—more than one-quarter of a nationally representative sample—articulate no religious preference, claiming instead an agnostic, atheist, spiritual, or other nonreligious identity (Eagan et al., 2014; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). At the same time, it can be argued that religion and spirituality are alive and well in higher education. Roughly two-thirds of first-year college students surveyed as part of a national, multi-institutional

---

3 The terms minority and non-majority will be used interchangeably throughout to describe religious groups or faith traditions whose members are in the numerical minority in the U.S.

4 Spirituality involves a desire to realize one’s meaning, purpose, and authenticity; a meaningful connection with others in the community; and an orientation toward a higher power that is “set apart from the ordinary and transcends the self” (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003, p. 724).
study credited religious or spiritual beliefs for providing them with strength, support, and guidance; the overall majority of them were affiliated with a religious denomination; and they indicated high levels of participation in activities such as prayer (69 percent) and attendance at religious services (81 percent) (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; HERI, 2004). Notably, the proportion of students from non-majority religious traditions is growing on college campuses and exceeds that of minority-religious persons in society at large (Eagan et al., 2014; PRC, 2015). Muslims now comprise 1.7 percent of college students, marking a four-fold increase from 20 years ago; the proportion of Jewish students has increased from 1.9 percent in 1994 to 2.8 percent presently; and the percentage of Buddhist students has more than tripled in the same time frame (Astin, Parrott, Korn, & Sax, 1997; Eagan et al., 2014).

These findings highlight the heterogeneity of today’s college students when it comes to religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives. Within the higher education microcosms of our larger society, opportunities are seemingly rife to model intentional and meaningful interfaith engagement as Patel (2007) recommends. When an inclusive campus climate exists, there is space for constructive interfaith interactions to occur (Rockenbach et al., 2014); in turn, these experiences tend to foster appreciation of different worldviews (see Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013; Rockenbach, Mayhew, Morin, Crandall, & Selznick,

---

5 *Campus climate* describes the attitudes, behaviors, standards, and practices of individuals operating within a campus community, specifically as they relate to different subgroups’ access, inclusion, and success within the institutional environment (Rankin & Reason, 2008).
Ultimately, it is expected that the improved religious literacy and pluralism\(^6\) attitudes among college students will prepare them to function effectively as leaders in our diverse world (Patel, 2007).

Unfortunately, students with minority worldviews do not always view colleges and universities as welcoming places for sharing diverse beliefs (Rockenbach et al., 2014), which may disincentivize interfaith engagement. In some instances, negative attitudes toward particular religious groups in society at large (e.g., anti-Muslim sentiments in the U.S.) may be permeating college campuses (Ingraham, 2015). There is also some evidence to suggest that students’ attitudes toward peers with a particular worldview identity can vary based on prior familiarity and interaction (or lack thereof) with others from that identity group (Mayhew, Rockenbach, Correia, Crandall, Lo, & Associates, 2016). It is also important to be cognizant of how other dimensions of identity, including race and ethnicity, can shape one’s understanding of worldview diversity on campus. As Rockenbach et al. (2014) note, “race and ethnicity shape experiences and involvement, which in turn may shape perceptions of acceptance of diverse worldview groups” (p. 14). Whatever the reason, students might ultimately choose not to partake in interfaith exchanges at all for fear of reprisal (Goodman & Mueller, 2009), and those who do may suffer conflict when their views are opposed (Dean & Grandpré, 2011).

While students can experience marginalization with respect to their worldview at any institution when they feel their perspective is not valued, such feelings can be especially

---

\(^6\) **Pluralism** involves one’s willingness to actively engage with diversity; move from tolerance toward acceptance of different perspectives; accept others’ worldviews amidst commitment to one’s own; and appreciate similarities and differences across worldviews in equal measure (Eck, 1993).
acute in faith-based contexts, where Christian ideologies hold a privileged place (Bowman & Small, 2012b; Seifert, 2007). Given that sectarian institutions comprise a large and influential domain of higher education, and can expect to serve an increasingly diverse student population given current demographic trends in the U.S., special attention should be given to how they engender a sense of belonging for students with diverse religious, spiritual, or nonreligious views. The current study was thus situated within the sphere of sectarian higher education, focusing specifically on the experiences of students at a Catholic university. In the following sections, I provide a more detailed rationale for conducting my research in a sectarian setting, and for examining sense of belonging among students at a Catholic institution in particular. (A summary of the problem of interest, its significance, and the study purpose is also provided in Figure 2 later in this chapter.)

**Why Sectarian Higher Education Matters**

We know that faith-based higher education is sought after in part because it provides a favorable environment for religious engagement and spiritual exploration (Davignon, 2014) at a time when young people are seeking meaning and purpose in their lives (Astin et al., 2011). Religious and spiritual growth opportunities are valuable because they lead to a host of beneficial outcomes, including decreased risky behaviors (e.g., alcohol and drug use); greater college satisfaction, social integration, and spiritual development; and, in some cases, improved well-being and academic performance (Bowman & Small, 2010, 2012b; Bryant, 2007; Mayrl & Oeur, 2009; Small & Bowman, 2012).

---

7 *Sense of belonging* includes a student’s perceived connection to the campus community, or feelings of identification or isolation therein (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson, 2012).
Students at religiously-affiliated colleges and universities also have access to particular resources that enhance their spiritual growth, either directly or indirectly. For example, faculty support of religious and spiritual development is reportedly much greater in sectarian contexts, and is positively associated with students’ spiritual identification and spiritual quest (i.e., active seeking of meaning and purpose in their lives) (Bowman & Small, 2012a). At evangelical institutions, the availability of spiritual mentors and (to a lesser extent) the integration of faith and learning in the classroom foster increased religious participation (Davignon, 2014). In light of these findings, it is unsurprising that first-year students on faith-based campuses demonstrate greater gains in spiritual development than their peers at secular institutions (Lovik, 2010).

Lamentably, the impact of attending a sectarian college or university is not universally positive. It appears that students in the religious majority (e.g., mainline Protestants, evangelicals, and Catholics) tend to fare better in these contexts, while benefits can be mixed for religious-minority students. For example, one study examined the relationship between students’ religious affiliation and their well-being (Bowman & Small, 2012b) in different campus contexts. Findings revealed that students at sectarian institutions who were in the minority-religious group at their institution and in society at large (i.e., “double religious minority” students) experienced declines in eudaimonic well-being, defined as “living one’s life to the fullest … having positive relationships with others and a sense of competence and purpose” (Bowman & Small, 2012b, p. 494). The significant relationship between these students’ “double religious minority” status and their well-being existed after
controlling for religious engagement, suggesting there may be few opportunities to participate in religious activities on their campuses.

The unique offerings and positive outcomes associated with sectarian higher education collectively illustrate many potential advantages of attending a religiously-affiliated college or university. However, students who are not part of the worldview majority may not always realize these benefits. The matter is complicated further by concerns among some sectarian institutional leaders that increasing diversity and preserving religious identity are competing aims (Abadeer, 2009). However, emerging research suggests that students in faith-based settings can—and do—maintain their religious commitments while also developing positive attitudes toward pluralism; in fact, the two may be mutually reinforcing (Rine, 2012b). Because faith-based institutions serve nearly 1.9 million students across the U.S. each year (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014), their potential impact—for better or worse—is far reaching. In the interest of improving the collegiate experience (and its associated outcomes) for minority-religious, spiritual, and nonreligious students who are among the 1.9 million, this study focused on enhancing the climate for worldview diversity specifically within a sectarian setting.

Exploring Sense of Belonging at a Catholic University

Within the broad realm of U.S. sectarian higher education, there are a substantive number of Catholic colleges and universities (more than 200 according to the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities [ACCU], 2014). The majority of these institutions view diversity, “including religious diversity, as a positive dimension of … institutional identity and an aspect of … [their] Catholic identity” (Estanek, James, & Norton, 2006, p. 209). It is
therefore unsurprising that students on Catholic campuses are more racially, ethnically, and economically diverse than their peers at other private colleges and universities, sectarian and secular alike (Elliot, 2012). However, less is known overall about the worldview composition of the student population in Catholic higher education, and whether the missional commitment of Catholic institutions vis-à-vis religious diversity is being realized.

What we do know is that “double religious minority” students at Catholic colleges and universities experience adverse outcomes related to spiritual development, spiritual quest, and skepticism (Bowman & Small, 2010; Small & Bowman, 2012). These findings may be partially explained by a general lack of appreciation for worldview diversity among students who identify as Catholic, evidenced by their lower-than-average pluralism scores (Rockenbach et al., 2015). Bowman and Small (2010) offer an alternate explanation, speculating that “the conflict between minority students’ beliefs/values and the ubiquitous Catholic ideologies at these schools … may contribute to psychological stress and/or a sense of marginalization that directly inhibits … internalized spiritual outcomes” (p. 608).

In sum, it appears that many students at Catholic colleges and universities have room to grow when it comes to their pluralism orientation. However, we know that such growth is unlikely to occur if there are not opportunities for interfaith engagement. Relatedly, declines on important developmental outcomes may point to feelings of marginalization among minority worldview students, which in turn make them less apt to pursue interfaith activities. Because Catholic higher education faces some distinct and pronounced challenges related to worldview climate, but is also called to serve religiously-diverse students as part of its
institutional mission\textsuperscript{8}, it provided fertile ground for a study aimed at improving sense of belonging for non-majority worldview students. Therefore, the current study explored how students with different religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives experienced sense of belonging at a Catholic university.

**Emphasizing Social Justice and Catholic Social Teaching**

While there are multiple approaches to enhancing sense of belonging that are worthy of scholarly attention, I elected to examine how students might connect more fully to their institution through social justice activities. Social justice represents an ideal of equitable, inclusive, and participatory communities that meet the needs of all their members (see Bell, as cited in Davis & Harrison, 2013; Wilson & Meyer, 2011; Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust, 2006). The broad-based values that drive social justice efforts (e.g., caring for those in need) can serve as a bridge between otherwise distinctive religious or secular traditions, thereby allowing students with different worldviews to work alongside one another in pursuit of common goals. Put differently, involvement in social justice programs enables students to “connect personal purposes with broader social justice and civic responsibility purposes” that transcend specific religious beliefs (Bryant, 2008, p. 4). Thus, social justice activities can enhance sense of belonging by providing an avenue for students from myriad backgrounds to enact their worldview beliefs and contribute to the campus community in a meaningful way.

Because I conducted this study at a Catholic university, I was also interested in giving special attention to Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as a framework within which students might come to understand social justice. CST refers to the official social teachings of the

\textsuperscript{8} Institutional mission is the “fundamental rationale for existence” that provides direction and purpose for an organization’s members, guiding behaviors, decision-making processes, and goals (Woodrow, 2006, p. 313).
Catholic church regarding “the relationship between Christian morality … and the concrete social patterns, practices, and institutions within which persons live” (Brady, 2008, p. 1). Simply stated, this body of doctrine reflects the Catholic church’s distinct conceptualization of broad social justice themes (e.g., equity, inclusion, community). Because leaders at Catholic colleges and universities are called upon to operationalize social justice using CST (see “Ex Corde,” 1990), it is reasonable to expect that students engaged in social justice programs at a Catholic university are exposed to CST tenets, either directly or indirectly.

While social justice and CST are viewed as core features of Catholic higher education generally, it is important to be mindful of the significant diversity that exists across Catholic institutions. These colleges and universities are shaped by factors like demographics, size, selectivity, and founding religious order, among others (Jessup-Anger, Dooley, Leih, Mueller, & Dean, 2016), and the strength of their Catholic identity varies accordingly. There has been much speculation in recent decades that “Catholic cultural drift” is occurring on Catholic campuses (Morey & Piderit, 2006, p. 41), and Morey and Piderit (2006) assert the importance of “revivifying what has become more latent than apparent” (p. 41) to reinforce the religious identity of Catholic campuses today. Explicitly connecting social justice to CST is one path forward that can invigorate Catholic institutional identity; further, it seems possible that introducing students to CST through their social justice involvement could help them learn about their Catholic institution’s religious identity, and perhaps connect to it more deeply as a result.

The above premise—that learning about aspects of the Catholic faith can help non-Catholic students identify with their Catholic college or university—is the foundation on
which the current study was based, and it informed the central research question: *How can particular aspects of a sectarian institution’s religious identity be strategically employed to foster sense of belonging among students with diverse worldviews?* In this case, I specifically endeavored to learn how a fundamental understanding of CST might enhance non-Catholic students’ belonging at a Catholic university. I investigated this premise by exploring the lived experiences of students with diverse worldviews who participated in social justice programs. Specifically, I sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do students with diverse worldview perspectives engage in social justice programs at a Catholic university?

2. In what ways, if any, do students learn about Catholic Social Teaching (CST) through their social justice involvement?

3. How do students’ encounters with social justice and CST shape their sense of belonging within the campus environment?

**Sense of Belonging within a Campus Climate Framework**

A model of campus climate provided a guiding framework for the current research (see Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). Particular attention was given to the ways in which students with distinct religious, nonreligious, and spiritual beliefs experienced sense of belonging, since feeling part of the college environment can positively shape students’ perceptions of the overall climate (Strayhorn, 2012). This framework was selected in light of an emerging body of knowledge about the climate for worldview diversity in higher education, which suggests that interfaith
engagement occurs most readily on campuses that are welcoming of diverse worldviews (e.g., Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2012; Mayhew, 2012).

The extant literature addressing worldview diversity (e.g., Mayhew, Bowman, & Bryant Rockenbach, 2014; Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013, 2014; Rockenbach et al., 2015) applies a theoretical lens from the racial/ethnic diversity literature (Hurtado et al., 1998). Hurtado et al.’s (1998) model identifies four dimensions of climate that warrant attention when trying to improve diversity efforts on campus. These include the institution’s historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, which can manifest in present-day “long-standing, often unrecognized, benefits for particular student groups” (Hurtado et al., 1998, p. 283); structural diversity on campus (herein referred to as compositional diversity), which refers to the racial/ethnic diversity represented among the student body; the behavioral dimension of campus climate (e.g., general social interactions, exchanges between students from different backgrounds, and the nature of intergroup relations); and psychological aspects of the climate.

The psychological dimension of campus climate encompasses student perceptions of diversity-related attitudes (e.g., institutional commitment to diversity) and behaviors (e.g., intergroup interactions) (Hurtado et al., 1998). For the purpose of the current study, I focused on one facet of the psychological climate, sense of belonging, which is defined as “students’ perceived [emphasis added] social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). Because the successful development of students’
sense of belonging has positive implications for interfaith engagement (Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2012), it was worthwhile to examine how students with different worldviews came to feel accepted at their institution.

My decision to investigate sense of belonging as it relates to worldview diversity was grounded in emerging research on the topic. There is an expanding literature base underscoring the importance of sense of belonging within higher education (e.g., Cooper, 2009; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002; Soria, Troisi, & Stebleton, 2012), and highlighting sense of belonging as a precursor to desired outcomes like persistence (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods 2009). Much of the extant research in this area focuses on how students find sense of belonging among faculty or peers at their institution, and the construct is often measured by asking whether students feel they belong at their institution, feel part of their campus community, feel comfortable on their campus, or some variation thereof (see Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson, 2012; Meeuwisse, Severiens, & Born, 2010). Additionally, the overwhelming majority of these studies focus on students from underrepresented racial/ethnic minority groups. In contrast, empirical findings related to sense of belonging for worldview minority students are scant, which suggests a need to explore what campus features and experiences promote (or inhibit) sense of belonging for students with diverse worldview perspectives.
The conceptual framework for the current study is depicted in Figure 1. It includes the adapted version of Hurtado et al.’s (1998) model that has informed recent studies on worldview climate (see Bryant, Wickliffe, Mayhew, & Behringer, 2009). It also incorporates a fifth dimension of climate more recently discussed in the literature, the *organizational diversity* dimension; this climate factor captures the extent to which an institution’s organizational structures and policies reflect a commitment to diversity (Milem et al., 2005). Finally, this framework highlights the centrality of sense of belonging within the current study, as the primary purpose of this research was to explore how students with distinct religious, nonreligious, and spiritual beliefs perceived the psychological climate of their university and exhibited a sense of belonging therein. (See Figure 2 for a summary of the
problem of interest, its significance, the impetus for the current study, and a rationale for the study purpose.)

Figure 2. Summary of the problem of interest and how it informs the study purpose.
Methodological Overview

The weight of the evidence presented thus far suggests that—for myriad reasons—sectarian institutions may find it difficult to cultivate inclusive campus climates for worldview diversity. However, their failure to do so has potentially significant ramifications for students who hold diverse religious, spiritual, or nonreligious perspectives. In an effort to counter the significant challenges many faith-based colleges and universities face in this regard, the current study was designed to illuminate successful strategies for supporting students with different worldviews and enhancing their sense of belonging. After a rigorous site selection process (see Appendix A), a Catholic university (hereafter referred to as Ignatian University) was identified as an ideal case to examine from an assets-based perspective. Two qualitative approaches, descriptive case study and portraiture, were well suited to guide the research design for this study.

An explicit aim of portraiture is to seek out and highlight assets (i.e., what is working) within the research setting (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). At the same time, portraiture allows for—and encourages—use of a critical lens to identify and acknowledge areas for growth. The current study was designed to emphasize the strengths of Ignatian University’s campus climate, and to identify programs and practices that effectively foster sense of belonging at the institution. At the same time, research was conducted with the utmost rigor and attentiveness to detail so opportunities for improving the worldview climate at Ignatian University would also be revealed.

Because I am interested in identifying what works with respect to fostering sense of belonging in a Catholic higher education context, it seemed logical to choose a research site
with a seemingly favorable climate for worldview diversity (as evidenced by inclusive aspects of the historical, compositional, organizational, and behavioral climate domains). Additionally, in order to fully address the central research question, I needed to find an institution at which students are regularly exposed to social justice. Thus, I identified three broad criteria for site selection: a) robust institutional religious identity, b) demonstrated commitment to worldview diversity, and c) varied and numerous social justice offerings for students. Ignatian University satisfied these criteria and emerged as an ideal setting upon review of the institutional mission; policies, academic programs, offices, and staff positions; student organizations and campus programs; and the demographics of the student body.

Focus groups and individual interviews with Ignatian University students who were actively engaged in social justice programs comprised the primary mode of data collection for this study. Data were also gathered via staff interviews, as well as observation and document review, to contextualize findings that emerged from the interviews. Participants were carefully selected to ensure they represented a variety of religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives. I built rapport with participating students during the course of a month-long campus visit in order to facilitate meaningful dialogue about their social justice encounters and sense of belonging at the institution. The culmination of my research efforts was the creation of a multidimensional portrait of social justice and sense of belonging at Ignatian University as experienced by students with a diversity of worldview beliefs.

Contributions of the Study

Sectarian institutions are at an important crossroads in the current U.S. higher education environment. On one hand, the integration of religious ideologies into various
facets of campus life creates unique opportunities for many students to grow and develop spiritually during the college years. On the other hand, the myriad worldview perspectives of today’s students signal a need for new ways of thinking about diversity and inclusion in these environments. Further, they highlight the critical importance of creating campus climates that are welcoming of students with varying worldview beliefs. The significance of my research lies in its consideration of religious identity and worldview diversity in tandem, which thus far has been infrequently examined in the higher education literature. It also broadens the scope of literature on sense of belonging to include a previously understudied group—that of worldview minority students. By exploring how sense of belonging might flourish at the intersection of religious identity and worldview diversity, my research contributes to theory, research, and practice in several distinct and relevant ways.

Theoretical Significance

The conceptual framework that guided this study has its roots in the racial/ethnic diversity literature (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005; Strayhorn, 2012). As such, the dimensions of campus climate on which it is based—as well as the sense of belonging construct at its center—have predominantly been used to investigate the experiences of students of color in higher education. Though Hurtado et al.’s (1998) model was successfully adapted for a series of studies on campus climate for worldview diversity (see Bryant et al., 2009), it is worthwhile to test its utility further in this realm of research. Relatedly, this study provided an opportunity to apply the model in a sectarian setting and determine its usefulness in examining both institutional religious identity and worldview diversity. There has also been a need to explore the effectiveness of sense of belonging as a measure used for studying
worldview minority students. The current study therefore makes a theoretical contribution to the literature by using campus climate and sense of belonging as useful lenses for interpreting the lived experiences of students with different religious, spiritual, and nonreligious beliefs.

**Complements to Existing Research**

This study also complements existing research by adopting an innovative methodological approach to inquiry that is seldom used in higher education. My use of portraiture helped draw attention to programs and practices that improve students’ sense of belonging at Ignatian University, rather than focusing on deficits within the campus environment. This assets-based approach serves as a unique contribution to the existing research on sense of belonging. Additionally, qualitative findings from this study augment what is already quantitatively known about the importance of cultivating inclusive campus climates for students who hold a diverse array of worldview perspectives. The student voices captured in this research add nuance to existing research, giving way to new lines of inquiry in both quantitative and qualitative domains. Finally, the current research complements a small but related body of literature that examines the relationship between sense of belonging and pluralism in non-Catholic sectarian contexts (see Rine, 2014). Studying sense of belonging in a Catholic environment may set the stage for investigating its relationship to pluralism in new sectarian settings, which in turn could reveal meaningful between-institution differences.

**Implications for Practice**

The implications for practice that grow out of this research constitute its most significant contribution overall. First, this study sheds light on aspects of social justice
programs at Ignatian University that shape students’ sense of belonging. What is more, specific insights into the capacity for CST to both strengthen institutional religious identity and influence students’ social justice experiences have been gleaned. Cumulatively, findings highlight the successes and challenges Ignatian University students encountered when seeking sense of belonging at their institution. In turn, they inform strategies for enhancing the institution’s Catholic identity through greater emphasis on CST while concurrently improving students’ sense of belonging.

Second, findings from the current study may prove useful in environments beyond Ignatian University. Though qualitative research is not inherently generalizable, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) assert that overarching universal themes may be extracted from qualitative studies and applied in other contexts. I adopted a portraiture methodology to make possible the identification of broadly applicable themes. To the extent that these universal themes can inform practice on other Catholic campuses, as well as at religiously-affiliated institutions generally, I will have succeeded in extending the influence of my research beyond Ignatian University.

Looking Ahead

In the following two chapters, I set the stage for my dissertation research by grounding it in relevant literature and explicating the methodology that guided my work. Chapter four presents findings in the form of a comprehensive portrait of social justice and sense of belonging at Ignatian University. Chapters five and six are written as standalone manuscripts. Chapter five presents findings about enhancing sense of belonging via social justice in a sectarian context; challenges and opportunities related to using CST as a common
social justice language on Catholic campuses; and study implications for research, theory, and practice. Chapter six is a conceptual piece that discusses how the campus climate framework guiding this study might be adapted for sectarian higher education generally, and applied to assess the climate for worldview diversity at Catholic colleges and universities in particular. In chapter seven, I conclude with an overarching review of the study’s significance, its limitations and delimitations, and opportunities for future research.
CHAPTER 2

Many college educators and student affairs professionals in higher education aim to prepare students to engage fully and effectively in a diverse society. In today’s world, the diverse society in which we live includes people who claim a host of religious, spiritual, and nonreligious beliefs. It is therefore imperative that we provide students with opportunities for meaningful interfaith engagement while they are in college, so they can deepen their understanding of worldview perspectives that differ from their own. In order to encourage student participation in interfaith activities, we must cultivate collegiate environments that make them feel safe and supported. That is, we must identify ways to foster students’ sense of belonging within their campus communities. The current study endeavored to do so by investigating how students with diverse worldviews at a Catholic university experienced sense of belonging through participation in social justice programs. It was situated within sectarian higher education because religiously-affiliated institutions often struggle to create campus climates that are inclusive of worldview diversity. As such, a unique opportunity exists to identify programs and practices that may help diverse students feel welcome within faith-based contexts.

The literature review is organized to correspond with the problem of interest and study significance outlined in chapter one (see Figure 2). It begins with a brief depiction of the religious landscape in higher education, which in many ways mirrors the diversity of our larger society. This snapshot enables us to better understand what is required to form effective leaders for a diverse society. It then goes on to examine what is known about campus features and collegiate experiences that shape students’ appreciation of diverse
worldviews. This literature base illuminates predictors of pluralism orientation among today’s college students. Because the current study is situated within the realm of sectarian higher education, I also explore institutional characteristics that can help (or hinder) pluralism development for students at faith-based institutions. Fundamental to this line of inquiry is determining whether these environments are amenable to constructive interfaith interactions, as such interactions are vital to the cultivation of pluralism among students. Finally, I present literature related to Catholic higher education to contextualize the current study and justify its focus on sense of belonging at a Catholic university. The sections of chapter two, and the questions that guided each one, are depicted in Figure 3.

1. What is the current religious landscape in the microcosm of society that is higher education?

Illuminates what is necessary for effective leadership in a diverse society.

2. What campus features and collegiate experiences lead to increased pluralism?

Highlights avenues for increasing students’ pluralism orientation.

3. Do sectarian environments allow for campus features and experiences that foster interfaith engagement?

Explores opportunities and barriers for constructive interfaith interactions at faith-based institutions.

4. Why is a Catholic institution an ideal setting for the current study?

Explains why the current study examined sense of belonging at Ignatian University.

Figure 3. Organizational framework for the literature review.
The Religious (and Secular) Landscape in Higher Education

There is a commonly held perception that religion among college students is on the decline, and that colleges and universities are becoming increasingly secularized (Schmalzbauer, 2013). However, much evidence exists to the contrary, both at individual and institutional levels. Results from the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) 2014 survey of 153,015 U.S. college freshmen indicate that a large majority of college students today (72.5 percent) identify with a religious tradition (Eagan et al., 2014). This number aligns closely with data from previous studies that similarly addressed college students’ religion and spirituality (HERI, 2004; Mayrl & Oeur, 2009). It is also substantiated by findings indicating that students participate in religious services at least occasionally (71 percent) and frequently have discussions about religion (30 percent) (Eagan et al., 2014; HERI, 2004). The growth of sectarian higher education in the current era, measured by increases in applications and enrollment, serves as additional evidence of sustained interest in religion among today’s college students (Riley, 2005).

Given that many students are seeking opportunities for religious engagement during the college years, it is not surprising that campuses are “abuzz with organized religion,” and boast numerous signs of life with respect to student involvement in religious groups and programs (Schmalzbauer, 2013, p. 127). These signs include an expansion of evangelicalism; revival of Catholic student organizations; reinvention of campus Judaism; increased representation of new immigrant and alternative religions; renewal of mainline Protestant campus ministries; and greater attention to spirituality among student affairs professionals.
All of these trends suggest that students are partaking in religious activities in large numbers, and participation rates are indeed similar to those of a century ago (Schmalzbauer, 2013).

As the college student demographic becomes increasingly diverse, it seems that campuses are providing a veritable “spiritual marketplace” to meet students’ varied needs (Schmalzbauer, 2013). This is heartening given the benefits that are associated with religious participation, many of which are presumably derived from the sense of community that religious and spiritual student groups provide. These positive student outcomes include higher grades, social integration, and knowledge of other races and cultures (Bryant, 2007). Gains in spiritual identification and spiritual quest among college students are also linked to involvement in religious activities, though, as mentioned previously, they are conditional on religious affiliation and institutional context (Bowman & Small, 2010; Bowman & Small, 2012b; Small & Bowman, 2012).

Amidst the widespread religious diversity and vibrant religious engagement in higher education, it is important to note that a growing number of “nones” are joining the ranks of religiously-affiliated college students. These are individuals who do not claim a particular religious tradition, and they comprise 27.5 percent of freshmen that entered U.S. colleges and universities in 2014 (Eagan et al., 2014). Religious “nones” report the lowest levels of satisfaction with respect to university choice, the academic experience, and interpersonal relationships when compared to minority-religious and Protestant students (Bowman & Smedley, 2013). Though lesser engagement on campus (and its subsequent effects on well-being) may be partly to blame, the discrepancy in satisfaction remains even after controlling for participation in religious activities (Bowman & Smedley, 2013).
One possible explanation for nonreligious students’ underwhelming university satisfaction (and the relative dissatisfaction of their non-majority religious peers) may lie in their experiences with Christian privilege, defined as “the conscious and subconscious advantages often afforded the Christian faith in America’s colleges and universities” (Seifert, 2007, p. 11). Examples of Christian privilege include the lasting remnants of many institutions’ Christian foundations, such as academic calendars that account solely for Christian holidays, chapels on campus, and religion or theology curricula that favor Judeo-Christian traditions (Ahmadi & Cole, 2014). These and other symbols of Christian privilege can stifle the identity of students whose beliefs do not align with the dominant views at their institutions, thus “rendering them invisible” (Goodman & Mueller, 2009, p. 55). Coupled with a lack of space and support on campus to meet the needs of students with minority worldviews, Christian privilege may implicitly undercut the value of minority worldview beliefs and inhibit sense of belonging for a growing number of college students (Ahmadi & Cole, 2014).

To counter the effects of Christian privilege and create a more inclusive environment for all students, Goodman (2012) proposes that we begin to acknowledge “spirituality, religion, and secularity … [as] three distinct pathways to values, meaning, and life purpose” (p. 64). This call to action is timely in light of the shifting landscape of worldview diversity in higher education, and it reflects the pluralism ideals that increasingly inform the work of college educators and student affairs professionals. As previously articulated, increasing students’ pluralism orientation should be of central concern in higher education because it facilitates interfaith understanding and cooperation in our diverse world. It is therefore
necessary to pose the question: *What campus features and collegiate experiences lead to increased pluralism?* A growing body of literature addressing ecumenical worldview\(^9\) and pluralism provides valuable insights on this front.

**Interfaith Engagement and Pluralism**

Diversity on U.S. college campuses has increased markedly in recent decades, bringing heightened awareness to issues of college access and success that are born out of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender differences (Patel, 2007). These aspects of diversity have received increased attention from higher education scholars and practitioners alike, but religion has been “effectively left out of the multicultural movement” until recently (Patel, 2007, p. 3). In the last decade, the tide has begun to turn, in part due to the 2004 launch of HERI’s Spirituality in Higher Education project. In its initial administration, the HERI (2004) survey captured meaningful information about religion and spirituality on college campuses from 112,232 entering freshmen at 236 institutions across the country. A follow-up survey of 14,527 students was conducted in 2007, and the resulting longitudinal data have informed numerous studies examining students’ experiences with worldview diversity in college (e.g., Bryant, 2011a, 2011b; Mayhew, 2012).

Findings from these studies suggest that students’ development of an ecumenical worldview can be partially explained by their religious and spiritual struggles in college (Mayhew, 2012), and that such struggles are often an outgrowth of challenging curricular and co-curricular experiences (Bryant, 2011a, 2011b). Interestingly, it appears that religious

---

\(^9\) *Ecumenical worldview* describes the extent to which an individual is “interested in different religious traditions, seeks to understand other countries and cultures, feels a strong connection to all humanity, and believes that love is at the root of all the great religions” (Astin et al., 2011, p. 24).
struggles are particularly impactful when students see their peers similarly grappling with difficult questions, thus emphasizing “the power and potential of designing supportive, ecumenical spaces where students can openly struggle with religious frames among their peers” (Mayhew, 2012, p. 304). In conjunction with further development of in- and out-of-class encounters with religion and spirituality, these spaces have the capacity to enhance students’ interest in, and acceptance of, diverse religious and spiritual perspectives.

Another set of studies examining ecumenism and pluralism consider the role of campus climate in shaping the experiences of minority-religious, majority-religious, and nonreligious students on college campuses (Mayhew et al., 2014; Mayhew & Bryant Rockenbach, 2012; Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013, 2014; Rockenbach et al., 2015). They utilize data from the Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey (CRSCS), developed in 2009 and administered at more than 50 institutions since 2011 (Rockenbach et al., 2015). The CRSCS instrument is informed by Hurtado et al.’s (1998) campus climate model, and similarly addresses the historical, compositional, behavioral, and psychological dimensions of the college environment (Bryant et al., 2009).

One of the earlier studies to come out of CRSCS compared a historically secular institution with one rooted in the Methodist tradition and found that student perceptions of climate were more favorable at the secular college, thus underscoring the potential influence of an institution’s historic commitment to inclusion (Mayhew et al., 2014). With respect to the psychological aspect of climate, perceived space for spiritual support and expression was positively linked to ecumenism, particularly among nonreligious students (Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013). Finally, research examining the behavioral dimension of the
religious and spiritual climate revealed that provocative experiences with worldview
diversity are positively related to ecumenism (Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013).

A more recent study utilizing CRSCS data explored students’ pluralism orientation
through interfaith engagement and informal peer interactions (Rockenbach et al., 2015).
Rockenbach et al.’s (2015) investigation paralleled previous research examining predictors of
ecumenical worldview (see Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013), and similarly
demonstrated that space for support and spiritual expression and provocative experiences
with worldview diversity are positively related to pluralism. Additionally, this study revealed
that interfaith engagement and informal interactions are significantly associated with higher
levels of pluralism, except in the case of negative interworldview encounters (Rockenbach et
al., 2015). These findings lend support to Patel’s (2012) “interfaith triangle,” a proposed
framework for understanding pluralism that is made up of three mutually-reinforcing
components—attitudes, relationships, and appreciative knowledge (see also Putnam &
Campbell, 2010). Patel (2012) asserts that these three components are enhanced when
individuals engage productively with worldview diversity, and that together they can foster
greater pluralism.

The cumulative literature on ecumenical worldview and pluralism in higher education
depicts the collegiate experiences that are most apt to stimulate meaningful interactions
across difference. It also affirms the notion that a diverse and inclusive learning environment
“provides the kind of experience base and discontinuity needed to evince more active
thinking processes among students, moving them from their own embedded worldviews to
consider those of another” (Hurtado, 2007, p. 189). When worldview diversity encounters
take place in these settings, their positive influence on the pluralism orientation of individual students can subsequently yield a more positive institutional bent toward pluralism (Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2012), which then makes the campus more inviting for students with different religious, spiritual, and nonreligious beliefs. Ultimately, such a move toward inclusion at the institution level will benefit the growing number of minority-religious, spiritual, and nonreligious students in U.S. higher education, and may be especially important for the subset of these individuals who are of primary interest in the current study: worldview minority students on sectarian campuses.

**Institutional Religious Identity: Challenges and Opportunities**

We now know that higher levels of worldview diversity and inclusion within higher education are important for: a) cultivating challenging encounters and informal interactions, and b) supporting both spiritual struggle and spiritual expression (Mayhew, 2012; Rockenbach et al., 2014). Further, research suggests that environmental factors like space for spiritual support and expression and provocative worldview encounters contribute to pluralism development. What we have yet to learn is whether sectarian institutions are well suited for cultivating pluralism in these ways. As such, the third driving question of this literature review seeks to ascertain: *Do sectarian environments allow for campus features and experiences that foster interfaith engagement?* At first glance, it appears that religiously-affiliated institutions face significant obstacles when it comes to engaging students across worldviews. However, some research findings suggest there is hope for realizing greater pluralism in sectarian higher education.
The religious heritage of higher education dates back to the first colonial colleges, which opened their doors nearly four centuries ago (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Thelin, 2011; Vine, 2007). These institutions were originally founded to groom students for roles in ministry, so Christian teachings and values were integrated into all aspects of academic preparation (Lee, 2002). The influence of religion on the mission of colleges and universities has largely diminished over time, but sectarian institutions continue to reflect the marriage of faith and reason that long characterized U.S. higher education. Unsurprisingly, vestiges of historic Christian privilege often remain on these campuses and can lead many to view the climate for worldview diversity unfavorably (Mayhew, 2012). Students are less inclined to participate in meaningful interfaith exchanges when they feel their college environment is unwelcoming, which in turn has negative implications for their pluralism orientation (Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2012, 2013).

The religious mission of sectarian colleges and universities can also thwart efforts to enhance diversity. Some Christian institutions demonstrate a weak preference for racial/ethnic and cultural diversity because it “does not reflect the true interest or the mission … of certain groups, especially the majority members or the leadership at these institutions” (Abadeer, 2009, pp. 193-194). If the “true interest or mission” of sectarian colleges and universities is to instill a particular set of religious beliefs in their students, then this may also explain why there is resistance to worldview diversity in faith-based contexts. In other words, institution leaders may uphold religiously homogeneous environments, what Hill (2009) refers to as “moral communities,” as the ideal for achieving mission objectives related to students’ faith development. Unfortunately, cultivating pluralism via informal interactions
with peers is not possible in these so-called moral communities. Furthermore, the omnipresence of religious reinforcers (e.g., attending religious services, spending time with like-minded friends) is likely to hinder ecumenical worldview development (Bryant, 2011b).

In light of the aforementioned challenges to interfaith engagement that are inherent in sectarian higher education, it is clear that we must think creatively about how to enhance diversity in faith-based contexts. One possible avenue that is gaining ground involves linking diversity efforts to the religious mission of sectarian institutions (Abadeer, 2009; Basham & Hughes, 2012). Paredes-Collins has made strides in this regard, specifically in the domain of racial/ethnic diversity. In two studies examining the experiences of racial/ethnic minority students on evangelical Christian campuses, she demonstrated that an inclusive campus climate for racial/ethnic diversity was associated with spiritual development among students of color (Paredes-Collins, 2013, 2014). Additionally, sense of belonging was identified as a significant predictor of spirituality for these students (Paredes-Collins, 2013). These findings highlight the vital role of campus climate in ensuring that underrepresented students achieve the same developmental gains as their majority peers in faith-based contexts (Paredes-Collins, 2013, 2014). They also suggest that attending to the needs of diverse students does not detract from—but rather contributes to—institutional efforts to foster spiritual growth.

While it is somewhat more challenging to articulate how worldview diversity might align with the mission of a religiously-affiliated institution, recent attempts have been made to frame pluralism such that it resonates within a college environment that is “committed to exclusivist truth claims” (Rine, 2012a, p. 70). Specifically, an emerging body of research (see Rine, 2012a, 2012b, 2014) has begun to investigate worldview pluralism in an evangelical
higher education context by developing a model to answer the following: Can students have strong Christian commitments while also retaining openness to pluralism? Using a national dataset (HERI, 2004) to test a model of “fallibilist Christian spirituality” (p. 833) among students attending Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) member institutions, Rine (2012b) confirmed that strong Christian commitment and openness to pluralism can coexist when students adopt a stance known as provisionality of belief, or fallibilism. Moreover, the data suggests that “as an individual’s commitment to Christian faith increases, openness to pluralism should increase as well, and vice versa” when they hold fallibilist epistemological perspectives (Rine, 2012b, p. 836).

Building on his prior work examining fallibilist Christian spirituality, Rine (2014) went on to investigate whether certain environmental features of CCCU campuses had a predictive relationship to students’ faith commitment, provisionality of belief, or their openness to pluralism. Germene to the current study was the finding that a sense of campus community (i.e., sense of belonging) was positively associated with an openness to pluralism among those studied, thereby suggesting that sense of belonging may not only engender pluralism indirectly by creating a climate that enables interfaith interactions. Rather, a sense of campus community in and of itself can lead to pluralism gains (Rine, 2014).

A 2016 study of students at Catholic institutions similarly examined factors within the institutional environment that shape student outcomes. It identified experiences associated with students’ perceptions that their college or university promoted Catholic mission-driven outcomes (Jessup-Anger et al., 2016). Using data from more than 12,000 students at 12

---

10 Provisionality of belief describes the perspective that, though there is a single Truth, diverse voices contribute to a more holistic understanding of that Truth (Rine, 2012b).
different Catholic colleges and universities who completed the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), Jessup-Anger and colleagues (2016) tested the extent to which various environmental variables predicted perceptions of Catholic mission integration, including academic courses, study abroad, service opportunities, and leadership development programs. Of significance in the context of the current study were findings that community service and mission-related student organization involvement (i.e., advocacy, service, or religious activities) “help[ed] to make the Catholic environment more palpable” for students (Jessup-Anger et al., 2016, p. 534). The fact that mission-driven programs have the capacity to make Catholic campuses’ religious identity more salient for students is valuable evidence in support of my choice to study sense of belonging in a Catholic higher education setting.

**Rationale for Studying a Catholic University**

Rine’s (2012b) findings reveal a viable pathway for promoting pluralism on sectarian campuses, one that respects the validity of students’ religious beliefs while also challenging them to adopt more inclusive attitudes toward different worldview perspectives (Hill, Edwards, & Hill, 2012). Further, his notion of religious identity and worldview diversity as mutually reinforcing is at the heart of my research, which seeks to address the following:

*How can particular aspects of a sectarian institution’s religious identity be strategically employed to foster sense of belonging among students with diverse worldviews?* To answer this question, I qualitatively examined the experiences of students with diverse worldviews who participated in social justice programs at a Catholic university. In keeping with Jessup-Anger et al.’s (2016) findings, I placed special emphasis on activities grounded in the Catholic mission of the institution that could heighten students’ knowledge and awareness
thereof. Specifically, I explored: a) how students with diverse worldview perspectives engaged in social justice programs at a Catholic university, b) in what ways, if any, students learned about Catholic Social Teaching (CST) through their social justice involvement, and c) how students’ encounters with social justice and CST shaped their sense of belonging within the campus environment. The decision to conduct the current study at a Catholic university, and to focus on CST as an aspect of religious identity, was made after a review of the existing literature. The final section of this chapter provides a rationale in response to the question: *Why was a Catholic institution an ideal setting for the current study?*

**Commitment to Diversity**

First and foremost, I believed this study should take place at a Catholic university because there exists a long-standing and deep appreciation for diversity within Catholic higher education. Unlike many of their non-Catholic sectarian counterparts, Catholic colleges and universities have a fairly inclusive legacy that informs their current commitment to diversity (Elliot, 2012; Thelin, 2011). These institutions were originally established to provide immigrants and first-generation college-goers of limited means with access to higher education, and they continue to serve these underrepresented groups in the present era. This commitment suggests that Catholic colleges and universities are less preoccupied with the diversity-related fears and tensions that plague some other sectarian institutions, including concerns that increasing diversity will relegate religious practices to an extra-curricular status, or otherwise diminish institutions’ Christian identities (Abadeer, 2009). Conversely, Catholic higher education leaders actively seek to enhance diversity on their campuses and as
a result boast more students from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds than many of their peer institutions (Elliot, 2012).

The heterogeneity of students at Catholic institutions suggests these colleges and universities are also primed to effectively address worldview diversity. Indeed, many are missionally driven to improve the campus climate for students who hold different religious, spiritual, and nonreligious beliefs (Estanek et al., 2006). This is unsurprising given the universal Catholic church’s long-standing commitment to “work sincerely for mutual understanding [across faiths] and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom” (Office of the Holy See, 1965). The church’s positive regard for religious diversity is echoed within the realm of higher education, not only in institutional mission statements but also in James and Estanek’s (2012) *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities*, which recommend that student affairs practitioners prioritize interfaith dialogue that fosters mutual understanding “in the midst of tensions and ambiguities” (p. 146).

**Struggle to Preserve Religious Identity**

The second reason I decided to conduct the current study at a Catholic university is rooted in a desire to address the challenges Catholic institutions face with respect to preserving and enhancing their religious identity (Buckley, 1999; Morey & Piderit, 2006; Wilcox & King, 2000). In today’s higher education environment, many Catholic campuses are said to be experiencing a crisis of culture (Morey & Piderit, 2006) because they are struggling to negotiate their core purpose amidst changing demographics, evolving notions of religion and spirituality, difficult economic realities, and isomorphic pressures to emulate
elite secular institutions (Dosen, 2012; Overstreet, 2010; Reilly, 2003). Though Pope John Paul II articulated the core characteristics that should distinguish a Catholic university in his 1990 declaration, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, tensions continue to arise as myriad Catholic institutions determine how to embrace these attributes without compromising reputation and rigor (McMurtrie, 2014). Additionally, though embracing diversity in many forms has long been a distinguishing feature of Catholic higher education (Elliot, 2012; Thelin, 2011), it may also be partially to blame for a lack of strong institutional religious identity, as it can be difficult to perpetuate religious ideologies without the homogeneity of belief that characterizes vibrant “moral communities” (Hill, 2009).

Ambivalence toward institutional religious identity at Catholic institutions appears to have an adverse effect on student engagement\(^\text{11}\) and associated outcomes (Bowman & Small, 2010, 2012a; Hill, 2009). Rates of religious service attendance on Catholic campuses are among the lowest reported for students enrolled at sectarian institutions (Hill, 2009), perhaps because religious participation is not expected or widely encouraged in these environments. Further, students at Catholic colleges “decline in religious service attendance at approximately 2.5 times the rate of students who are enrolled in public institutions” (Hill, 2009, p. 526). Regardless of religious affiliation, students who attend Catholic institutions are less religiously engaged than their counterparts on Protestant campuses (Bowman & Small, 2012a), and their spiritual development is diminished relative to peers at other sectarian schools (Bowman & Small, 2010). Collectively, these findings raise questions about whether \textit{strengthening} institutional religious identity within Catholic higher education might lead to

\(^{11}\) \textit{Student engagement} describes the degree to which college students participate in educationally effective practices that can be linked to measurable outcomes (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007).
greater student engagement for Catholic and non-Catholic students alike. In turn, it is possible that increased engagement could lead to greater sense of belonging for non-majority worldview students in particular.

**Catholic Social Teaching as a Valuable Tool**

The final rationale for conducting the current study at a Catholic university is inherent in the Catholic tradition itself. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) reflects a core dimension of church doctrine and is described as “a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society” (Brady, 2008, p. 11). CST encompasses a voluminous body of literature, but can be distilled into seven social justice themes (Brady, 2008; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 1998):

1. CST holds sacred the *life and dignity of the human person*;
2. Calls individuals to participate in *family* and *community*;
3. Emphasizes the importance of human *rights*, and the corresponding *responsibilities* and duties of individuals that ensure human rights are protected;
4. Requires that we seek a *preferential option for the poor and vulnerable*;
5. Upholds the *dignity of work* and the *rights of workers* as fundamental components of an economy that serves the people;
6. Promotes *solidarity* across “national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences” (Brady, 2008, p. 12); and
7. Implores individuals to *care for God’s creation*. 

Promotion of these themes as conduits for social justice is a central aim of Catholic higher education, and the themes are integrally part of the distinct identity of Catholic colleges and universities (see Brackley, 2006; Kolvenbach, 2000; Morey & Piderit, 2006). Importantly for the current study, the tenets of CST have the capacity to resonate with individuals inside and outside of the Catholic tradition who are committed to social justice (i.e., the notion that all institutions and individual members of a society should work together toward—and benefit from—the common good) (Connelly & Doyle, 2005). As such, CST serves as a potentially powerful tool for connecting students with minority worldviews to the Catholic identity of their institution. At the same time, inviting deeper exploration of this “rich treasure of wisdom” campus-wide may reinvigorate the institution’s connection to its religious roots.

The Catholic higher education literature highlights both the importance of increasing knowledge and understanding of CST on college campuses, and barriers to success in this domain. As part of an ongoing effort to increase the capacity for mission among student affairs practitioners at Catholic institutions, the aforementioned Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities were developed in 2007 (James & Estanek, 2012). Among these principles is an explicit recommendation for institutional leaders to provide students with opportunities to “experience, reflect, and act from a commitment to justice, mercy, and compassion, and in light of Catholic social teaching to develop respect and responsibility for all, especially those most in need” (James & Estanek, 2012, p. 146).
One university making concerted efforts to educate students about CST integrated it into social justice-related courses, and claimed that doing so “expand[ed] the students’ sense of community by expanding and reinforcing their base of common meaning rooted in the university’s mission and Catholic heritage” (Hill & Hill, 2008, p. 114). However, connections between CST and broader conceptions of social justice themes are not often made explicit (see Connelly & Doyle, 2005; Morey & Piderit, 2006), and little is known about how this might be accomplished specifically in the co-curricular realm of Catholic higher education. Thus, the current study fills an important gap in Catholic higher education research by seeking concrete strategies for introducing students to CST via social justice involvement, and doing so as a means for enhancing both institutional religious identity and students’ sense of belonging.

**Grounding the Study in a Campus Climate Framework**

Discovering ways to engender sense of belonging within Catholic higher education was a primary aim of this study. After all, belongingness is an innate psychological need that all human beings experience, and when it is realized it can positively affect individuals’ behaviors and perceptions (Strayhorn, 2012). Further, it is an important aspect of the campus climate, which shapes students’ access, inclusion, and success in college (Hurtado et al., 1998; Rankin & Reason, 2008). Finally, when students identify with their institution, and feel a meaningful connection to their college or university—in short, when students experience a sense of belonging on their campus—they may perceive their environment more favorably and engage in productive interfaith behaviors more readily. My interest in facilitating such “productive interfaith behaviors” ultimately drives the current study. However, I recognize
that sense of belonging is a critical precursor to student engagement across worldviews, and have thus used it to guide this research.

To employ sense of belonging as a lens for this study, I embedded it in a conceptual framework that addresses five distinct dimensions of campus climate—historical, compositional, organizational, behavioral, and psychological (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005). (See Figure 1 for an illustration of the campus climate framework.) It is believed that these climate factors work in tandem to shape feelings of inclusion or isolation on campus, and can influence students’ willingness to partake in interfaith activities (see Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2012; Mayhew, 2012). My research focused on the psychological climate factor by exploring how students perceived their connection or identification with the campus community (i.e., sense of belonging), and determining whether sense of belonging was enhanced by participation in social justice activities.

Some evidence already exists suggesting that membership in community outreach groups is positively associated with sense of belonging (see Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012), supporting my decision to focus on social justice involvement as an avenue for increasing students’ belongingness. Because CST provides a uniquely Catholic frame for conceptualizing social justice, it also has the capacity to enhance sense of belonging insofar as it resonates with students across worldview perspectives and heightens understanding of their institution’s religious identity. Finally, it is prudent to examine experiences and environmental features related to social justice and CST at Ignatian University given “the current literature base does not help us to understand how organization or institutional
attributes, conditions, ethos, and practices influence college students’ sense of belonging” (Strayhorn, 2012, pp. 13-14).

**Putting it All Together**

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides clear evidence that worldview diversity and interfaith engagement help students develop an appreciation for diverse others with whom they coexist in today’s society (see Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2012, 2013; Mayhew et al., 2014; Rockenbach et al., 2015). It also indicates that an inclusive campus climate—and an experience of sense of belonging therein—can enhance students’ perceptions and behaviors on campus, including those related to interfaith engagement (Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2012; Mayhew, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012). However, existing research that examines pluralism is quantitatively driven, which suggests the need for more studies that give voice to students’ distinct interfaith experiences in college. Relatedly, there is still much to be learned about how sense of belonging is achieved within different collegiate environments.

The extant literature also includes much commentary about the challenges of enhancing diversity in sectarian higher education (e.g., Abadeer, 2009). However, rigorous empirical studies are few, and those that address worldview diversity in particular (as opposed to racial/ethnic diversity) are even fewer. Thus, there is a need to broaden the conceptualization of diversity in faith-based contexts, and thoroughly explore how different religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives are attended to within sectarian environments. Finally, literature abounds that laments the identity crisis facing Catholic colleges and universities in the present era, and speculates as to the cause of the crisis (e.g.,
Buckley, 1999; Morey & Piderit, 2006; Wilcox & King, 2000). Unfortunately, though myriad proposals have been put forth about how to strengthen the Catholic identity of higher education institutions, empirically-based solutions for resolving the current “crisis” are notably absent from the conversation.

The current study uses a qualitative methodology and creatively applies a campus climate framework to investigate the lived experiences of religious, spiritual, and nonreligious students at a Catholic university. It acknowledges tensions that exist at the intersection of institutional religious identity and worldview diversity, and seeks avenues for deepening the former while expanding the latter. Most importantly, this study was carefully designed to reveal tangible strategies for improving sense of belonging for students of all worldviews within the broad scope of sectarian higher education.
CHAPTER 3

Religiously-affiliated colleges and universities comprise nearly one-fifth of the 4,726 degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the U.S. today (American Council on Education, 2015; NCES, 2014), and collectively they offer distinct opportunities for students to explore religion and spirituality while in college (Bowman & Small, 2012b; Davignon, 2014). In part, the unique appeal of these institutions lies in the richness of their religious identity and its manifestation in different facets of campus life (Davignon, Glanzer, & Rine, 2013; Garrett, 2006). At the same time, it is inarguable that college students in the U.S. are more diverse than ever before (Eagan et al., 2014), and there are many whose worldview beliefs fall outside the Christian traditions on which the vast majority of sectarian institutions were founded. For reasons both ethical and practical, it is important for higher education professionals at religiously-affiliated colleges and universities to welcome and support all students who come through their doors. This involves cultivating a climate that is inclusive of difference and making students from various worldview perspectives feel like they belong.

The current study examined the intersection of institutional religious identity and worldview diversity in sectarian higher education. Specifically, it explored whether aspects of an institution’s religious identity can be strategically utilized to foster sense of belonging among students with diverse worldview perspectives. To that end, I focused my research efforts on one university within Catholic higher education to explore how students gained a deeper understanding of their collegiate environment through involvement in university-sponsored social justice initiatives. Given the distinct Catholic character of the institution, I also investigated whether and how knowledge of Catholic Social Teaching (CST)
contextualized students’ social justice experiences through the lens of their institution’s religious identity. Finally, I was interested to learn how high-level engagement in social justice programs, and exposure to CST as a framework for understanding social justice, might cultivate sense of belonging at a Catholic institution. The specific questions guiding my research were:

1. How do students with diverse worldview perspectives engage in social justice programs at a Catholic university?

2. In what ways, if any, do these students come to learn about Catholic Social Teaching (CST) through their social justice involvement?

3. How do students’ encounters with social justice and CST shape their sense of belonging within the campus environment?

Good practice dictates that research questions should be carefully considered when determining the appropriate methodology to employ in a study. Because the current study was intended to elicit an in-depth and multifaceted understanding of selected student participants and their lived experiences at Ignatian University, I adopted a qualitative approach to address the above research questions. The study was driven by collaborative interactions with participants in a natural setting as recommended by recognized scholars in the social sciences (e.g., Mertens, 2010; Creswell, 2013). In particular, I utilized two complementary strategies, descriptive case study and portraiture, to construct a rich and nuanced representation of students’ encounters with social justice at a Catholic institution (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Yin, 1994).
Case Study and Portraiture

Case study provides an ideal architecture for a variety of qualitative inquiries, emphasizing process, context, and the exploration of people’s experiences within a bounded system (Merriam, 1998). Ignatian University represented the unit of analysis for the current study, and my depiction of the institution was informed by a variety of student voices, as well as supplemental perspectives from staff members. Primarily, this case study focused on students’ engagement with—and subsequent understanding of—social justice in the Catholic context of their institution. It was intended to be an instrumental case, or one that enhances understanding of a particular phenomenon by illuminating qualities that are generalizable to other contexts (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). In this vein, I expect that my findings related to social justice involvement as a mechanism for increasing belongingness among students at Ignatian University will prove valuable for other institutions within the realm of sectarian higher education.

The case study was used as a scaffolding to support and frame various components of portraiture, the second methodology that directed my investigation of Ignatian University. This dual approach offered more clearly defined parameters for data collection and analysis within the otherwise “all-encompassing method” of case study (Yin, 1994, p. 13). The lens of portraiture served as a unique contribution to my research design, augmenting the methods of data collection and analysis commonly utilized in case studies. Further, three distinct aspects of portraiture made it especially well suited for addressing the research questions.

First, portraiture is meant to “capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience” within a particular organization or community (Lawrence-Lightfoot &
Davis, 1997, p. 3). In a process that is central to portrait development, individuals’ stories are blended into an overarching narrative that is framed by time, history, and culture (Beer, 2012; Featherstone, 1989). The current study was thus designed to produce a cohesive and contextualized account of students’ experiences with social justice at Ignatian University, and it gave due attention to the institutional setting. Further, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ (1997) emphasis on the importance of a story’s broader sociohistorical context parallels the historical legacy dimension of Hurtado et al.’s (1998) campus climate model, highlighting its appropriateness as a guiding framework for the study methodology.

Second, portraiture is characterized by attentiveness to what is good in the environment being observed, even while acknowledging its imperfections (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). There are several problems with the pathology-based approach to inquiry that is common in education, among them a “focus on failure [that] can often lead to … cynicism and inaction” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 9). Conversely, accentuating what works within an organization can increase people’s willingness to acknowledge weakness, especially if “what works” encompasses effective solutions to identified problems (Chapman, 2005; Dixson, Chapman, & Hill, 2005). Portraiture offered a creative avenue for identifying solutions to the myriad challenges sectarian institutions face vis-à-vis campus climate for worldview diversity. Thus, I designed the current study to illuminate goodness as defined by students with diverse perspectives who are involved in social justice programs at Ignatian University. At the same time, I sought to identify opportunities for enhancing students’ sense of belonging on campus through their social justice experiences. Goodness in portraiture is defined as “a complex, holistic, dynamic
concept that embraces imperfection and vulnerability” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 142), and in this study it specifically captured the ways in which social justice encouraged sense of belonging for a diversity of religious, spiritual, and nonreligious students at a Catholic institution.

Finally, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) articulate the representation of unheard voices as a primary objective of their methodology. As Lawrence-Lightfoot explains:

I wanted [people] to experience the portraits as both familiar and exotic, so that in reading them they would be introduced to a perspective that they had not considered before. And…I wanted the subjects to feel seen as I had felt seen—fully attended to, recognized, appreciated, respected, scrutinized … Inevitably, I knew these would be documents of inquiry and intervention, hopefully leading toward new understandings and insights, as well as instigating change. (p. 5)

This study introduces a new and thought-provoking perspective on fostering sense of belonging within Catholic higher education by giving voice to students who hold worldview perspectives outside the institutional majority at Ignatian University. Their voices have the potential to inform strategies for engaging other students more fully with the Catholic identity of their institution, and may subsequently “instigate change” at other sectarian colleges and universities seeking to achieve a fruitful coexistence of religious identity and worldview diversity.

**Researcher as Instrument**

Qualitative inquiry in general, and portraiture in particular, take into account the profound influence of a researcher’s perspective and underlying assumptions on all aspects of
the research process, from site selection and data collection to the analysis and presentation of findings (Creswell, 2013; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). These perspectives and assumptions are shaped by one’s unique personal narrative. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) use the terms “preoccupation” and “autobiography” to describe the salient aspects of a portraitist’s life story (p. 87). The former describes the researcher’s intellectual and content knowledge, obtained through scholarly or professional endeavors and a mastery of the literature. Autobiographical themes include personal characteristics, inclinations, and biases that are informed by an individual’s “familial, cultural, ideological, and educational” history (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 95).

Portraitists are called to explicitly state preoccupations and autobiographical themes in their renderings of a scene so their voice (which includes these two dimensions) can be omnipresent in the portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In other words, “The multifaceted nature of voice [in portraiture] must be recognized, evaluated, and integrated within the telling of the data” (Chapman, 2005, p. 34). As such, I have reflected on my own preoccupations and autobiographical themes prior to commencing my study. Relationally, I carefully considered how they undergird my philosophical assumptions. What follows is a brief synopsis of my “lenses and tools for construction” (Chapman, 2005, p. 34), and the life experiences in which they are rooted. This overview is intended to make clear what aspects of my personal narrative shaped my work as a portraitist, how I arrived at my research questions, and why I was drawn to portraiture as the methodology for my line of inquiry.
Origins of Subjectivity

When I consider the salient values of my early life and career, inclusion and appreciation of difference are among the most important. As a young child, I lived with my family in a richly diverse community on a university campus, regularly interacted with people who did not look, think, or act like me, and viewed multiculturalism as the norm. My parents modeled acceptance of diverse others through their relationships with friends and colleagues from myriad backgrounds. In later years, first as a college student and then as a young professional, I was involved in numerous domestic and international service-learning programs. These reinforced my appreciation for engagement across difference by immersing me in unfamiliar settings and exposing me to worldviews that diverged from my own.

In addition to valuing diversity in its various forms, I uphold many tenets of the Catholic faith and have always identified as a Catholic. Catholicism was a significant element of family life—culturally and spiritually—throughout my upbringing, and led me to enroll at a Catholic university upon graduation from high school. Over the course of my four years in college, I gained a deep appreciation for the unique opportunities students are afforded to further their religious and spiritual development at sectarian institutions. My collegiate experiences ultimately led me to pursue a career in college student affairs, through which I continued my involvement in faith-based higher education. Recently, I spent four years as a student affairs professional at a small, Christian liberal arts college. During my time there, I observed the marked social, intellectual, and spiritual growth of students who were actively engaged in the institution’s religious tradition.
In many ways, my personal and professional history has led to an assumption that faith-based education has a significant capacity to positively impact students. At the same time, I recognize that my position as an insider (i.e., as a member of the worldview majority) at my undergraduate institution, and at my previous place of employment, likely shaped my experiences. Attending a Catholic university as a Catholic student doubtless facilitated deeper exploration of a faith tradition to which I already belonged. Similarly, while working at a Christian college, opportunities abounded for integrating my faith and my daily work because my faith aligned with the institution’s religious tradition. However, though I always felt welcome in these environments, I was keenly aware that individuals with non-majority worldviews were not necessarily afforded the same space and support as their Christian counterparts.

Ultimately, the realization that sectarian institutions are inviting and nurturing places for some—but not all—prompted me to pursue an advanced degree through a doctoral program in higher education. The study I recently conducted was carefully designed to address my multifaceted interest in the intersection of sectarian higher education and worldview diversity, and my research was significantly shaped by my distinct voice as a portraitist. First, it was founded on a belief that religion and spirituality are significant dimensions of student development and they are uniquely attended to at faith-based institutions. Second, it reflected an appreciation for environments that facilitate interfaith engagement among college students and the rich opportunities for growth they provide. Finally, implicit in the design of the study is my conception of goodness: a complex vision of
sectarian higher education and an increasingly diverse student population enriching one another and simultaneously thriving.

**Philosophical Assumptions**

Creswell (2013) suggests that one’s life experiences inform a set of philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality, sources of knowledge, the role of values in research, and preferred processes for conducting research. My preoccupations and autobiographical themes underlie assumptions that closely align with the tenets of qualitative research and, more specifically, the pragmatist paradigm. The pragmatist approach to research provides flexibility to maximize efficiency and achieve results in the research process (Mertens, 2010). Correspondingly, my primary motivation for conducting the current study was to identify actionable findings that could contribute to greater inclusion for students with diverse worldviews at sectarian institutions. Further, pragmatism in qualitative research supports the study of what is most valuable and interesting to the researcher (Mertens, 2010), which in this case involves strengthening institutional religious identity and worldview diversity.

Finally, pragmatist researchers draw from different interpretive frameworks to achieve their aims (Creswell, 2013), and choose a methodology that will produce desired knowledge (Mertens, 2010). The portraiture methodology I selected utilizes rigorous data collection and analysis methods much like those employed when adopting a postpositivist research orientation. In keeping with the constructivist frame, portraiture depends “as much as possible on the participants’ view of the situation,” and poses broad questions to gain insight into meaningful processes (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Lastly, portraiture applies a
criticalist lens by drawing forth underrepresented voices to craft a more nuanced and comprehensive narrative. The amalgamation of diverse philosophical approaches described above makes clear that portraiture reflects the spirit of pragmatism—by relying on the strengths of various traditions to solve identified problems and offering insights for change—and thus authentically reflects my philosophical assumptions.

Site and Participant Selection

Portraitists assert that any human experience must be examined in light of its “physical, geographic, temporal, historical, cultural, [and] aesthetic” context to ensure an accurate interpretation of what is being observed (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 41). Relatedly, the setting of a portrait should be depicted in rich detail to facilitate the meaning-making process for its audience. Thus, what follows is an initial description of the site selected for the current study, presented in an effort to begin “priming the canvas” for the portrait to come (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 74). I utilized Miles and Huberman’s (1994) four dimensions of site selection—setting, process, actors, and events—to explain why Ignatian University was identified as the preferred research site for exploring students’ encounters with social justice within a Catholic higher education context.

Ignatian University was selected as an ideal setting for this study upon careful review of its website and discussions with campus administrators. I was seeking evidence of: a) the university’s commitment to upholding its Catholic identity, b) support for students with diverse worldviews, and c) social justice as an institutional priority. This evidence was obtained by thoroughly reviewing the university’s institutional history and mission; its policies and infrastructure, including offices and staff positions; the curricular and co-
curricular programs it offers; its student organizations; the worldview composition of its
student body; and recognition or honors received by the institution (e.g., the President’s
Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, the Carnegie Foundation’s Community
Engagement Classification).  

I selected this setting because it reflected an institutional commitment to worldview
diversity through the composition of its student body, statements of inclusion, and myriad
interfaith initiatives. Further, the worldview diversity of the student body made it feasible to
seek out and document voices of individuals holding underrepresented perspectives. Ignatian University was also an ideal choice given its missional commitment to the Roman
Catholic tradition on which it was founded. A multitude of programs and student groups that
provide Catholic faith formation also reflected this commitment, and suggested that students
are regularly exposed to dimensions of the institution’s Catholic identity. Finally,
opportunities to engage in social justice at Ignatian University are widespread and readily
accessible to students. The abundance and variety of social justice programs in this setting
facilitated a multidimensional examination of students’ experiences therein.

Ignatian University is a Jesuit institution within the Catholic tradition, which means it
was founded by the Society of Jesus, a religious order that claims a 500-year history and
views education as one of its foremost priorities (“The Society of Jesus,” n.d.). This Jesuit
university proved to be an ideal site for the purpose of the current study because—in keeping

12 This criterion was included to provide objective evidence of an institutional commitment to activities through
which social justice may be addressed, and high levels of student participation in those activities.

13 In order to be consistent with extant literature on worldview diversity, “non-majority” is used to describe
students at Ignatian University who do not identify with a Christian worldview.
with Jesuit ideals—it strives to incorporate justice and faith as part of a holistic education (Kolvenbach, 1989). Further, Jesuit colleges and universities are deeply and explicitly committed to promoting social justice (Álvarez, 2014; Kolvenbach, 2000). Finally, there is recognition among Jesuit institutions that “the Catholic identity of the university is not to counter or exclude the fundamental humane and religious values of other traditions, but to support and endorse their presence” (Buckley, 1999, p. 9). Yet CST is also viewed as a valuable resource for individuals from non-Catholic perspectives to better understand the social tradition of their Catholic campus communities (Cahill, 2013).

Appendix A provides an overview of the site selection criteria reflecting Ignatian University’s relevant institutional characteristics, and is organized by the various dimensions of campus climate. As previously noted, this research was designed to examine students’ sense of belonging—an aspect of the psychological climate—in a context seemingly inclusive across other climate dimensions. As such, the campus features documented in Appendix A were carefully selected to demonstrate inclusion within the climate factors of historical context/legacy of the institution, organizational diversity, behavioral climate, and compositional diversity (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005).

The process of my site selection began with identification of gatekeepers and informants. At Ignatian University, I was fortunate to have a connection to senior leadership through a colleague who is a faculty member and who previously served as an assistant to the provost for social justice initiatives. Discussions with this gatekeeper confirmed my choice of Ignatian University as an ideal site given the purpose of this study, and she helped me navigate the necessary channels to gain authorization from within the institution. Upon study
approval, I emailed informants working in student affairs units that related to my line of inquiry (e.g., Community Service Office, Campus Ministry). I asked these staff members for assistance recruiting student participants, and invited them to take part in the interview process if they so desired. (See the email invitation to staff in Appendix B.) The administrators with whom I spoke were supportive of my research aims, willing to take part in the study themselves, and able to recommend participants. In total, six student affairs professionals from Ignatian University—all of whom possessed first-hand knowledge of social justice and/or worldview diversity on campus—were interviewed to provide contextual information about the campus climate and students’ sense of belonging.

The criteria for choosing student actors were carefully aligned with the research questions and the strengths-based emphasis of the portraiture methodology. Therefore, student actors (or participants) in the study were expected to: a) collectively represent a diversity of religious and worldview traditions, and b) demonstrate a high level of engagement in social justice programs. Specifically, I secured an initial pool of students that reflected the following composition: 36 percent from a Christian or Catholic tradition, 43 percent who claimed a non-majority religious or spiritual worldview (in this case, Muslim or spiritual but not religious), and 21 percent who identified as nonreligious. This breakdown was intended to give significant voice to minority worldview groups, while also taking into account what was realistic given student demographics at the institution. Though I strove to accentuate the experiences of worldview minority students at Ignatian University, I was

---

14 The participant sample was 71 percent female, which was fairly reflective of demographics campus-wide and within social justice programs.
mindful that the final portrait was meant to provide a holistic picture of Ignatian University, and inclusion of the Catholic student voice was essential to succeeding in that regard.

To determine potential student participants’ religious, spiritual, or nonreligious identities, and to ensure I selected participants who represented a variety of worldviews, I developed a brief screening questionnaire that all recommended study participants were asked to complete (see Appendix C). The questionnaire also contained items to indicate whether potential participants were highly involved in social justice initiatives at Ignatian University. Development of these items was guided by Astin’s (1984) seminal theory of student involvement, which emphasizes the importance of both qualitative and quantitative investment in activities, and the degree of involvement over time and across activities.

In addition to measuring student involvement in social justice programs, the screening questionnaire asked students to share their year in school and whether they would be on campus during the data collection period. Participants in this study were required to be undergraduates in their second year at the university or beyond to ensure they had gained ample exposure to the institutional environment. They were also expected to be physically present at Ignatian University throughout the time of the study (i.e., not participating in a study abroad program or off-campus internship experience), as I was conducting in-person interviews at the institution. The questionnaire also collected basic demographic information that was retained and utilized for those students who ultimately participated in the study. (See Appendix D for a demographic overview of student participants.)

15 Student involvement encompasses the amount of physical and psychological energy a student puts forth in their higher education pursuits (Astin, 1984).
Finally, the questionnaire outlined various events that comprise the current study, and respondents were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in each of them. These events included focus groups and individual interviews, both of which are fully explained in my review of data collection strategies. Different incentives were offered to students based on the level of their involvement in the study (i.e., $10 gift card for focus group participation, an additional $10 for a second interview, and $5 more for each subsequent interview); these incentives were described on the questionnaire to encourage participation.

The screening questionnaire, designed using Qualtrics survey software, was emailed to potential study participants and respondents who satisfied the study criteria were contacted within one week of completing the survey. At that time, they received further details of participation, including a brief reiteration of the study purpose; potential times to participate in an initial focus group interview; and a copy of the informed consent form outlining the rights of research participants. Individuals who completed the questionnaire but were not available for any of the focus groups were invited to instead schedule a one-on-one interview. If this option was not of interest to the student, they were removed from the list of participants.

Data Collection

Portraiture is akin to ethnography in that it requires a multilayered understanding of those being studied and the larger context within which they are situated (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The portraitist seeks not only to document the actor's experiences, but also to understand and convey how the actor feels about—and makes sense of—those experiences. Thus, I used a variety of data collection techniques over the course of an
extended campus visit to ensure that I had sufficient exposure to, and interaction with, my participants. Specifically, data collection included focus groups, individual interviews, participant observation, and document review. By employing these methods, it was possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of each actor’s experiences with social justice in the Catholic context at Ignatian University.

**Focus Groups and Individual Interviews**

Interviews are a common approach to data collection in case study research, and also serve as a vital component of portrait development (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Yin, 1994). Through the interview process, researchers are able to ascertain both what is *in* and *on* the minds of participants (Patton, 2002). They also garner valuable information about past events and experiences that are relevant to the study but impossible to observe directly (Merriam, 1998). Because I approached interviews through the lens of a portraitist, I strove to facilitate a mutual exchange of ideas and perceptions with participants in the spirit of the methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Giving generously of my time, attention, and feedback in exchange for what was being asked of participants was also necessary to build the reciprocal relationships that define qualitative inquiry and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

When speaking with participants, I referred to interviews as conversations when appropriate, as such terminology more accurately reflects the nature of interviews within portraiture. All conversations took place in mutually agreed-upon, on-campus locations that were familiar to participants to put them at ease as much as possible. I also frequently reiterated the purpose of the research to participants, and emphasized the unique and
meaningful contributions they were making to the study. In doing so, we were able to form relationships that were “rich with meaning and resonance and [that became] the arena for navigating the empirical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of authentic and compelling narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv).

Parameters for focus groups. As Merriam (1998) recommends, the research questions for this study were considered when determining the appropriate number of study participants. To engage with a sufficiently large and diverse group of students, I met with four focus groups during my campus visit, and three individual students who were not available to attend any of the focus groups. Each focus group was comprised of 2-4 students and met for up to two hours, thereby allowing time for every student’s voice to be heard; one-on-one interviews lasted for 45-60 minutes. A single semi-structured interview protocol was used for all focus groups and first-round interviews (see Appendix E), allowing for comparison of the groups’ distinct dimensions (Mertens, 2010). I used the focus groups and first-round interviews to identify eight students with whom I would have more in-depth conversations in the following weeks.

Follow-up conversations. Portraiture required me to spend significant time with participants in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The number of actors I selected for individual interviews was therefore determined upon careful consideration of: a) the time that was necessary to collect sufficient data for each participant, and b) the total amount of time I was present at the research site. Eight students were ultimately chosen to participate in follow-up conversations, and all had indicated their willingness to do so on the screening questionnaire. Respondents
included students who identified as Catholic or Protestant, but overall they comprised a diverse group with respect to worldview (i.e., two were Christian, four identified as spiritual or as part of a non-majority religious group, and two students were nonreligious). Four of these students participated in a second-round interview, and the remaining four students were asked to take part in two follow-up interviews. These follow-up conversations, each 45-60 minutes in length, made it possible for us to co-construct narratives that were woven into the final portrait of Ignatian University.

As I progressed through the focus groups and subsequent rounds of individual interviews, I moved beyond a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix F) and toward more open-ended questioning, listening for the underlying story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Specifically, I guided conversations toward in-depth reflection on students’ encounters with social justice and CST in their Catholic university context, expecting actors’ “insights into certain occurrences … [to serve] as the basis for further inquiry” (Yin, 1994, p. 84). The stories I listened for were those that revealed how students experienced the campus climate—and sense of belonging specifically—through their social justice involvement. All focus groups and individual interviews were digitally recorded and I took thorough notes to account for what was not captured in the audio recordings. At the conclusion of every focus group and individual interview, I revisited my notes, reflected on my reactions, and documented all thoughts in what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) refer to as “impressionistic records” (p. 188).

**Staff interviews.** In an effort to gather contextual information about the campus environment within which student participants were operating, I conducted one-on-one
interviews with six student affairs administrators who could speak to the campus climate for worldview diversity and to the university’s commitment to social justice. These individuals were identified through conversations with the gatekeeper at Ignatian University. Staff interviews were conducted at locations selected by the participants, and ranged from 45 minutes to two hours in length. A semi-structured interview protocol, available in Appendix G, guided each of the interviews. Given staff participants’ particular roles, areas of expertise, and longevity on campus, insights gleaned from their interviews provided a nuanced perspective of the setting—an integral aspect of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ (1997) portraiture methodology—beyond that which students alone could provide.

**Participant Observation and Document Review**

Participant observation and document review were important aspects of the study, as they allowed me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the environment that shaped students’ experiences. Upon arrival at Ignatian University, I conducted what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) refer to as “outside in” observations, documenting contextual elements of the setting from an external perspective before becoming fully acclimated to the environment. I accomplished this by attending two campus tours; visiting academic, co-curricular, and spiritual spaces; and exploring the area surrounding campus. Through these observations I was able to “remain open to input from all sources of potential contextual material” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 62). I ensured that my impressions during the “outside ins” were thoroughly recorded, as they were critical for producing a holistic rendering of the scene.
During the focus groups and individual interviews, I listened for references to programs, events, and documents that were salient in shaping participants’ social justice experiences at Ignatian University. Ultimately, I attended four events related to activities students mentioned in their interviews: a post-spring break gathering for students who participated in a university-sponsored social justice trip known as Alternative Spring Break, or ASB; a weekly outreach program that places students in the community to engage with homeless individuals; an on-campus protest that was part of the national Fight for $15 campaign to increase the minimum wage; and a presentation session for students participating in the yearlong Community Engagement Internship Program (CEIP).

Additionally, I elected to include several documents among the data I collected: the university’s strategic plan; syllabi and required readings for CEIP; a summary of ASB program assessments; and materials used for student leader training in the Community Service Office. These activities and artifacts served as the focus of observation and document review because they captured what was significant and relevant in the setting based on the actors’ experiences.

To further ensure that I was attuned to each student’s context and the story unfolding within it, I observed scenes as a “boundary sitter” rather than as a full participant whenever possible (Chapman, 2005, p. 43). However, it should be noted that I engaged as a participant-observer when it was appropriate to do so. An observation protocol was completed following each event or activity to ensure I thoroughly documented all that was taking place before me (see Appendix H). Keeping an appropriate distance during observations allowed me to

Data Analysis

This is a disciplined, empirical process—of description, interpretation, analysis, and synthesis—and an aesthetic process of narrative development. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 185)

Qualitative data analysis is recursive, meaning that findings emerge and evolve continuously throughout the study (Mertens, 2010). Such an iterative process results from a concurrent approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings that is inherent in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). The recursive approach was particularly salient for the current study because I employed multiple data collection strategies and was thus conducting different stages of the study simultaneously. Throughout these stages, I adhered to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ (1997) five modes of theme construction:

1. Identifying repetitive refrains that are verbalized or alluded to by multiple study participants and that reflect a common understanding or point-of-view;
2. Seeking resonant metaphors, or symbolic expressions, that capture how participants make meaning of their experiences;
3. Listening for themes in the midst of “cultural and institutional rituals that seem…important to organizational continuity and coherence” (p. 193);
4. Triangulating data from multiple sources; and
5. Developing convergent and coherent themes.

While data collection was still underway, I listened to interview recordings of focus groups, giving particular attention to dynamics between participants (Barbour, 2013);
reviewed interview transcripts on days I was not in the field; and regularly revisited impressionistic records. During my reflections, informal descriptive and interpretive codes were assigned to the data that reflected repetitive refrains, resonant metaphors, and institutional rituals (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The resulting hypotheses and initial interpretations of the data, as well as any insights or points of confusion that were documented in the impressionistic records, were used to devise questions for future interviews.

Upon completion of all fieldwork, I devoted time to in-depth analysis that is “more ruminative than the day-to-day analysis of the data-gathering phase” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 18). Professionally transcribed interviews, documents recommended by participants, observation protocols, and impressionistic records were read carefully to identify particularly meaningful passages, and these were highlighted or pre-coded (Saldaña, 2013). Preliminary codes were documented in an impressionistic record and reserved as evidence to support themes and speculations that emerged later (McClellan, 2006). During this time, I listened for an overarching storyline across different data sources (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Simultaneously, I was attentive to the emergence of divergent perspectives, as portraiture requires consideration of voices that fall outside identified themes and thus provide texture within the final portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005).

Akin to McClellan’s (2006) approach to data analysis within portraiture, a second round of data analysis involved open coding of interviews that sought to identify salient refrains, metaphors, and rituals germane to the research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I also used a priori coding when applicable to
classify findings related to the campus climate and students’ sense of belonging (Creswell, 2013). (See Appendix L for a complete codebook.) Reliance on theoretical propositions is a recommended analytic strategy within case study research and helped me establish connections between identified themes and the literature upon which the study is based (Yin, 1994). Coding throughout this phase of analysis was conducted using NVivo 11 software for qualitative and mixed methods research.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) recommend triangulation as a mechanism for identifying points of convergence across various data methods. Thus, my third phase of data analysis consisted of triangulating interview transcripts, observation protocols, summary forms for relevant documents, and impressionistic records. Also at this time, I provided eight student participants (those who completed at least two interviews) with summaries of their data and select quotes to review. Sharing findings at this stage of analysis is uncharacteristic within portraiture. However, it provides added transparency to combat critiques that portraitists are granted too much latitude in deciding what will be included—or excluded—in their renderings of a scene (English, 2000). Member checking at this stage also helps reinforce the “healthy, trusting and credible relationships” with participants upon which portraiture is founded (Waterhouse, 2007, p. 281). In the current study, two students offered thoughts about their data summaries; both responded positively and believed their sentiments were accurately captured by the quotes I elected to include.

Upon completion of triangulation, I organized all data into categories that were defined by overarching patterns in the data, condensing and/or further refining existing codes as necessary (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This phase culminated
in the construction of narratives capturing the data’s underlying themes (Saldaña, 2013). An interweaving of these narratives was the final step of portrait construction, resulting in what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) refer to as the aesthetic whole. A final round of member checking confirmed the portrait’s authenticity, or resonance, with participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Four students—including two whose perspectives were of critical importance during portrait construction—indicated they had carefully reviewed the portrait and affirmed that it reflected their campus environment and individual experiences with precision. Collectively, the analytic strategies described above helped me move beyond iterative processes and toward the generation of a portrait that “capture[d] the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3).

**Research Integrity**

It is vitally important to validate study findings by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Mertens, 2010). *Credibility* requires provision of a complete and accurate picture of events examined in the study. I ensured that data analysis was credible by member-checking thematic findings with study participants after the coding process and again when the portrait was complete, and triangulating data collected from different sources. To ensure *transferability*, one must provide adequate details about the time, place, context, and culture in which the research was conducted (Mertens, 2010). Constructing a thick description of the study site is also central to the portraiture methodology, so significant time and attention was devoted to documenting Ignatian University’s aesthetic features and salient cultural symbols; the physical setting in which my
interactions with participants occurred; and my “perch and perspective” as the portraitist (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 66). My efforts to fully contextualize the portrait were aided by my immersion in the study site over a period of several weeks.

Dependability requires careful documentation at each step of the research process to explain any changes that occur over time (Mertens, 2010). I have provided detailed interview and observation protocols in the appendices to serve this purpose. Additionally, summaries of interviews and observations are available in Appendix K that outline the number and type of interviews and observations; duration of interviews and observations; and number and type of participants at each interview or event. Finally, in order to demonstrate confirmability, I must provide a rationale for my interpretation of findings (Mertens, 2010). Confirmability has been ensured by situating interpretations within the conceptual framework and extant literature, using objective data from the document review process to support interpretations, and explicitly articulating the influence of my preoccupations and autobiographical themes on the interpretation of findings (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

**Study Approval**

The proposal for this research was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at North Carolina State University. No steps to conduct the study were taken until approval was secured. I also shared my proposal with a staff member from the IRB office at Ignatian University, and confirmed it was not necessary for me to seek a secondary IRB approval at the research site. The IRB proposal approved by NC State included informed consent forms for participants (see Appendices I and J) that addressed the purpose of the study; identification of the researcher and the sponsoring institution; benefits and potential risks of
participation; expectations for participation; voluntary nature of participation; assurance of anonymity and confidentiality; and persons to contact if questions or concerns arose (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, the identity of the institution I studied was protected through use of a pseudonym, Ignatian University. Institution-specific data, whether contextual in nature or related to study findings, is presented hereafter in a manner that upholds anonymity as much as possible.

**Limitations**

Several limitations of the current study are worthy of note. First, due to resource constraints, the amount of time I had available to conduct research at Ignatian University was limited to four weeks. Therefore, it is possible the data I gathered were not sufficient to craft a truly comprehensive portrait of the institution (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Participant selection posed a second, and related, limitation. Fully answering the research questions required that participants represent a diversity of religious and worldview perspectives. While I was largely successful in recruiting a diverse array of students, those in the worldview majority comprised a larger proportion of the initial participant pool than I originally intended. Additionally, students’ schedule constraints made it difficult to assemble focus groups of 6-8 participants as had been initially planned. Smaller focus groups of 2-4 students reduced the amount of “rich interactional data” that emerged, thus limiting the value of employing focus groups as a data collection strategy (Barbour, 2013, p. 314). Finally, because I visited the campus late in the semester, there were events and programs relevant to the study that occurred prior to my arrival and thus could not be included as part of the data collection process. While none of these difficulties substantially inhibited my ability to
adequately answer the research questions, I acknowledge that they shaped—to a certain extent—the ultimate portrait that was created.

**Conclusion**

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) emphasize that “in the particular resides the general” (p. 14), suggesting that universal themes are identifiable within portraiture when sufficient detail and context are provided to invite outside readers into the scene (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Portraiture is also designed to be accessible for an audience that is both scholarly and non-scholarly, showcasing broadly relevant themes through its telling of a compelling story (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Much like an instrumental case study is intended to be useful for audiences beyond the immediate case being studied, the portrait I have constructed is intended to provide valuable insights to practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders at Catholic higher education institutions like Ignatian University. The comprehensive portrait of social justice involvement and sense of belonging at Ignatian University is presented in chapter four. Chapters five and six offer a culmination of findings in manuscript format, drawing from the portrait to highlight emergent themes. A concluding chapter reiterates the study findings and emphasizes their practical relevance for sectarian higher education.
CHAPTER 4

The current study was conducted to illuminate ways in which students with diverse religious, nonreligious, and spiritual worldviews can find sense of belonging via social justice involvement in a sectarian higher education setting. Specifically, it explored how students at a Catholic university perceived the psychological climate of their institution, and how social justice-related experiences helped them connect meaningfully to their collegiate community. I adopted an assets-based approach to the study, seeking evidence that sectarian higher education and students of diverse worldviews can simultaneously flourish, and perhaps even be mutually reinforcing. The setting of my research was a carefully-selected institution that exemplified: a) robust institutional religious identity, b) demonstrated commitment to worldview diversity, and c) varied and numerous social justice offerings.

Ignatian University satisfied the aforementioned criteria across multiple campus climate domains (see Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005). The university’s founding by the Society of Jesus—a Catholic religious order for which social justice and education for all are of central importance—was indicative of an inclusive historical legacy. The institutional mission statement, grounded in Ignatian’s Catholic and Jesuit heritage, suggested an ongoing desire to uphold the university’s religious identity in the present day. Students from various non-Catholic backgrounds (i.e., Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, and “other”) collectively comprise more than half of the student body at Ignatian, reflecting the institution’s compositional diversity. Several aspects of Ignatian’s organizational structure signified strong institutional support for worldview diversity and inclusion: policies explicitly referencing religion as a valued aspect of diversity on campus; curricula focusing on a variety
of religious traditions as well as an interfaith minor; and campus ministry staff specifically dedicated to serving non-Catholic students. Finally, in the vein of an exemplary commitment to social justice, an array of curricular and co-curricular opportunities at Ignatian University (e.g., internships, alternative break trips, advocacy training) lend themselves to engagement with worldview diversity (i.e., an inclusive *behavioral climate*).

When I arrived at Ignatian University to conduct my study, I endeavored to learn more about: a) the nature of students’ interactions with others of diverse worldviews, and b) their perceptions of the campus climate for worldview diversity. Additionally, my on-site research involved delving into the environment at Ignatian to determine what campus features, programs, and experiences were salient for students with different worldview perspectives who were highly engaged in social justice activities. Finally, I attempted to learn how students’ encounters with social justice cultivated their sense of belonging in college.

All of the findings I gleaned from this study were considered in light of the Catholic setting at Ignatian University, with special consideration given to whether and how Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as a social justice framework helped non-Catholic students feel more connected to the religious identity of their institution.

In total, I spent four weeks at Ignatian University, crisscrossing the campus on foot, riding crowded trains to and from the heart of the urban center Ignatian calls home, studying in the student union alongside countless undergraduates deep in thought or conversation, and attending campus events that served as windows into the culture of the institution. Also during this time, I was fortunate to glean insights from six administrators who work closely with students and possess first-hand knowledge of institutional religious identity, worldview
diversity, and social justice engagement at Ignatian. Finally, I had the privilege of getting to know 14 students at the university: three agnostics, three Roman Catholics, three Muslims, two Protestants, and three students who were spiritual but not religious. All were deeply committed to social justice as an aspect of their collegiate experience.

I initially met with students in a series of four different focus groups consisting of 2-4 participants. During each convening, students were animated and willing to share openly about their social justice encounters on campus; they also augmented each other’s stories with unique perspectives based on personal background, campus involvement, and worldview. Eight of these students agreed to talk with me in individual follow-up interviews. Allie, Bob, Cassidy, Elizabeth, Ella, Falcon, Mary, and Sarah collectively represent the rich diversity of students at Ignatian across myriad dimensions, including worldview, race/ethnicity, gender, geography, and field of study. Though the portrait to follow captures sentiments of all 14 students with whom I interacted at the university, it features these eight students’ intimate views of Catholic identity, social justice, and sense of belonging at Ignatian. I highlight participants’ sentiments by presenting direct quotes from my conversations with them, and offer snapshots of their direct experiences (in italics) based upon my direct observations of programs and events in which they were involved.

An Outsider’s Purview

On a crisp spring morning, I emerge from the stairwell of a train station, blinking into the bright sunlight, and give a cursory glance up and down the trafficked thoroughfare before me. To my left are a few well-worn storefronts: a neighborhood bar with garish red, white, and blue Coors Light logos adorning its windows; a second-story hair salon demarcated by
faded, larger-than-life images of coiffed male and female models. Looming above the station are several pristine hi-rises in progress, including a hotel and a high-end apartment building with a “for rent” banner rippling in the wind; both stand in stark contrast to the squat, weathered, unassuming buildings beneath them. These two domiciles, along with a nearby Pita Pit—undoubtedly an oasis for college students seeking a quick bite—suggest I am somewhere in the vicinity of Ignatian University. Yet, though I am confident I de-trained at the stop closest to the university, it is not immediately clear where the campus is located. Some city dwellers pass me on foot, plugged into smartphones and looking past me with unfocused gazes, while others await a bus at a nearby stop. No one seems attuned to my unfamiliarity with the urban bustle surrounding me.

After some exploration on foot and a request for directions from a passerby, I locate an understated entrance to Ignatian, marked subtly with cement pillars. Indeed, it is very near my starting point and the Pita Pit is but a stone’s throw from the campus perimeter. Almost immediately after stepping through the university’s gates, I feel miles away from the urban center in which it is situated—a city that is among the nation’s 50 largest. I make my way to the interior, passing old and new academic buildings that face landscaped green spaces at varying angles; fixed benches, manicured flowerbeds, and sculptures of a religious persuasion seem to beg people to sit awhile in quiet reflection or contemplative conversation. However, at this midday hour on a midweek day, there are few students indulging such an inclination. I continue on and soon find the university chapel rising up before me in all its grandeur, an architectural and cultural centerpiece of this place. As I turn and walk away from it toward the student center, I hear the clanging of bells echoing from its steeple.
Ignatian’s student center is a stately and expansive fixture on campus, and I later learn from a study participant that it was constructed with students’ expressed needs in mind. Glancing upward as I approach the building, I spy students seated alongside floor-to-ceiling windows that frame the second floor, presumably studying or convening with friends. As I enter through sliding doors, I pass individuals flowing out of the building; they appear to be traditionally college-aged and are of varying races and ethnicities. Women outnumber men by a sizable margin, and several wear hijabs (the only outward sign of religious diversity I have yet encountered). Many men and women don apparel in their school colors and emblazoned with Ignatian’s logo. On the main floor, in the midst of a small gift shop, an eatery, and a coffee kiosk that “proudly serves Starbucks,” I find the glass-fronted Office for Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) in a prominent and central location, abuzz with student activity inside. It faces an atrium echoing with chatter, where students unwrap sandwiches, sip from to-go cups, and bide their time between classes and other commitments.

The Campus Ministry offices, one floor above and directly opposite OMSA, offer a bird’s eye view of all the action in the atrium. The symbolism of these two student affairs units situated across from each other in the heart of the student center, one supporting students with diverse identities and another meeting their myriad spiritual needs, is not lost on me; I consider the statement it makes about the institution’s priorities and corresponding investment of resources. It is with this thought in mind that I climb the stairs to familiarize myself further with the campus hub that will also serve as my personal hub in the coming weeks. In this building, I will spend much time interviewing staff and students alike to gain an insider’s perspective on the distinctive and multifaceted nature of Ignatian University, and
discerning what lessons about social justice and sense of belonging might be learned from the stories they share.

**Catholic Identity is “Laid at Your Feet”**

My first conversation with students is scheduled for late afternoon on a Sunday, and we have agreed to meet in a small, semi-private conference room across from Campus Ministry in the student center. Just down the hall from our meeting place is an array of prayer rooms and offices I discovered on my self-guided tour of the building earlier in the week: Hillel and Protestant student organization offices, a Puja room for Hindu students, a Musallah for Muslims, and a Christian prayer space. The second floor is virtually deserted when I arrive, but students pass by periodically on their way to the prayer rooms. This intermittent coming and going of individuals continues for the hour and a half I spend in a group conversation with Allie, Cassidy, and Mary, highlighting the demand for such space on a campus characterized by substantive religious diversity. It is an interesting backdrop when our conversation turns to the Catholic identity of Ignatian University.

For Mary, Ignatian’s Catholic influence is omnipresent across the institution. Hers is a unique perspective on the topic of institutional religious identity, as she is one of only three Catholic students included in the study. Mary was born into a Catholic family and raised in the faith. She attended Mass every Sunday growing up, and studied at a Jesuit high school. When it came time to select a college, Mary explains that she “made a decision that I wanted to continue my faith and that was one of the biggest things I wanted and … [by] applying to Jesuit universities I knew I could find that.” It is therefore unsurprising that Mary has continually sought opportunities to enrich her faith via Catholic channels at Ignatian:
I started building a foundation of my faith community and specifically, I guess, kind of Catholic, and going on Sunday and Thursday Masses … Things, I think, for me kind of spiraled out of … I wouldn't say out of control but … there were so many other opportunities, and I figured out about Campus Ministry and I heard about Alternative Spring Break and I went on one my freshman year, and it was just so great and I was like, "This is cool and I'm only getting this taste of this."

Just hours after my initial conversation with Mary, I run into her at the weekly student Mass in the university chapel. The service takes place in the evening, so I walk across campus in the dark. I am amidst a cadre of students, most in groups of two or more, funneling themselves toward a common destination. Once at the chapel, I heave open one of the heavy rear doors; I am overcome by a bright light pouring out into the black night and strains of music floating toward me. Because I have arrived a few minutes ahead of schedule, I am privy to a mini-concert: the choir rehearsing jubilantly in the loft above. But I am not an audience of one. Rather, students file in, find their friends, and fill the rows; their backpacks are strewn helter-skelter along the outer walls of the church. I am looking for a seat two-thirds of the way back, behind the bulk of the crowd, when I spot Mary. She seems joy-filled and utterly at home in this space, and I can appreciate why that is the case: the energy is high and the sense of community is palpable. For someone seeking a vibrant Catholic collegiate environment, worshiping with peers in this setting is undoubtedly impactful.

While Mary’s experience might suggest that students are encountering Catholicism in a deep and dynamic fashion, it is important to note that she has actively chosen to engage
various facets of her Catholic worldview on campus. When I ask non-Catholic students about when and how they are attuned to Ignatian University’s religious identity, most of them talk about being indirectly reminded of its Catholic heritage via rituals, actors, or artifacts they encounter on a regular basis. Falcon, who was raised Muslim but now considers himself spiritual, describes it this way:

We're constantly hearing the bells ringing. You have priests and things walking around campus. Sundays, there's a big Mass and so it's around us for sure. There's a cross in every single classroom right at the front ... There's some priests that teach the classes. You see them around. It's not hidden in any way, but for me, it doesn't really bother me. I know where I'm at. This is Ignatian. They're doing their thing.

A similarly peripheral awareness of Ignatian’s Catholic roots is evident when some students describe their involvement in social justice programs through the university. Cassidy, who claims a spiritual worldview and has spent multiple years as a leader in the Soup Kitchen Ministry, mentions offhandedly, “It is a Catholic soup kitchen. They say [a Catholic] prayer. They pray before soup kitchen and you're invited to join in prayer or you can step aside and do whichever.” However, the soup kitchen’s location in the basement of a Catholic church and the weekly prayer ritual in which Cassidy participates are not defining elements of her experience there. In another social justice program—the yearlong, credit-bearing Community Engagement Internship Program—students are placed at Catholic-based nonprofits in the city and they come together monthly to discuss aspects of social justice like power, privilege, oppression, and community development. The syllabus and required readings do not explicitly reference Catholic dimensions of social justice. When I ask Ella,
one of the interns, about class discussions, she muses, “[It’s] interesting how my internship is [with] Catholic Charities. We haven’t done a lot of incorporation of the faith at all.”

This is not to say that opportunities do not exist for engaging Catholicism via social justice programs, but it does require an extent of active seeking on the students’ part. Ella—who was raised Catholic but no longer identifies with the religion—elected to attend the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice in Washington, DC with support from Campus Ministry, and reflected on her experience:

It was just really cool to learn about how your faith can go along with social activism and social justice. Being around people who were ... not everybody there was faith-based but most of them were. Just being around that is just really ... I never really considered how those two things could come by [each other], like politics and social justice and religion.”

Campus Ministry-sponsored Alternative Spring Breaks (ASBs) also integrate faith and justice, often incorporating Mass, faith-based reflections, and principles of CST into weeklong immersive service-learning trips. Interestingly, all the students I talk to who have taken part in ASBs point to social justice as a vehicle Ignatian uses to convey its Catholic identity. Allie in particular describes her ASB experience as eye opening in this regard, noting, “[I] found that ... Reflecting on [social justice] in a faith context allowed me to sit with that more and critically think about why these things ... Why this social justice stuff happened and why a response is needed.”

Allie’s evolving understanding of Ignatian’s Catholic identity is somewhat divergent from her peers’ experiences. When she first arrived at Ignatian, Allie was not accustomed to
talking about faith. “From age 8 to 19, I did not think about faith really at all,” she says.

“Belief in God, I think, for sure was consistent just because that's what my family believes, but [I] did not think about it in any way.” Perhaps her lack of prior religious engagement fueled perceptions that “everything at Ignatian was, a lot of it was faith-based, which really freaked me out so I had a rough time with that.” Yet when a friend encouraged Allie to apply for an upcoming ASB, she decided to give it a try and it proved to be transformative:

I went on an alternative break immersion and it completely changed my worldview. I changed my major from film to … general communications with a focus in film, and the rest of my coursework is in advocacy … Coming back from that alternative break, I applied to lead a homeless outreach ministry, which I do. I am [also a leader in] a ministry of first-year students and we just try to help them integrate themselves into Ignatian, which is something I felt like I was lacking my own freshman year so I really wanted to help that process move quicker than it did for me.

What began as a fortuitous, if not intended, foray into Catholic-focused social justice initiatives via ASB ultimately changed Allie’s campus involvement trajectory in many ways. Among her foremost commitments at present is the Good Samaritan Ministry (GSM), which serves homeless individuals in and around the city Ignatian University calls home.

One Thursday afternoon, I travel by train to join Allie and her peers for GSM, acutely aware of how the university feels simultaneously near and far from the harsh realities of urban life. When I arrive at my destination, the sun is setting, a pinkish sky is settling into gray behind the skyscrapers, and the pleasant afternoon temperature is quickly dropping. I pull on gloves and zip up my fleece against the wind, preparing for the several hours we will
spend navigating the city streets bearing food and drink for those in need of it. Before our work commences, however, we gather in a campus-owned building downtown for group prayer. The words we utter together include the following intercession: “Enable us to see Jesus in our poor brothers and sisters and not judge by appearances. Make us realize that in helping them, we are helping Jesus. Show us how to befriend them and not pass them by.” This prayerful request, I quickly realize, captures the essence of the journey on which we are about to embark.

For the next two hours, our group of eight volunteers (one of four groups that departed from our meeting place in various directions) weaves its way through crowds of business people and shoppers in a commercial district of the city. The street is pristine, and as the sky darkens, the neon signs of high-end retail stores become more imposing. Foot traffic on the sidewalk is matched by the steady flow of cars zooming past us on the street. It would be easy to overlook and pass by the homeless men and women sitting at various junctures on the sidewalk if it were not our set purpose to see and befriend them. Each time we approach these individuals, we bend to their level and ask how they are doing. We ask if they are hungry. We literally encircle them, becoming a barrier between their world and the frenetic energy of city life that surrounds us. As I observe the students’ interactions with people on the street, it is evident that their focus on seeing Jesus in others is forefront. When we reconvene with the other groups at the end of the night, prayers are offered for each person we encountered on our travels.

Above and beyond co-curricular programs like GSM, classes in the academic core are yet another way many students learn about institutional religious identity, albeit the focus is
more often on Jesuit aspects thereof. Whether they are hearing from a Jesuit priest in the first-year seminar required of all freshmen, learning about the Jesuit for whom a prominent building is named on campus, or traveling to one of the many Jesuit-inspired retreats Ignatian’s Campus Ministry offers each semester, students of all stripes are exposed to Catholicism indirectly by virtue of the institution’s Jesuit heritage. I ask Bob, an agnostic student who is highly engaged in a diverse array of campus activities, to share how he came to know about the Jesuits:

Everyone around me talks and lives and breathes Jesuit values a lot of times, like a lot of my teachers, even if they're not Jesuits themselves. Or just doing things on campus, like going to certain events, there's always … most likely there's an underlying Jesuit core value behind it.

Elizabeth, the only practicing Protestant among the students I meet, echoes Bob’s sentiments when she notes lightheartedly, “There's Jesuit everything. Since coming here, I feel like it's just entered my vocabulary because every other class is like, ‘Here's [a] Jesuit reflection. Here's also a Jesuit teaching for this.’ I'm like, ‘Oh, there's just endless Jesuit ways.’”

Students like Bob and Elizabeth, who do not identify as Catholic, seem more drawn to Jesuit values, and understandably so. The Jesuit commitment to *cura personalis* (i.e., educating the whole person), reflected in Ignatian’s broad-based curriculum, is relevant to every student regardless of worldview. Mantras like, “Go forth and set the world on fire” and “Men and women for others”—popular catch phrases in the Jesuit world—hold broader appeal because they are not laden with overtly religious language. Additionally, these Jesuit themes reflect a social justice orientation that may resonate better with all students, Catholic
and non-Catholic alike. However, for many students I talk to, the connection between Jesuits and the broader Catholic tradition is tenuous at best. Even Christina, assistant director for the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, admits, “I tend to view Jesuit education as so different from Catholicism, when really Jesuit is a part of that.”

Despite the varied and numerous conduits that exist to convey Ignatian’s Catholic identity, the general sentiment I hear from most non-Catholic students is best articulated by an admissions officer facilitating an information session I attend: Ignatian’s Catholic identity is “laid at your feet, not imposed on you.” A student tour guide later rephrases by saying, “Ignatian is Catholic, but … really is a home for all faiths, and … they’re not going to shove Catholicism down your throat.” This tempering of institutional religious identity—describing engagement with Catholicism as possible but not obligatory—reflects an approach Ignatian has evidently adopted to foster a welcoming climate for worldview diversity. Accordingly, multiple students cite the university’s “laid at your feet” approach to Catholicism as evidence that Ignatian offers an inclusive environment for students with different religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives. In my ongoing conversations with students, several other markers of an inclusive worldview climate also come to light, along with opportunities for growth and improvement in this domain.

**Dusting Off the Interfaith Triangle**

Perhaps one of the most striking takeaways from my time at Ignatian University is students’ seemingly unilateral belief that their institution has a generally favorable climate for worldview diversity. “I think Ignatian is very inclusive when it comes to faith-based, whether you are Catholic or not. I think they’ve done a really good job at making others who
are from other faiths feel like they belong, and I really like that,” notes Ella, an agnostic student. “Coming to Ignatian and being able to relate to people who were Christian, or Hindu, or Muslim, Jewish, whatever the background was, without me being part of that major religion, was really nice,” offers Falcon—who identifies as spiritual—in a different conversation. Even Elizabeth, a Protestant student of color who expresses some frustration when it comes to the racial climate on campus, believes that “if it's stuff like faith, I feel like they really try to be inclusive … they try really hard to be more welcoming and stuff. I really think it's dependent on the identity.”

The numerous support mechanisms Ignatian provides for students of diverse religious worldviews seem to have bearing on how students perceive the campus climate. More than half of those I talk to mention student organizations like the Hindu Student Association and Hillel as important spaces for support and awareness building. The on-campus prayer rooms I observed during my first week at Ignatian are cited as examples of a strong institutional commitment to worldview diversity, particularly considering the university’s Catholic context. When I sit down for coffee with Ignatian’s former interfaith program coordinator at a small, crowded café a few blocks from campus, he talks about Campus Ministry’s efforts to engender greater inclusion by improving the compositional diversity of their office staff. In addition to bringing on a Muslim campus minister, notes Greg, they “hire[d] a couple of student workers to be at the front desk who were not of a Christian background [and] that started building some comfort of non-Christians just coming in and using the space.”

In the midst of many students’ praise for Ignatian’s worldview diversity climate, Sarah and Elizabeth offer thoughtful insights framed by their experiences in
underrepresented religious groups on campus. In our initial conversation, Elizabeth states that she was raised in the African Methodist Episcopal church. As she elaborates on her religious background, it quickly becomes evident that race and worldview are two salient and intersecting identities for Elizabeth. She tells me, “I've been Christian my whole life, I would say. If I could go back it would be at a Black church. It doesn't really matter the denomination. Right now I identify as nondenominational.” Even though Elizabeth’s experiences with worldview diversity at Ignatian have been mostly positive, she does face some challenges as someone who holds multiple identities that are underrepresented at the university: “Because this is a majority white school and also majority Catholic school … two groups I don't belong to … having grown up and identified with the quote-unquote black church, it felt like here I didn't really have a space to worship.”

Sarah, a Muslim woman at the institution, shares sentiments that also relate to a lack of sufficient space and support:

I feel like Christian students have just some more opportunities … that not all faiths really have access to, I guess. So there is still a heavy Catholic, which makes sense, it's a Catholic university. There still is that, but I feel like all we kind of have is the prayer spaces and the clubs. The feeling that Ignatian provides insufficient support for her worldview sometimes feels especially acute to Sarah because she is a minority even within her own religion on campus. Though she is Muslim, Sarah does not fall into the dominant Sunni group that largely comprises the university’s Muslim Student Association. In my meeting with Greg, he shares that students from smaller Christian and Muslim subgroups have expressed feelings of
isolation in the past. Learning that marginalization exists within certain non-Catholic factions at the institution helps me understand why Sarah and Elizabeth struggle at times within a climate that is otherwise considered to be extremely welcoming of diverse worldviews.

I do find it somewhat surprising that students like Elizabeth and Sarah—who have found at least some avenues for engaging their worldviews on campus—seem to struggle more with the campus climate than their nonreligious and spiritual peers. After all, student groups like the Secular Student Alliance do not fall under the umbrella of Campus Ministry, and their students receive far less institutional support when it comes to worldview development. Additionally, I learn from several staff members that nonreligious students face various obstacles when trying to find their place at Ignatian. Yet when I ask Bob, Cassidy, Ella, and Falcon—who do not ascribe to particular religions—if they desire or seek out communities of people who share their worldviews, I hear resoundingly that they are satisfied with their existing communities regardless of the worldviews that are represented.

As I ponder the different forces at play in fostering positive perceptions of the worldview climate among the students I am meeting at Ignatian University, Eboo Patel’s (2012) interfaith triangle makes its way to the forefront of my mind. I mentally dust it off and recall that it is comprised of three mutually-reinforcing components of interfaith cooperation: attitudes, relationships, and knowledge. The premise underlying the triangle is that, “by creating positive, meaningful relationships across differences, and fostering appreciative knowledge of other traditions, attitudes improve, knowledge increases, and more relationships occur” (Interfaith Youth Core, n.d.). In my ongoing conversations with Ignatian
students, I become increasingly aware of allusions to this interplay between students’ attitudes, knowledge, and relationships.

Whether Catholic or from another worldview, students at the university consistently exhibit *appreciative attitudes* toward diverse others. These attitudes are implicit in Mary’s description of an interfaith encounter on her Alternative Spring Break trip to a Native American reservation: “Basically we got to participate in their form of prayer and that was really impactful to me because I felt so honored to be invited. We did a [spiritual ceremony] with them in a sweat lodge and it was just beautiful, and I felt welcomed and honored to be there.” Bob more explicitly articulates his feelings of respect and appreciation for friends with other worldviews:

Not many of my friends actually share similar viewpoints. I think it helps me challenge myself to not only just accept other people for what they believe in, but also … [to reflect on] my own, I guess, arguments, or my own ways of thoughts, so that I can express [them] in a more educated and respectful manner.

For Bob, *relationships with peers* who have different worldview perspectives have led him to be more appreciative of who they are and what they believe. In a similar vein, Allie talks about Catholic friends at Ignatian who helped her develop an appreciation for Catholicism while she discerned whether it was a worldview to which she felt personally called:

[My Catholic friends] have been a really huge part. I'll go to Mass with them sometimes and when I first started going with them, I just had no idea what I was doing and they were really integral in helping me navigate that and explore my spirituality in myself … [They] helped me understand the Catholic faith in a good
way and also in a way that has made me think maybe that's not really what I want ...

[My Catholic friends] exposed me to things that have allowed me to think about that in a way and interpret what it means to me.

Sarah describes how her interfaith relationships have led to an exchange of knowledge about different worldview traditions. She met a number of non-Muslims through her involvement in orientation and via her Special Education major, and she lights up when describing her interactions with members of that friend group:

I have … more friends here that identify as Catholic than Muslim friends. I love them all so much; they have been so accepting of where I come from and my worldview. They always ask me about like ... my prayer center … I go there often and I feel like I'm very dedicated to that part of my life, as well, so I'm always talking about it … So they're always asking me questions about it … and then they are always talking about going to Mass and the people they saw at Mass, so then I'll ask them about it, too. We have those discussions really often, now that I think about it, about each other's religions … Both people in the conversation always so accepting of it, so I love it.

Falcon also speaks eloquently about frequent conversations with his roommates “about what inspires us, how God plays a role in each of our lives.” In a moment of self-reflection, he goes on to say:

I feel like, with a lot of people that kind of think like me, they limit themselves by being afraid of what religion can offer you, being afraid of calling something a God or calling something faith or whatever. I don't think you should be afraid of that. You
should be able to take from it what resonates with you, learn from it, and then bring it back to yourself and move on with it.

Ella declares in a separate exchange, “Now that I’m here, that I am going to [a] Catholic university, I think it would ... be really important for me to seek out what it is to be Catholic.”

She proceeds to elaborate on why there is more for her to learn about the faith tradition in which she was raised, but with which she no longer identifies:

I don’t think it was right for my parents to take me to church and not take the time to explain to me why we were going to church, why church is important, other than like, “God is important.” Okay, but what is God? Who is God? You know, things like that.

As I consider the implications of Sarah, Ella, and Falcon’s interfaith knowledge seeking, I am reminded of an anecdote from my conversation with Greg, Ignatian’s former interfaith program coordinator. There had been times during his tenure at Ignatian when students articulated an interest in increasing their “basic religious knowledge” so they could “engage in more meaningful interfaith conversations,” and campus programs had proliferated from there. In that vein, Allie describes a campus ministry-sponsored training she participated in that prepares students for productive interfaith exchanges. From her perspective, “Ignatian is very intentional … about interfaith conversations and interfaith interactions and learning about other faiths.” However, she continues, “I think [it] could even be done even more.” To be sure, the university’s strong foundation of appreciative attitudes and interfaith relationships suggests it is primed to enhance worldview knowledge among people of different backgrounds. After reflecting on where and how such learning might
occur at a place like Ignatian, I turn my attention to students’ social justice experiences in college.

“*Ignatian Sets Us on the Right Track*”

Social justice programs have the power to bring together diverse people who have shared values and goals. “In my experience,” notes Greg, “all major religions have a welcoming-the-stranger, golden-rule element” that can rally people around a common cause. While several students describe opportunities for gaining hands-on experience or deepening their knowledge of social issues as the impetus of their social justice involvement, the most common reasons cited were variations on Greg’s theme of “do unto others.” Sarah, who identifies as Muslim, shares:

> The ethics of our faith are huge and they've been ingrained in us since we were kids … The ethic of brotherhood, sisterhood, and helping others … Just giving back, helping others, helping the poor, helping the elderly, being a good representative of the faith because there aren't that many of us … All of those things I think play into all the things that I'm involved in.

For students like Sarah, social justice programs may provide an important avenue for finding friends with similar ideological perspectives on a campus where few individuals share their specific worldview beliefs. When I talk to Ella, who is agnostic, about her cohort in the Community Engagement Internship Program, she references a juxtaposition of diverse worldview beliefs and common social justice values:

> I think it's been great. We all have different worldviews and it's eight of us. I've been really close with all the people there. We've built a great community and great
relationships, and I think it's just because we're all social justice-oriented. I think that's why. We're all of different backgrounds. A lot of them don't even hold any of my identities and it's just been really easy for me to connect through that social justice initiative and social justice background. As far as worldviews, I know we all hold different worldviews and it doesn't matter to me.

Social justice is clearly an institutional priority at Ignatian. University leaders have developed and are currently implementing a five-year strategic plan that prominently features strategies for enhancing social justice learning, both in and out of the classroom and within and across program areas. The plan’s priorities also include greater attention to—and support of—underserved students within the campus community, as well as community partners in the university’s backyard. It even emphasizes the importance of faculty development in the realm of social justice to ensure that individuals who are teaching students are committed to advancing the university’s social justice mission.

The strategic plan suggests an impressive *aspirational* commitment to social justice, while my conversations with current students suggest the *actual* commitment to social justice at Ignatian is also substantial. When I ask how they define social justice, the responses are complex and nuanced (see Table 1). These eight individuals convey a shared understanding of social justice evidenced by emergent themes like giving voice to the voiceless, working toward equality, and using one’s privilege for good. When I consider that each of these students is engaged in distinct ways and within different peer groups on campus, it is remarkable that their conceptions of justice are so thematically congruent.
### Table 1

**Participant Definitions of Social Justice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allie</td>
<td>True social justice would be not just giving someone a seat at the table, but would be giving up your seat to someone at the table and making sure, doing your part of uplifting someone's voice and someone who has been marginalized … and making sure that they're heard and that you're not speaking for them, and that you're not using your privilege to speak for them but using your privilege to make sure that they're speaking for themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>I see social justice as equality. I guess that's the root and that's, I guess, the end goal; equality, making sure that everyone is equal, everyone has the equal resources, just equal rights for everyone … I think at the root of everything we are all equal. I think we tend not to focus enough on the fact that, at the bare minimum, we are equal. Unfortunately, though, there are different situations, like contexts, where people are not equal. I guess it’s just to try to level playing fields. It's not to lower the people who have higher privilege. It's just trying to empower those who don't, just make sure that everyone's voices are heard … and to fight for those whose voices are not heard. It's just, I guess in the end, to make sure that we realize that everyone is created equal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>Social justice has a lot to do with being a human being and … respecting a human being's spirit, feelings, and just physiological needs in order to live … respecting that someone is so different than you but they need the same things you do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Social justice is basically community in action … I think working together and having intersectionality, like I've learned in college, has really been the baseline of it. I think a lot of issues are interconnected. I think through social justice [we] realize that there's many factors that go into whatever movement you're campaigning for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>To me, [social justice] means being inclusive of everyone … it’s like using your privilege to help others and using your privilege with others, not using your privilege for others. I think it means being more than just in solidarity but also being an ally to those who may not be in the same situation as you are, may not have the same life situations or same privileges as you do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falcon</td>
<td>To me social justice means fighting for those whose voices have been silenced, essentially. Social justice is understanding your privilege and realizing ... some people have to struggle for it, essentially. Social justice is looking outside of yourself and putting your effort, when you can, into things that are going to better more than just you and affect people outside of your own bubble ... Social justice is looking at the world and understanding that you do have an impact in it, and that your voice does matter, and that you can do something if you choose to do so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>I would describe social justice as acting, decision making in the same way Jesus Christ would have or does.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>I think social justice is fighting for all groups in society regardless of their identities that they hold, to be on the same level, to have equal opportunity, to reach the same resources, the same opportunities as anybody else.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the 14 students I talk to while visiting Ignatian, only one cites service as a reason he decided to attend the university, yet everyone I meet is now so highly engaged that they can easily articulate what social justice means to them. When I investigate where their definitions of social justice come from, the overwhelming majority give examples of learning about social justice via Alternative Spring Breaks, the Community Engagement Internship Program, Good Samaritan Ministry, the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, study abroad, academic courses, and more. In short, it appears that social justice at Ignatian is captivating the hearts and minds of students once they arrive on campus, even if it is not necessarily what draws them to the university at the outset.

Whatever is occurring is likely manifested in the diversity of social justice programs offered across the institution. These programs range from one-time service opportunities to yearlong, credit-bearing internships, and are accessible through a wide range of campus offices and academic departments. Such varying commitment levels and access points for social justice make it possible for students from all walks of campus to get involved for their own reasons and at their own comfort levels. For Cassidy, one of the spiritual-but-not-religious students I get to know, volunteering at the Soup Kitchen Ministry (SOUP) began as a way to satisfy a volunteer requirement for her freshman seminar course. The program, run by Ignatian’s Community Service Office, was appealing because it allows students to drop in and help out as time permits. “I can say that when I came into college, I wasn't necessarily seeking community and service at all,” Cassidy remarks. “It was something that happened and I had that openness to let it happen.”
That openness ultimately led Cassidy to accept a leadership role at SOUP, through which she oversees student volunteers each week. Yet while SOUP has been a conduit for higher levels of engagement in Cassidy’s case, for those participating at lower levels there is not often time to help them make meaning of the experience in a social justice context:

On our way back on the [train], usually all of us are standing together. … So I always usually say like, especially for people that are new, “Did everyone have a good time?” … A lot of people initially were like, “Oh, Cassidy, this was so great. I really enjoyed my time. I'm going to try and come back next Tuesday.” … [But] we've never done a sit-down formal reflection.

Kelly—who directs the Community Service Office—shares that, for students who come and go at the soup kitchen but do not become leaders, SOUP is more of “an exposure opportunity, a chance of more charity, direct service … you're going and you are exposed to a community that the staff knows.” She elaborates by saying, “Especially where there is little reflection and additional supporters … I do not call that social justice.” Nevertheless, the students who reference SOUP in our exchanges talk about it under the umbrella of social justice, and offer personal examples of how the program promotes social justice themes.

Volunteers for the City (V4C) is another initiative the Community Service Office sponsors. It is also peer led, but requires a longer-term commitment from students. They sign up to volunteer for a semester or longer, and work with the same community-based organization every week. Bob, who claims an agnostic worldview, is a mentor through Big Brothers Big Sisters as part of V4C and recently learned he was accepted to be a leader for the coming year. The extent to which reflection and meaning making occur in the V4C
context is somewhat variable, as student leaders are responsible for facilitating conversations about social justice. Bob explains:

We're supposed to have reflections every few times. We have mini-reflections when we walk from the [service site] to Ignatian back home. Yeah, so we definitely have a set reflection. We have [a] topic and we have a theme and then we just talk about it. We stray off with it … Yeah, the leader will be coming up with that.

When I ask Kelly about this program, she names relationship building as the distinguishing characteristic that makes V4C a social justice program rather than simply a service opportunity. “To me, relationship is an incredible … an essential part of anything that we might call social justice.” Opportunities to develop relationships are greater in V4C because students participate in the program for an extended period of time. The higher-level time commitment also allows for more direct and ongoing exposure to social problems in the local community, which in turn cultivates a deeper understanding of social justice. For example, after a year as a Big Brother, Bob has begun to understand how public education policy plays out on the ground and affects low-income children like his mentee: “I get to see a lot of, I guess, issues with the education policy here [in the city] … just public schooling in general.”

If SOUP sits at one end of the social justice engagement spectrum, and V4C hovers in the middle, the Community Engagement Internship Program (CEIP) should be placed firmly at the other end of the continuum. Interns in this program are required to spend 10 hours each week at their nonprofit placements in the city, where they contribute to pressing projects and initiatives that require support or expertise beyond what existing staff can provide. Tasks
range from building websites to helping resettle refugee families. Because students receive compensation via scholarships, and are able to enroll for course credit as part of the program, this time commitment is feasible. The depth of engagement affords interns greater opportunities to observe how social justice is operationalized in the real world. As a result of her experience in CEIP, Sarah has “learned how [social justice] connects to ... me pursuing Special Education. And when I'm a Special Education teacher, I'll be fighting for social justice for people with disabilities. I had never thought about that before.” Her internship course instructor, Michael, emphasizes the value of “applying the theoretical knowledge … [from] the classroom to real-world situations.”

*On one of my final days at Ignatian, I am invited to attend presentations by the CEIP interns at the university’s annual Undergraduate Research Symposium. I enter one of the older, statelier academic buildings near the center of campus and ascend to the second floor via elevator, flanked by professionally dressed students and symposium attendees. When I find the presentation room, it is already half filled with people. The lights are dimmed, but that does not dampen the energy in the room. Rather, there is an air of informality in the space, and I observe enthusiastic greetings between student presenters, former and incoming interns, and community partners in attendance. The four presenters are distinguished by their dressy attire and are visibly diverse—two men, two women, and three students of color. I am reminded of my conversation with Ella, when she disclosed that this group also boasts a diversity of worldviews, and I silently appreciate the varying motivations that have led each of the students to this time and place.*
During their presentations, all four interns describe the meaningful and substantive roles they played at their respective work sites. It is evident their relationships with the nonprofits were truly reciprocal; through the internship program, it seems that as much value was added to the organizations as to the students’ resumes. When Sarah takes the podium, she speaks articulately about the ways her intern responsibilities at a home for adults with disabilities enabled her to build skills relevant to a future career in Special Education. With respect to the individuals she served, Sarah remarks, “They have so much love to give, and deserve that love in return.” In the words of someone well versed in social justice language, Sarah goes on to speak about the ways her internship illuminated the importance of human dignity and respect for life. Ella’s presentation centers on themes of privilege and allyship, and she describes what she learned about social justice by working with Latina immigrants: “Ignatian [talks about] being a person for others ... which really means being a person with others.” At her internship site, Ella explains, “We’re not just giving to them; we’re giving to each other.”

When students describe their academic internships, or volunteer opportunities through the Community Service Office, or Campus Ministry’s alternative break and homelessness outreach programs, I am aware that social justice in all of these contexts refers to serving communities beyond the borders of Ignatian’s campus. Interestingly, for a subset of the students I come to know at the university, social justice feels closer to home. Specifically for Elizabeth, Ella, and Sarah, it means supporting marginalized groups within the institution through the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA). Though OMSA also offers off-campus social justice opportunities for students, these three women have elected to serve as
mentors for peers on campus with whom they share identities as women, students of color, or first-generation students. Sarah links her role as a mentor to social justice in this way:

I decided to be a mentor because … I wanted to do the same thing for other incoming students, and I feel like that relates to social justice because you are helping the quality of their life throughout their college careers. Despite the identities that they may come with and however marginalized they may feel, you are helping support them and that definitely relates to social justice.

As these students describe their desire to pay it forward to peers whose experiences and struggles they intimately understand, I come to see that various campus programs not only provide avenues for students to pursue justice in the larger world; rather, they also offer a mechanism for enacting Ignatian’s social justice commitments in a more proximal sphere.

Supporting underrepresented populations at Ignatian is itself an act of social justice, and is recognized as such when students assess the university’s commitment to social justice overall. In its strategic plan, Ignatian explicitly names recruitment and retention of underserved students as a social justice aim. In that vein, when asked how they believe their institution enacts social justice, four students speak about diversity enhancement efforts and campus resources dedicated to supporting the retention and success of individuals from underrepresented backgrounds. However, in the next breath, the same students point to high tuition costs as contradictory to Ignatian’s stated support of marginalized groups. This perceived dissonance between what Ignatian practices and what it preaches in the realm of social justice reemerged on a few other occasions, adding an important nuance to my understanding of the university’s social justice commitment as perceived by students.
A prominent example of contradiction between Ignatian’s words and deeds—as conveyed by students—relates to a series of protests on the campus over the course of the past year. It began with a group of students demanding improved demonstration rights because they felt disenfranchised by the institution. Falcon, who identifies as spiritual, has been actively involved in this cause from the start. He explains that he and others were frustrated by the fact that “social justice is essentially empowering those voices that are unheard,” and yet, “the administration was kind of doing what they wanted and we were supposed to abide by their rules.” After much negotiation, a new policy was enacted that broadened students’ rights to protest, and a subset of the movement organizers then shifted their focus to a new effort. Students Organizing for Workers (SOW) dedicated themselves to speaking out on behalf of university food service workers, demanding better contracts and wages. Students from across the institution supported the campaign, and nearly all the students I meet with mention it when discussing social justice at Ignatian. Mary, who is Catholic, summarizes SOW’s efforts in this way:

Basically there's been a group of students, and one of my really close friends, who have been working with the dining hall workers to basically get fair wage and healthcare and being fair, and then they fought for this for a few months now, and [it] actually just passed last week. And I think that seeing that on campus and seeing this group of students …Was so important, and they made change happen on campus, and they stood for and with the dining hall workers and fought the system and won.

As Mary paints a picture of the SOW activists standing “for and with the dining hall workers,” I recall Falcon’s worldview commitment to treating people the way he wants to be
treated, and his belief that social justice means “looking outside of yourself and putting your effort when you can into things that are going to better more than just you.” When I consider the issues SOW is tackling in conjunction with the views Falcon holds, it is clear why he has become so invested in this cause. “My mom taught me to respect my elders to the fullest,” Falcon says. “And I see these workers every day and I say, ‘Hello’ and ‘How are you?’” He goes on:

But for me to hear about a 58-year-old man being talked down to like a little boy hurt me really deep because it was like, this man could birth you and you're talking to him like that. He's not even a relative of mine but it hurt me so hard because if I was in that position, if someone was talking to me like that, I couldn't take it.

With the momentum of two successes driving them forward, SOW has moved on to the Fight for $15 campaign, which is “basically working for all fast food and low-wage workers generally to make a minimum of $15 an hour.” From the second-floor study room of the library where we are conversing, Falcon points in the direction of an outdoor quad and shares that, in the days ahead, they will be staging a protest and rally in that space. Three hundred supporters from the local community are expected to attend, and SOW leaders hope to match them with 300 Ignatian students.

As I approach the library, drumbeats ricochet off the surrounding buildings and, rising above a group of 60 or 70 marchers, I hear chants of, “I’m fired up!” and “We are the union, the mighty, mighty union.” But they are not the union, per se; they are students and community members alike; they are a tapestry of ages, races, ethnicities, and genders. As the crowd grows in volume and enthusiasm, I notice a campus tour pass through the mayhem
and pause to talk at the entrance of the chapel. It occurs to me that the imposing church provides an interesting backdrop for today’s Fight for $15 demonstration, and I wonder what prospective students and parents are making of all the excitement on what would normally be a tranquil campus quad. Dutiful campus police on bicycles and news reporters toting large cameras are observing the scene through scrutininous eyes, but the general feeling in the air is one of peaceful protest.

Between two campus buildings that face the street beyond, I spot a large group of true union members flowing into campus to join the existing crowd. A quick scan of their brightly colored t-shirts and posters highlights the diversity of workers in attendance—health care providers, food service employees, and adjunct faculty are among them. Their chants die down when the formal program begins. From atop a makeshift stage, one speaker after another energizes those in attendance in a spirit of solidarity. The lineup includes faculty, students, and even a local parish priest. “Their working conditions are our learning conditions,” proclaims one student in reference to Ignatian’s contingent faculty. A tenured faculty member asks the crowd, “What are we teaching students about justice? When there’s a mess we’re in at this university, we’re all in it together.” Another student urges, “Jesuit and Catholic social teaching promote a living wage.” Eventually, this brief rally draws to a close and the community members among us head back to the perimeter of campus. Their retreating voices fade into the breeze, and everyday business on campus resumes without fanfare.

To be sure, Falcon and several other students I meet view their university’s commitment to social justice through a critical lens. But across the board, people I talk to
speak positively about the ways that Ignatian helps students grow into champions of social justice. Falcon believes the SOW campaign gives him a platform to “go out there and put out my values, put out a statement of support to this.” As he puts it, “It's like my whole body, my whole entity telling you this is what I believe in” leads to greater confidence in one’s ability to enact change. Michael, who oversees the Community Engagement Internship Program, cites critical reflection as a valuable skill Ignatian engrains in students, calling it “the strongest part of Ignatian’s support for social justice work on a student level.” Students also recognize the tools Ignatian provides in the form of knowledge and skills. Sarah believes they are being educated to contribute to society:

> It's not just a focus on your degree. It's not just a focus on academics and building your resume. It's a focus on helping you become a better person, somebody who's inspired to change the world after you graduate, somebody who's a critical thinker about issues that are happening in society. So after we graduate, we're not just like a student who got a degree, but somebody who's ready to make some change, and who's aware and educated about what's going on in the world, which I don't think a lot of universities can do for their students, necessarily.

> With tools and platforms in hand, it might be expected that individuals at Ignatian are well prepared to engage social justice in a meaningful and substantive way. Indeed, in multiple conversations, students comment on the depth of their collegiate social justice engagement relative to high school. The shift from one-day-a-week, short-term service opportunities to ongoing, immersive social justice experiences affects their depth of understanding, as well as their investment, when it comes to issues of injustice. The social
justice programs at Ignatian seemingly have a catalyzing effect on student growth. Ella—a self-identified agnostic—believes that Ignatian “has incredible value in bringing … issues to light [and] to other students who wouldn’t usually be exposed to them.” In my initial meeting with Bob, who also claims an agnostic worldview, I am struck by a particularly resonant metaphor that captures his peers’ overall sentiments:

Ignatian itself as an institution doesn't really do a whole lot hands-on necessarily [but] I think it definitely gives us a sense of empowerment. It gives us the tools to, I guess, build upon … Ignatian sets us on the right track, but the students themselves kind of drive the car to the finish line.

Unity, Empathy, and Gratitude

Week after week, I ask students questions about their social justice experiences at Ignatian University, attentively listening for references to sense of belonging in the anecdotes they share. As I mentally compile and sift through their narratives, it becomes evident that sense of belonging is indeed rooted in social justice communities for all of the students I have come to know. At the same time, I am aware that each of their communities is wonderfully distinct. It is a revelatory moment when I realize what is written between the lines of each individual story I hear: Social justice is a powerful vehicle for engendering sense of belonging precisely because it offers such a broad array of communities from which students can draw strength and support, and to which they can devote time, energy, and enthusiasm. Michael sums it up best when we meet:

A huge part of social justice is community, building community. Exploring and recognizing communities that already exist or could exist. I think by nature building
community makes somebody feel a sense of belonging, even if they’re building community partially with others on campus [or] partially with people out, off campus.

For nearly half of the students I meet, social justice communities are valuable because they bring together students from different walks of life whose paths would likely not cross otherwise. Social justice values provide common ground and fodder for conversations that often lead to friendships as time goes on. “Social justice has been so ingrained in us as Ignatian students that almost everybody is passionate about it,” Sarah tells me. “So you have something to talk about, you have passion you share with other students … [and] that helps to make friendships and meet people.” Cassidy’s friend group from the soup kitchen serves as a vivid illustration of what Sarah describes:

That group … that is kind of my core group that goes to the soup kitchen, we all went on spring break together … We walked into a restaurant and … someone said, “What a motley crew.” I kind of looked around and I was like, “What do you mean?” I thought about it after that was said, and … Yeah, we are a diverse group of people and come from completely different worldviews and backgrounds, but we were all in the same place and came to the same place because we started doing service at the soup kitchen, which I thought was super awesome.

The efforts of Students Organizing for Workers (SOW) also “corralled … a very diverse group of people,” according to Falcon. These included student-athletes, students from multicultural groups and Greek life, along with others. At the helm was a small group of students, reaching out and inviting people to the table who had perhaps not partaken in social
justice initiatives previously. Falcon speaks with earnest pride about the impact of their
diverse coalition:

The power of eight individuals, essentially, to polarize a whole campus ...It may not
have been ... I'm not saying the polarization was a good thing, but the fact that we
were all able to affect the whole campus just from our actions, that's something in
itself. Doing those things, finding the people [who are] like-minded, people better
than myself that I could look up to, really just helped.

The community that SOW awakened at Ignatian includes not just students, but also
the food service workers for—and with—whom they advocated, thus widening the campus
community tent to bring in those who are often left on the margins. Ella and Allie express
that they too are finding community at the margins with individuals they serve beyond the
walls of campus. As a daughter of Mexican immigrants, Ella feels a strong connection to the
Latina women she works with at her internship site. “I consider myself being ... not an
immigrant, but partially, culturally yes because I do have that exposure to Hispanic culture,”
she says. “I do have a strong connection to the population that I work with, and I think it’s
just very, very rewarding for me to be able to be part of creating greater change.” In a similar
tone, Allie describes the profound connection she has with people she has come to know
through the Good Samaritan Ministry (GSM):

One of the best things about GSM and being a GSM leader is having that support [of
fellow GSM volunteers] because it's hard to go out every week and talk to people
who we see every week and build relationships with. And I've had relationships with
people for two years living on the streets, and so having someone, or a group of
people, that understand what you're feeling and how you're processing what we're seeing, and how we're processing everything and being super intentional about that processing … has been really incredible. And they're some of my best friends.

At a foundational level, Allie is building her social justice community by cultivating relationships with the homeless individuals she serves. On a secondary level, her existing community of like-minded volunteers is reinforced by the difficult-yet-rewarding, hard-to-describe experiences they share in GSM.

Several other students describe a similar phenomenon whereby social justice-based interactions strengthen and enhance their sense of belonging in worldview or other identity-based groups. Perhaps because she is part of the worldview majority at Ignatian, Mary seems to experience this phenomenon most frequently: “I don’t have that stark difference or a difference between the people I go to classes with and people that I share my same faith and service and justice with,” she admits. “I really see an intertwining, probably because the Christianity and probably Catholicism is majority represented, so I kind of just fit into that category.”

Social justice is also a fundamental aspect of the identity-based communities within the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA). In many ways, it seems that the mentorship programs—which students classify as social justice—undergird a host of other programs that together create a complex web of support for underrepresented students at Ignatian. Christina, who works in OMSA, refers to the Jesuit ideal of *cura personalis* when she talks about the function of her office: “The [idea of] care for your full self … I think that allows me to really see students for who they are and [help them] … get to know all parts of
themselves and feel pride in that.” Elizabeth’s experience illustrates how OMSA provides a comforting space when she is faced with issues related to her various identities:

Being in OMSA and having the social justice programs really helped me have a family and stuff, so I could go to them when I had problems … that weren't even social justice-related. If I had an issue in class and my advisors couldn't really relate because we don't share the same identities, I could go [to OMSA] and they will understand because that happened to them, too.

Bob shares that he has discovered his own community of kindred spirits through Campus Ministry’s Alternative Spring Break (ASB) program. It is heartening to hear this, especially after several staff members at the university indicate that nonreligious students and students of color do not always engage with Campus ministry because they do not see themselves reflected in the staff. Despite identifying as agnostic and as a student of color, Bob was open to participating in ASB. Indeed, the immersive nature of ASB and its subsequent impact on sense of belonging comes up in exchanges with many students, both Catholics and non-Catholics. I ask Bob if his social justice involvement has helped him feel more a part of Ignatian’s community. His reply captures the impact social justice programs can have on students’ sense of belonging when they open themselves up to being transformed:

Being part of these social justice organizations, activities, I'm definitely able to be more connected with students who also share very similar viewpoints as I do. I definitely feel a sense of … community with these students themselves … [On the ASB] we [had] such a powerful experience together, and everyone else, even though I
met them in a week's span, I feel like I got to know them so well. They're all really empowering, strong, amazing individuals. I can definitely talk to them. I still do.

I am tucked away in a chair against the wall of a large conference room in the student center, trying not to intrude on a boisterous and jubilant reunion of students who recently took part in the ASB program through Ignatian’s Campus Ministry. A low stage is set up to my right with an open mic, and throughout the course of the evening it has played host to poets, comics, and even a group of would-be rappers performing an ASB-themed version of the theme song from “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.” Hanging behind the stage is a large, white sheet with the prompt, “Human dignity is...” scrawled across it in marker. This event is intended to be a time of reconvening and meaning making for those who recently retreated from campus life to spend a week serving and learning about social justice. It is a time for new friendships to be solidified, and for transitions back to the “real world” to be smoothed. During a brief intermission in the evening, all are encouraged to turn to their neighbors and learn what was impactful for them on the ASB. A young woman to my left strikes up a conversation and tells me she has been on three ASBs while a student at Ignatian. “Your heart is broken and fills all at the same time,” she says.

Linda, the ASB coordinator, reminds everyone in the crowd that the power of their ASB experiences “only increases if you can give it away.” After each group approaches the stage and tells their unique story, they receive affirming cheers from the audience and hugs from their peers that symbolize the surprising depth of relationships newly formed. One student approaches the stage alone and sits on its ledge, jelly shoes dangling just above the floor. “Don’t clap for me for doing what is right,” she says when recounting the details of
her ASB experience. Then, back straight and eyes closed, she asks the audience to join her in clapping for all the individuals they have served. A reverent round of applause ensues in a gesture of unity, empathy, and gratitude.

Adding CST to the Social Justice Toolbox

It is the pre-dinner hour on a Monday afternoon, and I am sitting in a lounge chair on the second floor of the student center, awaiting my second meeting with Ella. She strides toward me at a relaxed pace and drops her backpack, looking as one should after a long first day of the week. “You mind if I sit on the floor?” she asks. “No, that’s fine!” I reply. Once she settles in, I dive into my notes from our previous conversation and before long we are talking about the evolution of her worldview. I ask how her current outlook on life informs her understanding of social justice, and she replies, “My worldview is incorporated with Catholic social teaching or being a person with others, and I think the way that I hold it, the way that I perceive it, it definitely encourages me to be part of making change and be part of the activities I’m part of.” My ears perk up at the mention of CST, as I have heard few references to it from students thus far. As it turns out, Ella was exposed to CST through two faith-based social justice programs: Alternative Spring Breaks (ASBs) and the Ignatian Family Teach-In.

In subsequent conversations with other students, I ask more directly whether they are familiar with CST. Those who have attended an ASB trip nod affirmatively, and some rattle off a few of the principles. “Yes, we were exposed to [CST] in the beginning, but a lot of people don’t revisit it,” Mary tells me. Her comment aligns with my sense that the principles are explored briefly at best, though Mary and others do recall applying them in the context of
an ASB reflection exercise. All Ignatian students who attend ASBs, which occur at 25
domestic and international sites each year, are invited to complete an evaluation when they
return to campus. Results indicate that more than 80 percent of participants are able to
identify one to three CST themes they encountered on their immersion trips. However, it is
less clear—from the evaluations and from the students I meet—to what extent students
understand that CST principles are actually part of a much larger body of Catholic doctrine
that informs the church’s approach to social justice.

Besides Ella, Allie and Elizabeth are the only two students I talk to who really
gravitate toward CST. They are both apparently enthusiastic about the principles, and give
examples of how they have put them to use in conversations about social justice. “When I led
the [Good Samaritan Ministry] leader meeting I did a small activity using Catholic social
teaching,” notes Allie. “I wish that I heard [the principles] more because I think that they do
provide a really good way, a tangible way to speak on social justice.” Elizabeth also feels that
CST has been a useful tool for her social justice toolbox, helping her put words to concepts
she was previously unable to articulate:

    Human dignity and the preferential treatment for the poor … I don't know all the
    things, but those two really stuck out to me and I adopted the stuff. Even in my
classes recently, for the last few classes, we’re talking about should all humans have
human dignity and stuff … Having those words, it made me realize, “Oh, that's why I
get so frustrated when politicians say they deserve to be poor.” I'm like, “No,
something happened.” Maybe if they did ... People obviously don't want to be poor.
Having those terms and stuff, or just the term social justice, I feel like was real useful.

Now I could frame my debates using specific words that people understood.

While Allie, Elizabeth, and Ella are the only students who employ CST language of their own accord, others regularly describe CST themes using slightly different words. Strikingly, every student I meet references at least one CST principle, albeit indirectly, when talking about their social justice involvements, conceptions of social justice, or their reasons for participating therein. Collectively, they touch on all seven of the social teachings. It makes me think back to several staff members with whom I met, who articulated that Ignatian’s institutional conception of social justice is grounded in CST. Based on students’ comments, I can see that CST is somehow being harnessed to inform their understanding of justice.

A possible explanation for the personalized nature of students’ social justice language may lie in the general notion that social justice should be open to each individual’s unique interpretation. “Social justice is essentially what you make it,” Falcon states. “You say it in your own way and you come to terms in your own way,” declares Mary. When I ask students how Ignatian describes social justice as an institution, they have difficulty pinning down a singular definition, and Cassidy responds by saying, “I would almost like to say, because Ignatian stresses how much they appreciate diversity, they would almost say that social justice is open to your own interpretation … I think they would encourage you to create your own definition of social justice.” Linda, who oversees the ASB program on campus, tells me that Ignatian “toes into Catholic social teaching a little bit, but not explicitly,” in the strategic plan. “Rarely, if ever, do they articulate the social justice component comes from Catholic
social teaching.” Elizabeth aptly captures the problem with not having a concrete framework to guide social justice efforts at the university:

It's hard. You don't want to get too hard of a definition, like, “We're doing social justice for this group …” because they leave out all these people that get mad. If you make it too open, which I feel like it sometimes is, then people are just like, “I don't know what that is.” I'm just like, “I can't fight for that. I don't know what it is.” It's hard, and I know it's hard, but it's hard because you want to be inclusive with your language, but then it becomes like people don't know what you're talking about.

As I wind down my time at Ignatian University, the tension that Elizabeth articulates weighs on my mind. I think about each of the students I have had the pleasure of meeting, and marvel at the creativity and passion with which they enter into social justice encounters. I wonder if imposing CST as a social justice framework could be limiting or, worse yet, if it would force students with non-Catholic worldviews to translate their conceptions of social justice into a language not of their making. Greg, the former interfaith program coordinator, had raised this concern with me in the course of our conversation: “Several students [have told me] … it’s almost like they spoke Spanish but they were in an English-speaking school where a Muslim was constantly translating the tenets of Islam into a Christian framework.”

But when I allow my train of thought to shift, I envision ways that CST could be taught to students alongside other faith-informed social justice constructs in the spirit of interfaith knowledge sharing. I imagine how a common language of social justice, embraced and understood across the institution, could help students hold their university more accountable to the spirit of that language. I also speculate about what role CST might play, if
any, in enhancing religious identity at a place like Ignatian. Last of all, I ponder how to weave together the stories I have gathered at Ignatian to answer some of these questions.

On my final night in town, I am wrapping up one last discussion with Bob. We are facing one another in two chairs on the outer perimeter of the student center’s second floor, where the floor-to-ceiling glass offers an open view of the entrance to campus I passed through only four weeks ago. “All right,” I say, after he answers my final question. “We did it!” But before we part ways, Bob—who is ever curious—asks me why I decided to study Ignatian. I offer my rationale, and then admit, “I think it's played out really well, and I'm so glad that this is where I came.” I continue with another admission: “It's funny, a lot of people, when I've told them what I'm doing, they're like, ‘And where else are you going?’ I'm like, just here. Then it's like, ‘Oh, you're just studying Ignatian?’ I feel a strong responsibility, in a good way, to tell the story right.” “Yeah, definitely,” Bob replies, before adding, “I’m glad I’m able to be part of the story.”

**Making Meaning of the Portrait**

The above portrait was carefully constructed using Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ (1997) methodical and “aesthetic process of narrative development” (p. 185) to provide readers with a holistic understanding of Catholic identity, social justice, and sense of belonging at Ignatian University. Meaning is made of this portrait throughout the next two chapters, which are presented as distinct manuscripts. The manuscript in chapter five discusses various characteristics of social justice involvement that can enhance connectedness, and how these might be leveraged to better serve students. Chapter six describes how a campus climate framework was applied to this research, and proposes
modifications that could improve its use for examining institutional religious identity and worldview diversity in tandem.

My reasons for including manuscripts within this otherwise traditionally-formatted dissertation were twofold, and were grounded in my pragmatist paradigm. First, I wanted to prepare my research for expedient publication so it could more readily inform practice in higher education. Relatedly, I believed that following manuscript guidelines would force me to distill my data down to the most pressing and relevant findings for practitioners in the field. At the same time, fidelity to my methodology was of utmost importance to me. Therefore, I was committed to including a rich and complex portrait of Ignatian ahead of the condensed findings in chapters five and six, and synthesizing all aspects of the study in a seventh chapter to ensure a truly holistic account of the case was provided.
CHAPTER 5

This scholarly article was written with submission guidelines for the *Journal of College Student Development* (JCSD) in mind. The focus of my research on social justice programs that engender sense of belonging in a Catholic context aligns closely with the expectation that manuscripts included in JCSD “increase our knowledge of organizational behaviors so that effective tactics and strategies might be applied to the implementation of developmentally focused programs on the campus” (“Submissions,” 2017). I considered tailoring this piece for a Catholic higher education outlet, but elected to pursue publication in a journal with a broader scope. First, I believe that findings related to the sense of belonging component of my conceptual framework are relevant to scholar-practitioners across the higher education landscape. Second, it is expected that insights into “what works” to enhance students’ sense of belonging on a Catholic campus may extend—with some caveats and modifications—to other sectarian environments. As such, it would be shortsighted to share study implications solely within a Catholic sphere.

What follows is an abbreviated introduction and review of literature germane to my dissertation research; an overview of the conceptual framework and methodological approach that guided my study design; an explanation of three themes that emerged from the data and relate to my research questions about social justice, Catholic Social Teaching, and sense of belonging at Ignatian university; and a discussion of why identified themes are significant with respect to theory and practice in higher education. Given the focus and primary audience of JCSD, I give special attention to practical implications of the research. Study limitations and avenues for future research are also discussed.
Social Justice in a Catholic Context:
Building Community for Students with Diverse Worldviews

Abstract

This qualitative study employed case study and portraiture to examine how students with different worldview perspectives found sense of belonging by participating in social justice programs at a Catholic University. It also illuminated whether and how study participants learned about Catholic Social Teaching (CST) through their social justice involvement. Five dimensions of campus climate—historical, compositional, organizational, behavioral, and psychological—provided a guiding framework for this research. Particular attention was given to the ways in which students with distinct religious, nonreligious, and spiritual beliefs perceived the psychological climate of their university and exhibited a sense of belonging therein. Findings revealed that access to a broad array of social justice offerings based on shared interests, identities, or personal and professional aims increased students’ opportunities to make meaningful connections within their collegiate community. It was also evident that opportunities exist to introduce CST as a shared framework for understanding social justice. Implications of these findings are discussed as they relate to practice, theory, and future research.

Introduction

In recent years, the confluence of shifting religious commitments and increased worldview diversity on college and university campuses has set the stage for new religious realities in U.S. higher education (Eagan et al., 2014; HERI, 2004; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Schmalzbauer, 2013). A growing number of today’s students—more than one-quarter
of a nationally representative sample—articulate no religious preference, claiming instead an agnostic, atheist, spiritual, or other nonreligious identity (Eagan et al., 2014; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). At the same time, roughly two-thirds of first-year college students surveyed as part of a national, multi-institutional study credited religious or spiritual beliefs for providing them with strength, support, and guidance; the overall majority of them were affiliated with a religious denomination; and they indicated high levels of participation in activities such as prayer (69 percent) and attendance at religious services (81 percent) (Astin et al., 2011; HERI, 2004). Notably, the proportion of students from non-majority religious traditions (e.g., Muslims, Jews, Buddhists) is growing on college campuses and exceeds that of minority-religious persons in society at large (Eagan et al., 2014; PRC, 2015).

Unfortunately, students who are in the religious minority, as well as their religiously unaffiliated peers, do not always view colleges and universities as welcoming places for sharing diverse beliefs (Rockenbach et al., 2014). Many experience negative attitudes that exist in society at large, such as anti-Muslim sentiments or stigmas about atheists, on their own campuses (Goodman & Mueller, 2009; Ingraham, 2015). In other instances, students outside the religious majority bear the brunt of unfavorable attitudes their peers hold, attitudes based on prior negative interactions with—or lack of exposure to—members of particular worldview groups (Mayhew et al., 2016). Identities such as one’s race or ethnicity can also “shape experiences and involvement, which in turn may shape [student] perceptions of acceptance of diverse worldview groups” (Rockenbach et al., 2014, p. 14).

The current study seeks to discover how social justice opportunities on college campuses might provide space for positive interactions among students with different
worldviews. It is informed by the premise that individuals can build relationships while pursuing shared social justice aims, united by common values even while their specific ideologies differ (Bryant, 2008). In particular, this research examines the role of social justice in fostering sense of belonging at a Catholic university. It does so because faith-based institutions, which explicitly endorse particular religious traditions, face unique struggles when it comes to cultivating campus climates that are inclusive of different religious, spiritual, and nonreligious beliefs. In light of changing demographics across the higher education landscape, these colleges and universities must identify avenues for effectively engaging worldview diversity.

**Literature Review**

While students can experience marginalization with respect to their worldview at any institution when they feel their perspective is not valued, such feelings can be especially acute in faith-based contexts, where Christian ideologies hold a privileged place (Bowman & Small, 2012b; Seifert, 2007). In these settings, some students do not fare as well as their peers on important outcome measures. For example, one study revealed that students in sectarian contexts who fall into the minority-religious group at their institution and in society at large experience declines in eudaimonic well-being, defined as “living one’s life to the fullest … having positive relationships with others and a sense of competence and purpose” (Bowman & Small, 2012b, p. 494). Strikingly, the significant relationship between “double religious minority” status and well-being existed after controlling for religious engagement, suggesting these students may have few opportunities to participate in religious activities.
At Catholic colleges and universities in particular, “double religious minority” students experience adverse outcomes related to spiritual development, spiritual quest, and skepticism (Bowman & Small, 2010; Small & Bowman, 2012). These findings may be partially explained by lower levels of appreciation for worldview diversity among students who identify as Catholic, evidenced by their below-average pluralism scores (Rockenbach et al., 2015). Bowman and Small (2010) offer an alternate explanation, speculating that “the conflict between minority students’ beliefs/values and the ubiquitous Catholic ideologies at these schools … may contribute to psychological stress and/or a sense of marginalization that directly inhibits … internalized spiritual outcomes” (p. 608).

It may be difficult for non-majority worldview students to connect meaningfully within a Catholic university setting if they feel undervalued by their Catholic peers, and pervasive ideological messages that conflict with their beliefs can lead to a sense of isolation. Strayhorn (2012) describes “students’ perceived social support on campus … feeling[s] or sensation[s] of connectedness, [and] the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important” as their sense of belonging within the campus community, or among faculty and peer groups therein (p. 3). Much of the extant research on this topic examines predictors of sense of belonging for various student populations, but it most often focuses on members of racial/ethnic minority groups (e.g., Johnson, 2012; Meeuwisse et al., 2010) and their encounters in the classroom, residence hall, or other on-campus spaces (Strayhorn, 2012).

Some evidence suggests that membership in community outreach groups is positively associated with sense of belonging, though findings are specific to marginalized groups like
Latino students and summer bridge program participants (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). These studies also do not investigate specific aspects of community service organizations that may lead to increased belongingness. However, they give credence to the idea that social justice engagement, which includes participation in community outreach groups, could similarly enhance sense of belonging for a group that is often marginalized on college campuses—students who hold minority worldview perspectives. Perhaps the broad-based values that drive social justice efforts (e.g., caring for those in need) could serve as a bridge between otherwise distinctive religious or secular traditions, thus providing an opportunity for students to transcend worldview and contribute to the campus community in a meaningful way (Bryant, 2008).

Within a Catholic higher education context, it is also possible that Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a particular framework for understanding social justice, could offer a path forward to help students connect to their institutional community more deeply (i.e., find sense of belonging). CST reflects a core dimension of church doctrine and encompasses a voluminous body of literature, but can be distilled into seven central social justice themes (Brady, 2008; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 1998):

1. CST holds sacred the *life and dignity of the human person*;
2. Calls individuals to participate in *family* and *community*;
3. Emphasizes the importance of human *rights*, and the corresponding *responsibilities* and duties of individuals that ensure human rights are protected;
4. Requires that we seek a *preferential option for the poor and vulnerable*;
5. Upholds the *dignity of work* and the *rights of workers* as fundamental components of an economy that serves the people;

6. Promotes *solidarity* across “national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences” (Brady, 2008, p. 12); and

7. Implores individuals to *care for God’s creation*.

Because these principles reflect many values that characterize social justice across a diverse array of worldviews, it is possible that they might resonate with individuals inside and outside of the Catholic tradition. At the same time, the spirit of the principles and the language used to describe them are distinctly Catholic, reflecting core tenets of the faith. One university that has integrated CST into social justice-related courses claims anecdotally that doing so “expand[ed] the students’ sense of community by expanding and reinforcing their base of common meaning rooted in the university’s mission and Catholic heritage” (Hill & Hill, 2008, p. 114). However, empirical evidence that CST can achieve such an outcome—inside or outside of the classroom—is lacking in the literature, suggesting that further inquiry into this question is warranted.

**Study Purpose and Research Questions**

Given that sectarian institutions comprise a large and influential domain of higher education, and can expect to serve an increasingly diverse student population given current demographic trends in the U.S., special attention should be given to how they engender a sense of belonging for students with diverse religious, spiritual, or nonreligious views. The current study focuses on social justice engagement as an avenue for improving sense of belonging in sectarian contexts because service and justice-related activities allow
religiously-diverse peers to work side by side, motivated by distinct beliefs and values, while at the same time pursuing “broader social justice and civic responsibility purposes” (Bryant, 2008, p. 4). The specific focus on Catholic higher education is informed by: a) the distinct challenge of cultivating positive outcomes among non-majority worldview students on Catholic college and university campuses (see Bowman & Small, 2010; Small & Bowman, 2012), and b) the unique opportunity that exists to introduce non-Catholic students to the Catholic tradition of their institution by presenting them with some “ubiquitous Catholic ideologies” (i.e., CST themes) that might be meaningful to them.

The central purpose of the current study was thus to determine how social justice and Catholic Social Teaching can be strategically employed to foster sense of belonging among students with diverse worldviews at a Catholic University. The following research questions guided this qualitative inquiry:

1. How do students with diverse worldview perspectives engage in social justice programs at a Catholic university?

2. In what ways, if any, do students learn about Catholic Social Teaching (CST) through their social justice involvement?

3. How do students’ encounters with social justice and CST shape their sense of belonging within the campus environment?

**Conceptual Framework**

I chose to use an adapted version of Hurtado et al.’s (1998) model for racial/ethnic diversity as the guiding conceptual framework for this study. It has been used throughout a substantive body of literature addressing worldview diversity in higher education (see Bryant
et al., 2009; Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013; Mayhew et al., 2014). The model addresses four climate dimensions: the institution’s historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion; compositional diversity of the student body; the behavioral dimension of campus climate (e.g., general social interactions, exchanges between students from different backgrounds, and the nature of intergroup relations); and psychological aspects of the climate, which include perceptions of diversity-related attitudes (e.g., institutional commitment to diversity) and behaviors (e.g., intergroup interactions) (Hurtado et al., 1998). A fifth dimension of climate more recently discussed in the literature, organizational diversity, was also employed to capture the extent to which organizational structures within the institution reflect a commitment to diversity (Milem et al., 2005). I was attuned to all dimensions of the campus climate when gathering data, but overall I was chiefly concerned with exploring how students with diverse worldview beliefs experienced sense of belonging—an aspect of the psychological climate—on their campus.

**Research Design**

The weight of the evidence suggests that sectarian institutions face significant challenges when it comes to supporting religiously-diverse students, yet their failure to do so has potentially significant ramifications given the rapidly changing religious and secular landscape of higher education. In an attempt to view this problem from an innovative perspective, the current study was designed to illuminate successful strategies for supporting students with different worldviews and enhancing their sense of belonging within the specific bounded context of an exemplary case study. Portraiture was employed in addition to case study as a qualitative approach to this research. An explicit aim of portraiture is to seek out
and highlight assets (i.e., what is working) within the research setting (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). At the same time, it allows for—and encourages—use of a critical lens to identify areas for growth. In other words, portraiture is intended to illuminate what is good in a given environment, even while acknowledging imperfections (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It also emphasizes the importance of drawing forth unheard voices to paint a multifaceted picture of what is occurring in the research setting. My intent as a researcher was thus to identify programs and practices that effectively foster sense of belonging at the institution from the perspective of students in the worldview minority, while also listening for opportunities to improve the worldview climate.

**Participant and Site Selection**

In keeping with portraiture’s emphasis on goodness, I elected to conduct this study on a campus that: a) possessed a robust institutional religious identity, b) demonstrated a commitment to worldview diversity across multiple climate dimensions within the conceptual framework, and c) featured varied and numerous social justice offerings for students. I ensured these criteria were sufficiently met by thoroughly reviewing the institutional mission; policies, academic programs, offices, and staff positions; student organizations and campus programs; and the demographics of the student body. A mid-sized, urban, Catholic university (referred to henceforth as Ignatian University) was ultimately selected as an appropriate setting.

Ignatian is a Jesuit institution, which means it was founded by the Society of Jesus, a religious order that claims a 500-year history and views education as one of its foremost priorities (“The Society of Jesus,” n.d.). A Jesuit university proved to be an ideal site for the
purpose of the current study because—in keeping with Jesuit ideals—it strives to incorporate faith and justice in every facet of the university. Further, Jesuit colleges and universities are deeply and explicitly committed to promoting social justice (Álvarez, 2014; Kolvenbach, 2000). Finally, there is recognition among Jesuit institutions that “the Catholic identity of the university is not to counter or exclude the fundamental humane and religious values of other traditions, but to support and endorse their presence” (Buckley, 1999, p. 9). Further, they view CST as a valuable resource for individuals from non-Catholic perspectives to better understand the social tradition of their Catholic campus communities (Cahill, 2013).

Participants included 14 undergraduate students, ranging from sophomores to seniors, who were highly involved in social justice on campus (see Astin, 1984). They were recruited via email with assistance from key stakeholders who oversee a variety of social justice programs, and offered an incentive of up to $25 for agreeing to be a research participant. Students represented a variety of worldviews, including Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, spiritual, and agnostic. Because the experiences of worldview minority students are of primary interest in the current study, findings presented here feature direct quotes from seven non-Catholic participants with whom I spent the most time (though themes were derived using interview data from all participants). Key characteristics for these seven individuals are summarized in Table 2. To uphold participant confidentiality, students were asked to select pseudonyms when they agreed to participate in the study, and their preferred aliases are used in all reporting.
Table 2

*Overview of Participant Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym (Self-selected)</th>
<th>Worldview Identification</th>
<th>Gender (Self-described)</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity (Self-described)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allie</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Agnosticism</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Indian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Female, Cisgender</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>Agnosticism</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falcon</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

Focus groups and individual interviews with students comprised the primary mode of data collection for this study. In the initial round of interviews, I held four focus groups that involved a total of eleven students, and I met individually with three students who were not available to attend any of the focus groups. Each focus group was comprised of 2-4 students and met for up to two hours, thereby allowing time for every student’s voice to be heard; one-on-one interviews lasted for 45-60 minutes. A single semi-structured interview protocol was used for all focus groups and first-round interviews, allowing for comparison of the groups’ distinct dimensions (Mertens, 2010). Questions addressed students’ worldview beliefs; intrafaith and interfaith interactions; perceptions of the campus climate and the institutional religious identity; involvement in social justice; and sense of belonging.

I used the focus groups and first-round interviews to identify students with whom I would have more in-depth conversations in the following weeks. Eight students were ultimately chosen to participate in follow-up conversations over the course of my month-long campus visit, one who identified as Catholic and the rest of whom fell outside the
institutional religious majority. These individuals were selected in part because they comprised a diverse composition with respect to worldview (i.e., one was Catholic and another was Protestant, four identified as spiritual or as part of a non-majority religious group, and two students were nonreligious). Four of these students participated in a second-round interview, and the remaining four students were asked to take part in two follow-up interviews. The seven non-Catholic students who were involved in multiple rounds of interviewing are featured in the findings presented here.

As I progressed through the focus groups and subsequent rounds of individual interviews, I moved beyond a semi-structured protocol and toward more open-ended questioning, listening for the underlying story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Specifically, I guided conversations toward in-depth reflection on students’ encounters with social justice and (when applicable) CST in their Catholic university context, expecting actors’ “insights into certain occurrences … [to serve] as the basis for further inquiry” (Yin, 1994, p. 84). The stories I listened for were those that revealed how students experienced the campus climate, and sense of belonging specifically, through their social justice involvement.

All focus groups and individual interviews were digitally recorded and I took thorough notes to account for what was not captured in the audio recordings. In between student interviews, I gathered additional data via staff interviews, observations, and document review to contextualize emergent findings.

**Data Analysis**

Upon completion of all fieldwork, I devoted time to in-depth analysis that is “more ruminative than the day-to-day analysis of the data-gathering phase” (Lawrence-Lightfoot &
Davis, 1997, p. 18). Interviews were professionally transcribed and analyzed using NVivo 11 software. Open coding was used to identify salient refrains (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), while *a priori* codes helped illuminate findings related to the campus climate and students’ sense of belonging (Creswell, 2013). Throughout data analysis, I was attentive to the emergence of divergent perspectives, as portraiture requires consideration of voices that fall outside identified themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005).

I made certain that findings were credible by summarizing relevant documents and observation protocols and using them for triangulation. In the same vein, eight student participants were invited to participate in member checking at two junctures during the write-up of findings. Transferability has been ensured by providing adequate details about the setting in which the research was conducted (Mertens, 2010). Interview data, participant observation, and document review collectively contributed to the “thick description” of students’ experiences presented here. Dependability was enhanced through development of detailed interview protocols, as well as a thorough summary of all data collection methods. Finally, I addressed confirmability by situating my interpretation of findings within a well-tested campus climate framework.

**Limitations**

It is important to mention several limitations that shaped data collection and analysis for the current study. First, due to resource constraints, the time frame for my research at Ignatian University was limited to four weeks. Therefore, it is possible that the data I gathered does not present a truly holistic account of the case (Creswell, 2013). Second, fully answering the research questions required that participants represent a diversity of religious,
spiritual, and nonreligious worldview perspectives. While I was largely successful in my efforts to recruit a diversity of students with non-Catholic worldviews, the religious-minority perspective in particular was limited to one Muslim student and—for all intents and purposes in a Catholic context—one Protestant student. As such, it is impossible to ascertain how experiences with social justice and sense of belonging are similar or different for other religious identity groups on campus (e.g., Hindu, Jewish). Finally, the students who participated in this study were highly engaged, not only in social justice programs, but in a host of other curricular and co-curricular activities as well. Though I attempted to identify their primary communities by asking where these students devoted most of their time and energy, it is difficult to claim that their sense of belonging is derived solely—or even primarily—from social justice communities. None of the aforementioned difficulties substantially inhibited my ability to answer the research questions; however, findings should be considered in light of these constraints.

Findings

In the four weeks that I devoted to exploring the people, culture, and climate of Ignatian University, I had the privilege of getting to know 14 students and learning about their unique and often transformative encounters with social justice at the institution. During every exchange, I listened carefully for an underlying story of discovering community, finding one’s place, and realizing a sense of belonging through involvement in social justice programs. When I was not sitting down with a student, I made work of touring the campus, attending events, and gleaning insights about social justice engagement from student affairs
staff in a range of administrative units, including Campus Ministry, the Community Service Office, and the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs.

Over the course of the study, I searched for features within the institutional setting that enhanced belongingness via social justice involvement. What drew students to their social justice communities, and what made them stay? Ultimately, three emergent themes helped me formulate answers to these questions. The first two themes reflect complementary precursors to sense of belonging. First, individuals must feel like they identify with a particular group or its members; they must experience “feeling[s] … of connectedness” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). Second, it is important that people feel they have an important role to play within their community; in other words, they must have an “experience of mattering.” Evidence abounded that students were achieving these two components of belongingness through their social justice activities on campus. A final emergent theme related to the ways in which conceptions of social justice can influence people’s connection to the institution and involvement therein.

Feelings of Connectedness

“Social justice has been so ingrained in us as Ignatian students that almost everybody is passionate about it, so you have something to talk about, you have passion you share with other students … [and] that helps to make friendships and meet people,” Sarah informs me during our initial meeting. Sarah is a Muslim student at Ignatian University, studying in the Special Education program. Her co-curricular activities are largely centered on her academic major, and she is currently completing a yearlong internship at an organization that serves adults with developmental disabilities. Sarah is one of eight students completing the
Community Engagement Internship Program (CEIP), through which she is required to spend 10 hours each week at a nonprofit placement in the city. Once a month, the interns come together to discuss aspects of social justice like power, privilege, oppression, and community development. Compensation via scholarship, as well as the opportunity to earn course credit, makes the significant time commitment feasible. The depth of engagement that characterizes CEIP affords interns ample time to connect both within the class and at their internship sites.

For Sarah, CEIP facilitates connectedness by engaging her with like-minded peers on a topic of common interest, namely social justice. Ella, another student in CEIP, interns at Catholic Charities and helps provide resources and support for Latina immigrants. As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, Ella feels a personal connection to this population: “I consider myself being ... not an immigrant, but partially, culturally yes because I do have that exposure to Hispanic culture,” she says. “I do have a strong connection to the population that I work with.” In another breath, Ella talks about the camaraderie she has experienced as a member of her CEIP cohort:

I've been really close with all the people there. We've built a great community and great relationships, and I think it's just because we're all social justice-oriented. I think that's why. We're all of different backgrounds. A lot of them don't even hold any of my identities and it's just been really easy for me to connect through that social justice initiative and social justice background. As far as worldviews, I know we all hold different worldviews and it doesn't matter to me.

During my visit to Ignatian, I attended a symposium at which four of the CEIP students, Sarah and Ella among them, gave presentations about their social justice
experiences as a culmination of their internship requirements. As the two women offered highlights from their internships for the audience, a deep connectedness to their newfound communities was conveyed. With respect to the individuals she served, Sarah remarked, “They have so much love to give, and deserve that love in return.” Ella had this to say about the immigrant women with whom she worked: “We’re not just giving to them; we’re giving to each other.”

Two other students I got to know at Ignatian, Bob and Cassidy, described to me how their social justice activities led them to new friend groups. For Bob, who identifies as agnostic, a desire to give back through service led him to participate in an Alternative Spring Break (ASB) trip. In turn, his ASB connected him to a group of like-minded peers. In the ASB program, students pay a participation fee to visit one of 25 domestic and international service-learning sites, where they spend a week with leaders and peers learning about systemic issues of injustice. The immersive nature of the program created a meaningful bond among Bob and his fellow participants in a relatively short time frame:

Being part of these social justice organizations, activities, I’m definitely able to be more connected with students who also share very similar viewpoints as I do. I definitely feel a sense of … community with these students themselves … [On the ASB] we [had] such a powerful experience together, and everyone else, even though I met them in a week's span, I feel like I got to know them so well. They're all really empowering, strong, amazing individuals. I can definitely talk to them. I still do.

Cassidy is a passionate and enthusiastic volunteer for the university’s Soup Kitchen Ministry (SOUP). Her tenure at the soup kitchen began when she needed to fulfill a volunteer
requirement for a class, but she quickly fell in love with the community and decided to stay on as a leader. Now, Cassidy oversees a cadre of volunteers who make and serve meals for homeless individuals each week. Among them are a host of Ignatian students whom she would never have encountered if not for this shared service commitment. Even though many of SOUP’s volunteers drop by to help out only sporadically, Cassidy has built strong relationships with some of the more dedicated students:

That group … that is kind of my core group that goes to the soup kitchen, we all went on spring break together … We walked into a restaurant and … someone said, “What a motley crew.” I kind of looked around and I was like, “What do you mean?” I thought about it after that was said, and … Yeah, we are a diverse group of people and come from completely different worldviews and backgrounds, but we were all in the same place and came to the same place because we started doing service at the soup kitchen, which I thought was super awesome.

While social justice efforts drew Cassidy into a heterogeneous social justice community, Elizabeth—a Protestant student who identifies as African-American—found a sense of belonging among a group of peers who share her identity as a woman of color on campus. Her social justice efforts take place primarily within the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMSA), where she works to promote retention and success for underrepresented students as a peer mentor. In Elizabeth’s case, her contribution to a community upon which she relies for support is in itself considered social justice:

Being in OMSA and having the social justice programs really helped me have a family and stuff, so I could go to them when I had problems … that weren't even
social justice-related. If I had an issue in class and my advisors couldn't really relate because we don't share the same identities, I could go [to OMSA] and they will understand because that happened to them, too.

Each of these students sought social justice groups that appealed to a unique set of interests, objectives, or identities. For Sarah, working with a population she will someday serve professionally was a priority; Bob and Cassidy’s desire to engage in service led them to new friendships; and Ella and Elizabeth found solace in communities with which they could empathically relate. Across these experiences, students described feelings of connectedness that were essential to solidifying their sense of belonging on campus.

Experience of Mattering

Being able to draw support from a community is undoubtedly a vital aspect experiencing belongingness in college, but of equal importance is feeling that your contributions to that community matter. In this vein, nearly all participants articulated the value of gaining—as they described it—tools, platforms, and catalysts that enabled them to contribute more substantively to their social justice communities. In general, students praised the institution for providing them with abundant opportunities to develop as social justice advocates even amidst criticisms that their university was not directly modeling social justice through its own actions and decision-making. As I talk with various students, I come to understand that the tools they describe include skills cultivated through hands-on experience, knowledge of systemic issues learned via courses and programs like ASB, and an awareness of how social justice relates to their personal and professional interests.
Bob discussed how his involvement in Volunteers for the City, a peer led, long-term service program through which he serves as a Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor, helped him learn about education policy and its impact on low-income students like his mentee. For Ella and Sarah, the Community Engagement Internship Program provided theoretical tools in the classroom that could be employed at their internship sites in a way that added value to the organization. Additionally, their internships exposed them to social problems on a deeper, more multifaceted level. Sarah shared, “I have learned how [social justice] connects to ... me pursuing Special Education. And when I'm a Special Education teacher I'll be fighting for social justice for people with disabilities. I had never thought about that before.”

Falcon is another student I was able to talk with on multiple occasions during my visit to Ignatian. He claims a spiritual worldview, and has found his social justice community via a grassroots movement that has emerged on Ignatian’s campus over the past year. It began with a group of eight student leaders demanding improved demonstration rights because they felt the institution was acting unjustly by disenfranchising them. After much negotiation, a new policy was enacted that broadened students’ rights to protest, and with their newfound rights in place a subset of the movement organizers shifted their focus to a new effort. Students Organizing for Workers (SOW) dedicated themselves to speaking out on behalf of food service workers at Ignatian, demanding better contracts and wages. After mobilizing students campus-wide, SOW was successful in this pursuit, as well. Falcon believes the SOW movement provided a valuable platform for him to build confidence in expressing his views:

Social justice at Ignatian kind of allowed me to take these steps to get to that point where I can really go out there and put out my values, put out a statement of support
to this. It's more than just a like on Facebook. Now it's like my whole body, my whole entity telling you this is what I believe in, and you're putting it out there for scrutiny.

By using this platform to speak out on matters of injustice, Falcon contributed meaningfully to a cause that ultimately achieved institutional change. In other words, he felt that his voice had been heard his participation in SOW made an impact:

The power of eight individuals, essentially, to polarize a whole campus. It may not have been ... I'm not saying the polarization was a good thing, but the fact that we were all able to affect the whole campus just from our actions, that's something in itself. Doing those things, finding the people [who are] like-minded, people better than myself that I could look up to, really just helped.

Perhaps as important as the policy changes that resulted from SOW’s work was the enthusiasm it engendered among a broad swath of community members on and off campus. From student-athletes to members of Greek life, from food service workers to local priests, SOW leaders activated support from a diverse and wide-reaching community, which I witnessed firsthand at a protest and rally the group organized while I was on campus. With two victories under their belt, SOW was motivated to expand the scope of their efforts even further, and they organized a rally in support of the national Fight for $15 campaign in hopes of moving their cause forward yet again.

Catalyzing experiences were the final conduit by which students at Ignatian felt they were being formed as social justice allies. Catalysts were defined as programs that rapidly deepened individuals’ understanding of—and commitment to—social justice. Unlike the one-day-a-week, short-term service opportunities students were accustomed to in high school,
collegiate pursuits were found to be transformative experiences that exposed them to social justice as a way of life. Allie, who identifies as spiritual but not religious, struggled to find her place within the campus community upon her arrival at Ignatian. When a friend encouraged her to apply for an Alternative Spring Break (ASB) trip, she decided to take the risk. As was the case for several people I talked to at the university, the ASB proved to be a significant catalyst for Allie’s future social justice involvement:

I went on an alternative break immersion and it completely changed my worldview. I changed my major from film to … general communications with a focus in film, and the rest of my coursework is in advocacy … Coming back from that alternative break, I applied to lead a homeless outreach ministry, which I do. I am [also a leader in] a ministry of first-year students and we just try to help them integrate themselves into Ignatian, which is something I felt like I was lacking my own freshman year so I really wanted to help that process move quicker than it did for me.

What started as a one-time social justice opportunity eventually led Allie to multiple leadership roles and ongoing, high-level engagement in both ASB and the homeless outreach program known as Good Samaritan Ministry (GSM). In these capacities, Allie’s impact and experience of mattering were evident. I joined her and a group of volunteers one evening for GSM’s weekly visit with homeless men and women in the city surrounding Ignatian. They met the basic needs of people we encountered by providing food and drink, but more striking was the familiarity and compassion with which Allie and others interacted with them. They operated within the bounds of a unique and nourishing community that had been formed with these marginalized individuals:
One of the best things about GSM and being a GSM leader is having that support because it's hard to go out every week and talk to people who we see every week and build relationships with. And I've had relationships with people for two years living on the streets, and so having someone or a group of people that understand what you're feeling and how you're processing what we're seeing and how we're processing everything and being super intentional about that processing has been really incredible, and they're some of my best friends.

“Open to Your Own Interpretation”

In the midst of many exchanges with students about what they were doing in their social justice communities, I also endeavored to learn how they conceived of social justice, and how they perceived institutional messages about social justice on campus. Several individuals with whom I spoke believed there was not a singular definition of social justice, but that it meant different things to different people. Falcon asserted, “Social justice is essentially what you make it.” With respect to institutional messaging, Cassidy mused: “I would almost like to say, because Ignatian stresses how much they appreciate diversity, they would almost say that social justice is open to your own interpretation … I think they would encourage you to create your own definition of social justice.” Interestingly, leaving the door open to different conceptions of justice appeared to enhance sense of belonging insofar as it enabled diverse students, with their distinct passions and motivations, to participate and feel welcome in social justice communities.

Students’ articulated definitions of social justice seemed to be specifically informed by their own backgrounds and experiences, with one exception: Jesuit phrases like “Go out
and set the world on fire” and “Men and women with and for others” were commonly peppered into our discussions of what justice looked like at the individual and institutional level. When I asked Bob where he was learning about Ignatian’s Jesuit philosophy, he said:

Everyone around me talks and lives and breathes Jesuit values a lot of times, like a lot of my teachers, even if they're not Jesuits themselves. Or just doing things on campus, like going to certain events, there's always … most likely there's an underlying Jesuit core value behind it.

Elizabeth echoed Bob’s sentiments when she noted lightheartedly, “There's Jesuit everything. Since coming here, I feel like it's just entered my vocabulary because every other class is like, ‘Here's Jesuit reflection. Here's also a Jesuit teaching for this.’ I'm like, ‘Oh, there's just endless Jesuit ways.’” However, at another point in the conversation, she commented on the challenges associated with not having a tangible definition of social justice:

It's hard. You don't want to get too hard of a definition, like, “We're doing social justice for this group …” because they leave out all these people that get mad. If you make it too open, which I feel like it sometimes is, then people are just like, “I don't know what that is.” I'm just like, “I can't fight for that. I don't know what it is.” It's hard, and I know it's hard, but it's hard because you want to be inclusive with your language, but then it becomes like people don't know what you're talking about.

Although Elizabeth’s was the dissenting voice with respect to defining justice, it aptly points to ways that social justice definitions (or a lack thereof) can influence participation in social justice, and thus either help or hinder efforts to realize sense of belonging. I was somewhat surprised that I did not hear CST principles used to describe social justice in the
same way that Jesuit phrases were applied. After all, each student who attended an ASB trip was familiar with the principles, albeit to varying degrees. What is more, every student I met referenced at least one CST theme indirectly when describing their social justice involvements, conceptions of social justice, or their reasons for participation.

Collectively, the 14 students I interviewed touched on all seven of the social teachings, but Ella, Allie, and Elizabeth were the only ones who brought up CST in conversation of their own accord. These three all seemed to find the language compelling as a means for talking about social justice. Allie shared that she had used CST to lead a reflection activity with fellow leaders of the Good Samaritan Ministry, and added, “I wish that I heard [the principles] more because I think that they do provide a really good way, a tangible way to speak on social justice.” Elizabeth provided a concrete example of a scenario in which she put CST to use:

Human dignity and the preferential treatment for the poor … I don't know all the things, but those two really stuck out to me and I adopted the stuff. Even in my classes recently, for the last few classes, we’re talking about should all humans have human dignity and stuff … Having those words, it made me realize, “Oh, that's why I get so frustrated when politicians say they deserve to be poor.” I'm like, “No, something happened.” Maybe if they did … People obviously don't want to be poor. Having those terms and stuff, or just the term social justice, I feel like was real useful. Now I could frame my debates using specific words that people understood.
Discussion

When one thinks about sense of belonging and how it is achieved, findings from the current study suggest that “feeling[s] … of connectedness” and “experience[s] of mattering” are indeed critically important elements of connecting to a community in a meaningful way (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). At Ignatian University, the students I talked to had a broad array of social justice communities at their disposal from which to draw support and contribute their time, energy, and enthusiasm. The diversity of options available to them increased the likelihood that they would find a space that felt familiar or embracing in some way. For some, getting to know a group of like-minded peers was enough to set the groundwork for meaningful friendships and connections. Students who participated in Alternative Spring Break trips indicated that sharing an immersive social justice encounter with such peers was instrumental in solidifying their sense of belonging, while interns in the Community Engagement Internship Program built community with one another as a result of sustained and in-depth interactions over time.

Other students, particularly those from underrepresented groups (e.g., students of color, first-generation college students), found that engaging in social justice with peers who shared their identities helped strengthen relationships with one another. Further, the chance to pay it forward or lend a hand to people on campus whose struggles they personally understood was clearly a salient aspect of community and belongingness. Yet another subset of students discovered sense of belonging via participation in communities of people beyond Ignatian students, faculty, and staff. These individuals described relationships they had cultivated over time, sometimes over many years, with people they served through their
social justice activities. The opportunity to be present to those on the margins of society and learn their stories—including guests at the soup kitchen, clients at Catholic Charities, children at Big Brothers Big Sisters, or food service workers on Ignatian’s own campus—frequently led to experiences of connectedness and mattering for students.

The broad notions of community that students described over the course of this study stand in contrast to more narrowly-defined campus communities (e.g., peers, faculty), or vaguely defined concepts of campus community, that are often used as measures in the sense of belonging literature (see Johnson, 2012; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). Even in Hurtado and Carter’s (1997) study examining the influence of participation in community outreach, sense of belonging was measured by the extent to which students felt part of the campus community, without due attention to off-campus communities in which they were also involved. To effectively study sense of belonging within the social justice domain, conceptions of community should be extended to include off-campus organizations and the people they serve. After all, it appears these social justice organizations are instrumental in cultivating an overall sense of campus community to the extent that students are engaging therein through campus-sponsored programs or with their collegiate peers. As such, there is value in encouraging students to tap into non-traditional communities via institutional channels like social justice programs and reconceptualizing sense of belonging accordingly.

Another takeaway from the current study involves social justice programs that offer students access to tools, platforms, and catalyzing experiences. Alternative Spring Break (ASB), the Community Engagement Internship Program (CEIP), Good Samaritan Ministry (GSM), Soup Kitchen Ministry, Students Organizing for Workers, and Volunteers for the
City were described as transformative and impactful when it came to sense of belonging because they enhanced students’ knowledge, skills, confidence, and compassion in a way that made their social justice experiences more meaningful. ASB and CEIP are double-edged swords to a certain extent because they engage students at the highest levels and are thus especially catalyzing. However, they are also somewhat exclusionary. The internship program places students in nonprofit organizations for 10 hours per week, and includes supplemental readings and class discussion, but it is only available to 10 students per year. Those who participate in ASB learn about social justice issues from trained faculty and staff during an immersive spring break trip and through pre- and post-trip gatherings. However, a substantial fee is required to take part in these trips (though some financial aid is available).

Despite their limitations, ASB and CEIP offer unique opportunities to equip students with valuable social justice “tools.” CST is among those tools, and represents a final point of discussion that was raised in the findings. When I talked to students about their familiarity with CST, responses were mixed. Some had learned about CST through the ASB trips, where it is used as a mechanism for framing students’ learning and reflection, and found that it helped them articulate different elements of social justice. For others, CST language was not salient; yet, they frequently referred to underlying themes of CST like human dignity, dignity of work, and solidarity when talking about what social justice meant to them. Moreover, Ignatian students demonstrated general affinity for certain justice-focused Jesuit themes—perhaps because they are broadly compelling and not laden with exclusionary religious language—thus indicating they might also gravitate toward CST as long as it was presented in a way that was accessible, inclusive, and connected to existing social justice ideals.
Some evidence from this study reveals a tension related to whether and how social justice should be concretely defined. From one perspective, it appears that leaving definitions of social justice open-ended (rather than using a specific frame like CST) can have positive implications for worldview diversity and inclusion on campus. It seems that when people develop and live into their own concepts of justice, they may feel more welcomed at the social justice table regardless of ideology or worldview (see Bryant, 2008). In turn, students with minority worldviews—whose well-being suffers when engagement in other domains is diminished (see Bowman & Small, 2012b)—are afforded opportunities to benefit from social justice engagement alongside their majority worldview peers. Yet an ongoing challenge exists, as lack of a common language to talk about shared social justice experiences can limit occasions for enhanced communication, collaboration, and relationship building, all of which foster sense of belonging. When a specific language is adopted, and it is grounded in a distinct faith tradition, great care must be taken to ensure the intent and impact of its use does not alienate people holding diverse worldviews.

Implications

The current study illuminated several important implications for practice that relate to sense of belonging for students from diverse worldview groups. Findings suggest that social justice activities engendering sense of belonging for religious, spiritual, and nonreligious students at Ignatian were generally characterized by high-level engagement via immersive or long-term experiences. Administrators at Ignatian or within higher education generally who are committed to worldview diversity and inclusion would be wise to make these social justice offerings more readily available to students for whom such programs provide a unique
conduit for achieving sense of belonging. With sufficient financial and human resources, accessibility of programs could be improved by: funding small scholarships for students who serve as leaders within programs like Volunteers for the City or Good Samaritan Ministry; offering additional sections of social justice courses; reducing the cost of Alternative Spring Breaks (ASBs) to make them accessible to more students; and expanding ASB to include more trips specifically for minority worldview identity groups or at sites that immerse students in non-majority worldview traditions.

Another avenue requiring fewer assets but greater creativity involves integrating social justice into existing campus groups that serve worldview minority students. Lessons can be gleaned from the Office of Multicultural Affairs at Ignatian, where sense of belonging is cultivated via social justice engagement within identity-based groups for students of color and first-generation college-goers. Social justice opportunities could even connect students to people outside the institution with whom they share a common worldview identification, thus facilitating community building beyond campus borders. Finally, it could be fruitful to cultivate partnerships between worldview-minority student groups and popular social justice programs on college campuses to create a pipeline for participation.

Findings from the current study also revealed implications for Catholic colleges and universities in particular. For example, it was evident that students at Ignatian who hold diverse worldviews were well positioned to benefit from CST as a useful tool for understanding social justice in a Catholic context. This may have been true at Ignatian in particular given the generally positive climate for worldview diversity, which was assessed across multiple dimensions of the conceptual framework during site selection. In this vein,
leaders of other Catholic institutions might consider utilizing the campus climate model (see Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005) to assess how welcoming their own worldview climate is before instituting CST as a social justice tool. If there are disparities between climate domains in terms of diversity and inclusion, Hurtado et al. (1998) and Milem et al. (2005) may point to possible strategies for improvement.

In Catholic contexts that boast an inclusive campus climate for worldview diversity, it would behoove decision makers to consider strategies for teaching more students about CST so those students can benefit from a shared social justice language that connects them more deeply to their institution’s religious identity. ASB program leaders at Ignatian may have insights about how best to promote awareness of CST based on prior experience. Because there has been some success conveying various aspects of Ignatian’s Jesuit tradition to students (e.g., via courses like the first-year seminar, or campus events such as spirituality and meaning-making retreats), it might be possible to identify and utilize similar channels for promulgating CST on campus. If this proves to be a successful strategy, it has positive implications for other Jesuit, Catholic institutions seeking avenues for teaching CST as a social justice frame.

The current study highlights two keys to success when it comes to making CST a common language across an institution. First, a critical mass of students must be exposed to CST in a meaningful way if it is to be adopted broadly and collectively understood. This was not the case at Ignatian, as only a few students I talked to were well versed in CST principles. If sufficient resources are devoted to initiatives like ASB, and credit-bearing experiences such as the Community Engagement Internship Program are scaled up to reach a large
number of students, these programs and others like them could become primary vehicles for teaching students across a variety of worldviews about CST. Second, CST must be consistently conveyed to students regardless of where they learn about it. Even among students who participated in ASB, the depth and nuance of their CST knowledge varied depending on the trip they attended and the extent to which their leader used CST to frame social justice encounters. Greater consistency requires that everyone who teaches CST is trained similarly and employs shared institutional strategies for imparting CST knowledge.

Though CST is unique to Catholic institutions, there are opportunities for other sectarian campuses to similarly employ social justice frames from their own religious traditions. As such, the aforementioned keys to success could be applicable across a range of faith-based institutions. When developing institution-wide strategies for promoting social justice through the lens of a specific religion, it would be prudent to ensure that the institutionally-supported social justice perspective (e.g., CST) is communicated in a spirit of interfaith knowledge sharing so that students who fall outside the worldview majority do not feel marginalized. This can be accomplished by presenting it to students alongside other faith-based and secular social justice frames. Doing so demonstrates an appreciation for alternative social justice perspectives, and also allows students from different worldview traditions to engage in the conversation through a lens that feels familiar to them. Such an approach may prove valuable in any sectarian settings where social justice is prioritized and greater inclusion of worldview diversity is an institutional aim.
Future Research

Study findings indicating that students experience sense of belonging within nontraditional communities (e.g., among people they work with or serve off campus) highlight a need to broaden the construct of belongingness within higher education. Extant literature typically employs measures that capture the extent to which students feel they belong at their institution, feel part of their campus community, feel comfortable on their campus, or some variation thereof (see Johnson, 2012). However, they do not account for ways that students make connections through their institution to communities outside it. Future research could address this issue by testing different sense of belonging measures in relation to social justice involvement. Constructs may include questions that ascertain whether students feel they belong to a community organization, feel comfortable in the community surrounding their campus, or feel connected to local community members they meet through campus-sponsored programs. A sense of belonging construct that encompasses connection to off-campus communities could be useful to scholars studying a variety of collegiate activities, especially in an era of higher education characterized by community outreach initiatives, internships and externships, and service-learning programs.

The dual dimensions of connectedness and mattering that emerged in this study, particularly among students from traditionally marginalized groups, also point to an avenue for future research that may enhance the sense of belonging construct. Specifically, findings related to these aspects of belongingness are in many ways reminiscent of Schlossberg’s (1989) theory of marginality and mattering, thus suggesting that intersections between Strayhorn (2012) and Schlossberg’s (1989) work may warrant scholarly attention. If such
research is undertaken, there is potential to develop an even more robust conceptual framework—grounded in an extensive literature base on marginality, mattering, and sense of belonging—that illuminates how to help “all students to find a place of involvement and importance” in college (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 6).

A third avenue for future research relates to high-impact social justice programs. While the current study pointed to several activities that were especially effective in generating feelings of connectedness and experiences of mattering, there is still much to learn about specific aspects of these programs that elicited sense of belonging. In his work on student involvement, Astin (1984) speculates that “it would … be useful to assess how frequently students interact with each other, with faculty members and other institutional personnel, and with people outside the institution” in various campus activities. He goes on to propose that these data could be collected via student logs of how they spend their time. Something else germane to this study that could be captured in a journal or log would be when, where, and how students learn about CST through their campus involvement. Conducting this type of research at Ignatian could help university leaders identify key characteristics of strong social justice communities—including CST, if applicable—and incorporate them into other programs on campus. This research would also make it possible to adapt social justice programs that engender sense of belonging for other campus contexts.

One of the study limitations points to a third valuable line of future inquiry. Because it was not qualitatively possible to demonstrate that students derived their sense of belonging solely—or even primarily—from social justice communities at Ignatian University, a quantitative examination of social justice as a predictor of sense of belonging is in order. A
sense of belonging construct that measures connectedness to on- and off-campus communities could serve as the dependent variable, and independent variables could capture different curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities in which students are involved, as well as relevant demographic characteristics (including worldview). Measures of CST knowledge could also be included to look for direct or indirect relationships between CST and sense of belonging on Catholic campuses.

Findings would complement qualitative data gathered at Ignatian by confirming whether students found their sources of connection and mattering within social justice communities, from outside communities, or some combination of the two. Data may also reveal distinct influences of CST on belongingness. To maximize utility of quantitative research findings, it would be ideal to include students from a variety of institution types in the study (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, private nonsectarian), though not everyone would need to receive CST-related questions. Data could then illuminate between-institution differences when it comes to campus activities that foster sense of belonging for various worldview groups. It would also make possible rigorous analyses of the interplay between worldview identification, social justice engagement, and sense of belonging in higher education at large.

**Conclusion**

Today’s college student population reflects a rich tapestry of religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives, and highlights an ever-increasing need for higher education leaders to support diversity and inclusion in this realm. Given what we know about the collegiate experiences and outcomes of non-majority worldview students, it is important to focus on mitigating issues that cause feelings of marginalization. At the same time, we
should be forward thinking in our efforts to welcome students of diverse worldviews on all
college campuses and engender greater collaboration and appreciation across worldviews.
This study demonstrates that social justice is a viable pathway for bringing diverse students
together, and helping them find sense of belonging at their institution. While there is still
more to learn about what specific social justice programs and tactics are most effective for
increasing belongingness, the current research lays an important foundation for research and
practice dedicated to improving the campus climate for worldview diversity in a range of
higher education contexts.
CHAPTER 6

The following theoretical manuscript was written in accordance with guidelines for the “Opinions and Perspectives” section of the Journal of College and Character. I selected this outlet because it publishes scholarly articles related to, among other things, spiritual growth in higher education. My work—which aims to improve worldview diversity and inclusion on sectarian campuses—fits nicely within these parameters since it addresses students’ sense of belonging at institutions that are already distinctly committed to fostering spiritual development (see Bowman & Small, 2012a; Lovik, 2010). Conceptual pieces in this journal “generally present little or no data or findings [and] may be examinations of existing theories or research findings” (“Instructions for Authors,” 2017). Therefore, this manuscript focuses primarily on the campus climate framework that guided my dissertation research and introduces data and literature sparingly to support and contextualize discussion of the theory.

This piece describes the conceptual framework I employed in my study and a rationale for selecting it; explains how I adapted the model to examine worldview diversity in a Catholic context; walks the reader through my process of applying the framework; and offers implications for theory and practice. My purpose in writing this article is twofold. First, I want to provide fellow scholars with a roadmap for strategically selecting and creatively adapting a conceptual model such that its utility is maximized for distinct research aims. Second, I would like to propose an adapted conceptual model for practitioners specifically in sectarian higher education who are interested in examining intersections between worldview diversity and institutional religious identity on their campuses.
Applying a Campus Climate Framework to Examine the Intersection of Worldview Diversity and Institutional Religious Identity

Abstract

Campus climate provides a useful lens for understanding how students from diverse backgrounds experience their collegiate environments. Recently, scholars have begun to investigate the climate for worldview diversity in higher education. The theoretical framework guiding their research is comprised of four campus climate dimensions—historical, compositional, behavioral, and psychological. The current article presents an adapted version of that framework, which incorporates an organizational climate dimension and expands the psychological climate dimension to include sense of belonging. It also describes how the model was applied to examine institutional religious identity and worldview diversity at a Catholic university. Finally, lessons learned from using this framework in a sectarian setting are discussed with respect to research and practice.

Studying Worldview Diversity in a Catholic Context

There are more than 200 Catholic institutions within the broad realm of U.S. higher education (ACCU, 2014), and the vast majority of them view diversity, “including religious diversity, as a positive dimension of … institutional identity and an aspect of … [their] Catholic identity” (Estanek et al., 2006, p. 209). Unlike many of their non-Catholic sectarian counterparts, Catholic colleges and universities have a longstanding historical legacy of inclusion that informs their current commitments (Elliot, 2012; Thelin, 2011). It is therefore unsurprising that students on Catholic campuses are more racially, ethnically, and economically diverse than their peers at other private colleges and universities, sectarian and
secular alike (Elliot, 2012). Yet while Catholic institutions are living into their missional commitments to diversity in myriad ways, many face challenges when it comes to upholding their oldest and most enduring mission: living out the Catholic faith tradition.

Catholic colleges and universities today are said to be experiencing a crisis of culture (Morey & Piderit, 2006), struggling to negotiate their core purpose in the face of changing demographics, evolving notions of religion and spirituality, difficult economic realities, and isomorphic pressures to emulate elite secular institutions (Dosen, 2012; Overstreet, 2010; Reilly, 2003). In his 1990 declaration, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Pope John Paul II articulated the core characteristics that should distinguish a Catholic university; however, institutional leaders have been slow in determining how to embrace those attributes without compromising reputation and rigor (McMurtrie, 2014). Furthermore, on campuses that are religiously diverse, it can be difficult to remain distinctively Catholic while also effectively serving students with different worldview beliefs (Bowman & Small, 2010).

When it comes to balancing commitments to worldview diversity and institutional religious identity, Catholic higher education’s cultural crisis can seem particularly salient. However, little empirical evidence exists to support (or challenge) the notion that these two aims are incompatible. To address this gap in the literature, I recently completed a qualitative study at a Catholic university to explore whether it is possible for an institution to be both vibrantly Catholic and broadly inclusive of diverse worldview beliefs. Specifically, I interviewed students with different religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives to determine how they experienced sense of belonging on their campus. At the same time, I ascertained how these students learned about—and engaged with—the Catholic heritage that
characterized their institution. By pursuing these dual lines of questioning, I hoped to shed light on promising practices for welcoming students of all faiths within the context of a rich faith tradition.

Portraiture was the primary methodological approach I selected for my study because it is intended to illuminate what is good in a given environment, even while acknowledging imperfections (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In that vein, I conducted my research at an institution that was—from an outsider’s purview—doing things well vis-à-vis institutional religious identity and worldview diversity. I also used case study as part of my qualitative research design in order to emphasize process, context, and people’s distinct experiences within the bounded system of a single Catholic university (Merriam, 1998).

Reliance on theoretical propositions is a recommended analytic strategy within case study research (Yin, 1994). In this instance, I was seeking a conceptual model relevant to my line of inquiry that would systematically guide selection of an exemplary research site, and help me establish connections between emergent themes and extant literature upon which the study was based. What follows is a description of the framework I selected and my rationale for doing so; an overview of how I adapted it to examine worldview diversity in a Catholic context; an explanation of how I applied it to my research and what I learned in the process; and implications for theory and practice.

**Adapting and Applying a Campus Climate Framework**

I began my search for an appropriate conceptual framework within the literature base addressing worldview diversity in higher education (see Mayhew et al., 2014; Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013, 2014; Rockenbach et al., 2015). Research in this domain has
frequently and successfully employed a theoretical model that was originally developed to examine racial/ethnic diversity on college campuses (see Hurtado et al., 1998); it therefore seemed appropriate to use the same model in my study. Hurtado et al.’s (1998) campus climate framework identifies four dimensions of climate that warrant attention when trying to improve diversity efforts on campus. These include the institution’s historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, which can manifest in present-day “long-standing, often unrecognized, benefits for particular student groups” (p. 283); compositional diversity on campus, which refers to the demographic makeup of the student body; the behavioral dimension of campus climate (e.g., general social interactions, exchanges between students from different backgrounds, and the nature of intergroup relations); and psychological aspects of the climate including student perceptions of diversity-related attitudes (e.g., institutional commitment to diversity) and behaviors (e.g., intergroup interactions) (Hurtado et al., 1998).

For the purpose of my study, I incorporated a fifth dimension of climate into the conceptual framework. The organizational diversity dimension has been more recently discussed in the literature, and captures the extent to which an institution’s organizational policies and structures reflect a commitment to diversity (Milem et al., 2005). I also expanded the psychological climate dimension to include sense of belonging, which is defined as “students’ perceived [emphasis added] social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). The conceptual framework for the
current study is depicted in Figure 1. It reflects the adapted version of Hurtado et al.’s (1998) campus climate model that has informed recent studies on worldview climate (see Bryant et al., 2009); includes the organizational diversity climate factor conceptualized by Milem et al. (2005); and highlights sense of belonging as an important construct embedded within the psychological climate.

**Examining the Intersection of Worldview Diversity and Institutional Religious Identity**

I initially used the campus climate framework to facilitate site selection. In the spirit of portraiture, I was seeking an institution seemingly inclusive of worldview diversity and deeply invested in its religious identity. Because my interviews with students would yield rich data about their lived experiences (i.e., behavioral climate) and sense of belonging (i.e., psychological climate), I elected to focus site selection primarily on the remaining three climate factors. I first sought evidence of *worldview inclusion* within the institution’s historical context, organizational structures, and worldview composition (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005). For example, I explored whether the institution had a tradition of educating students from religious-minority groups (historical context); explicitly included religious diversity in institutional diversity statements and hired staff to support students with diverse worldviews (organizational structures); or boasted a student body comprised of individuals with a variety of religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives (compositional diversity).

Next, I applied framework somewhat nontraditionally by using it to find evidence of robust *institutional religious identity* across the same three climate dimensions. Religious identity-based criteria included a mission statement that clearly articulated the institution’s
Catholic roots (historical context); academic programs and campus offices like Campus Ministry that fostered Catholic faith formation (organizational structures); and a critical mass of students who identified as Catholic (compositional diversity). The university setting for my research was ultimately selected after thoroughly reviewing its history, mission, policies, infrastructure, and student demographics, and organizing various institutional characteristics within the climate dimensions to ensure all of them were represented.

During my review of the institution, I also perused student clubs and organizations, which served as a useful proxy for aspects of the behavioral climate dimension. In other words, co-curricular programs suggested avenues for student engagement within and across worldviews. However, I wanted to know more about students’ actual interactions with religiously-diverse peers. I also intended to ascertain students’ distinct perceptions of the campus environment (including its religious identity) and how they experienced sense of belonging therein. Thus, my final application of the campus climate framework (which employed the behavioral and psychological climate dimensions, including sense of belonging) occurred during data collection and analysis. First, the model served as a guide for developing interview prompts used during data collection:

1. Describe times when you have socialized with students who share your worldview.
2. Tell me about your interactions with students whose worldviews differ from yours.
3. Tell me about your experiences on this campus given the worldview you hold.
4. Tell me how the Catholic identity of your institution is conveyed, and how you experience or understand it.
5. Do you feel part of the campus community given the worldview you hold?
Second, student responses to questions were coded and analyzed according to the framework to understand whether the campus climate was viewed or experienced as a Catholic place, as a place welcoming of myriad worldview perspectives, or both.

**Lessons Learned from Applying the Model for Site Selection**

I found the campus climate model worked well as a tool for organizing evidence to demonstrate *both* a robust institutional identity and a commitment to worldview diversity. Once that was accomplished, I was able to consider each climate factor with a critical eye and pinpoint the framework’s strengths and limitations in the current context. The historical legacy dimension of campus climate was well suited for examining worldview diversity, though its application was slightly more complicated in a Catholic context. Catholic colleges and universities are inherently exclusive by virtue of their roots in a particular faith tradition, yet Catholic higher education as a whole has a long history of embracing different aspects of diversity and educating people from marginalized populations (Elliot, 2012; Thelin, 2011). Further, when, where, and by whom a Catholic institution was founded can shape its tendency toward or away from diversity and inclusion for various groups.

One limitation of this conceptual framework as a site selection tool had to do with the difficulty of accurately assessing compositional diversity when it comes to worldview. Campuses often do not make worldview affiliation data comprehensively or publicly available. The university I studied posted some demographic information online, but worldviews were condensed into categories of Roman Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, or “other.” This made it difficult to grasp the full extent of religious diversity on the campus, particularly among nonreligious students and within larger
umbrella groups like Muslims and Protestants. For individuals using this framework within their own institutions, it would be advisable to seek out more descriptive worldview diversity data if they are available.

The challenge of capturing an institution’s worldview composition with accuracy informed a related issue with the organizational structure and behavioral climate dimensions. When I was choosing the research site, I documented campus policies and offices that supported Catholic and non-Catholic students alike. Among them was a seemingly interfaith-oriented Campus Ministry that provided prayer spaces for multiple religious-minority groups and a full-time Muslim campus minister. With respect to university-sponsored student organizations, groups for Jewish, Hindu, and secular students (among others) were deemed positive indicators of an inclusive climate given what I knew about the worldview makeup of students at the institution.

Upon visiting campus, I learned the evidence I was using to demonstrate an inclusive behavioral and organizational climate was far more nuanced that it seemed at first glance. For example, the Muslim Student Organization, though a large presence on campus, was not representative of less-common sects of Islam, leaving some students on campus feeling isolated even among Muslim peers. The Secular Student Alliance (SSA) was not advised by anyone in Campus Ministry because it was not a faith-based organization. So, students within SSA were less likely to be involved in—or benefit from—Campus Ministry-sponsored interfaith initiatives. Finally, I noted an interesting tension in how different worldview groups perceived prayer spaces and student clubs. For those who belonged to the religious majority or identified as nonreligious, these were regularly cited as examples of their institution’s
commitment to religious diversity. Yet for religious students who were not Catholic, there was a sense of frustration that all they were offered in terms of worldview support were prayer spaces and clubs. It appeared that, though these students had access to more resources than their nonreligious peers, they felt the least supported when it came to expressing their worldviews on campus.

**Assessing Model Effectiveness Based on Study Findings**

By employing this campus climate framework to examine sense of belonging among religiously-diverse students at a Catholic university, I was able to uncover several themes that related to model effectiveness in the distinct context of my study. First, after asking students to share details of their interfaith (i.e., behavioral) interactions on campus, I learned that informal exchanges were common between students of diverse worldviews. In many cases, these involved conversations between Catholic and non-Catholic peers that were described as productive learning experiences, helping non-Catholics better understand aspects of their institution’s religious identity. In fact, Catholic peers seemed to be a primary conduit for knowledge sharing about the university’s Catholic tradition for students holding other worldviews. Given this finding, it could be worthwhile to give special attention to behavioral interactions between Catholics and non-Catholics to determine how those exchanges shape students’ feelings of inclusion or exclusion.

Second, regarding the psychological climate, I discovered that students commonly perceived the Catholic identity at their institution as something that is “laid at your feet,” meaning it is readily available but never imposed on you. The underlying sentiment was that when an institutional religious identity is present but not imposing, it creates a more
welcoming climate for students in the worldview minority while also allowing space for Catholic students to engage their faith. With respect to the campus climate framework, this finding suggests that the model might be improved if it could capture the balance of “just enough, but not too much” to satisfy both the institution’s religious identity aims and to protect and preserve the climate for students who are not Catholic.

Data collection and analysis for the current study confirmed that an explicit focus on sense of belonging enhances understanding of the psychological campus climate dimension. Assessing the psychological climate usually involves asking students about their perceptions of diversity-related attitudes and behaviors on campus. Often, it focuses on “individuals’ views of group relations … perceptions of discrimination … and [others’] attitudes toward those from [different] backgrounds” (Hurtado et al., 1998, p. 289). Incorporating a line of inquiry about sense of belonging helped me identify student experiences that enhanced their perceptions of group relations, mitigated perceptions of discrimination, and strengthened feelings of acceptance among diverse peers. To that end, I found that sense of belonging was engendered in groups where students felt supported and understood by peers, and believed their contributions were valued and valuable. Within the sense of belonging literature, these two concepts are referred to as “feeling[s] … of connectedness” and “experience[s] of mattering” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). If the psychological dimension of the campus climate model were formally expanded to encompass sense of belonging, my research suggests it would be prudent to include connectedness and mattering as defining characteristics.
Proposing a Modified Campus Climate Framework

This article describes key characteristics of a campus climate framework that was recently developed to examine worldview diversity in a Catholic university setting. The framework as it stands is a strong starting point for assessing the intersection of religious identity and worldview diversity at Catholic colleges and universities, which is lately a topic of much conversation in the Catholic higher education literature. However, several lessons were learned when using the framework in the current study, and they point to modifications that could further strengthen the model. These refinements are presented in Figure 4. Of particular note are several revised climate factor names; expanded descriptions of climate dimensions for worldview diversity; and descriptions of climate factors as they relate to institutional religious identity. All additions to the framework are demarcated by italicized and bolded text. Importantly, worldview diversity and religious identity aspects of each climate dimension are separated by a horizontal line to emphasize the importance of maintaining balance between them.
Figure 4. Modified model of campus climate for use in a sectarian context.

Future Directions

The modified campus climate framework will require rigorous testing to assess its utility for research and practice. It would be wise to begin by employing it at another Catholic college or university, since changes to the model were born out of its use in a Catholic higher education setting. However, testing should ultimately be extended to other religiously-affiliated schools to determine whether the model is relevant beyond a Catholic context. If the framework proves to be an effective tool for investigating worldview diversity in myriad sectarian environments, its contribution to future research could be significant. It is anticipated that the modified campus climate framework will be of greatest value to
practitioners at faith-based colleges and universities who desire to assess their campus climate for worldview diversity and institutional religious identity in tandem. Not only does it have the capacity to highlight strengths and areas for growth in both of these domains, but it also offers common language and logic that can facilitate sharing of best practices across institutional and denominational boundaries within sectarian higher education.
CHAPTER 7

The final chapter of this dissertation provides a succinct yet comprehensive summary of the purpose, supporting literature, findings, implications, limitations, and delimitations of the current study. Though various aspects of these distinct dimensions are addressed within the manuscripts that comprise the previous two chapters, I would like to leave the reader with a holistic understanding of where this research began, its overarching scholarly and practical significance, and its future trajectory. To that end, let me reiterate that this dissertation study was born out of a desire to improve the climate for worldview diversity on sectarian campuses in U.S. higher education. These institutions are important spaces for college student development in the realm of religion and spirituality (see Bowman & Small, 2012a; Lovik, 2010), but they are not always welcoming of students who hold diverse worldviews. In light of the changing demographics of college-going students (see Eagan et al., 2014), it is more important than ever that we find ways to improve the collegiate experience for religious, spiritual, and nonreligious students who attend faith-based colleges and universities. One way to do so is by finding avenues to enhance sense of belonging, defined as one’s perceived connection to the campus community and feelings of identification or isolation therein (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012).

My research focused on exploring ways to increase belongingness for religiously-diverse students through social justice engagement. Because I conducted my study at a Catholic university, I also investigated whether the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a religiously-based framework for understanding social justice, were useful for fostering sense of belonging. Five dimensions of campus climate—historical,
compositional, organizational, behavioral, and psychological—provided a guiding framework for this research (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005). Particular attention was given to the psychological climate because it encompasses students’ perceptions of connectedness and mattering within the collegiate environment.

I designed an in-depth qualitative case study that incorporated various aims of the portraiture methodology to guide my data collection and analysis. Findings were carefully interwoven to fashion a multidimensional portrait of Ignatian University, the Jesuit institution I studied. The portrait offers insights into ways that students experienced belongingness at the institution, and gives due attention to unheard voices (i.e., perspectives of students with diverse worldviews). After spending one month on Ignatian’s campus talking to 14 students, meeting with six staff members, collecting relevant documents, and attending various events, I was able to fully address my research questions.

*How do students with diverse worldview perspectives engage in social justice programs at a Catholic university?* The students I met identified as agnostic, Muslim, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and spiritual. They were involved in a broad array of social justice programs that ranged in commitment level from one-time, drop-in service opportunities to yearlong, credit-bearing internship experiences. Most programs students described were university sponsored, though one student was part of an unofficial grassroots coalition on campus. Many of those I interviewed either held, or were seeking, leadership roles within social justice groups. Students were not deterred from participating in social justice programs for any reason except lack of time. Nonreligious and religious-minority students were open to participating in activities coordinated by Campus Ministry, the
Community Service Office, the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, and other campus units. However, the avenues to social justice they most actively pursued were connected to salient identities (e.g., woman, student of color), personal interests or obligations, or professional aims.

In what ways, if any, do these students come to learn about Catholic Social Teaching (CST) through their social justice involvement? Direct exposure to CST turned out to be fairly minimal for students. When prompted, a few of them mentioned hearing about CST in a class or on an Alternative Spring Break (ASB) trip. Every student who participated in ASB could articulate one or two CST principles, but that seemed to be the extent of their understanding. Three students brought up CST of their own accord, and a fourth student seemed fairly well versed in the principles. All of them had learned about CST on their spring break immersion trips, and found it compelling as a way to think and talk about social justice. Interestingly, every student I met referenced at least one theme of CST in the course of conversation, suggesting that they had learned about CST without realizing it had a name or a specific set of defining characteristics. Unfortunately, it was difficult to pinpoint where students were indirectly learning about CST.

How do students’ encounters with social justice and CST shape their sense of belonging within the campus environment? Social justice emerged in the findings as a powerful channel for enhancing sense of belonging among students with diverse worldviews. Students who felt a strong connection to a social justice community, and believed they were contributing significantly to it, indicated a strong sense of belonging at their institution when they described relationships with peers, colleagues, or individuals they served in the
Particularly meaningful social justice experiences tended to grow out of high-intensity, immersive programs, or programs that engaged students in an ongoing project for a sustained period of time. The communities that became sources of belonging were as diverse as the students participating in them, including groups of like-minded peers, groups of people who share a common identity, or groups of people working together in a community context (e.g., students and those they serve at a local soup kitchen). It was less clear from this study whether CST played a role in shaping students’ sense of belonging at Ignatian University. It is probably safe to say that, because their knowledge of CST was fairly superficial, CST likely did little to help students feel connected to the religious identity of their institution.

Complements to Extant Literature

In addition to answering my research questions through the current study, I identified myriad connections between data that emerged and the extant literature related to my line of inquiry. First, regarding the religious and secular landscape in higher education, I found that Ignatian University reflected what is portrayed in the literature about worldview diversity in higher education. The campus was “abuzz with organized religion,” evidenced by myriad religious groups and prayer spaces (Schmalzbauer, 2013, p. 127). Though Catholic students were a dominant group on the campus, they did not dominate the religious landscape, which is a reality for an increasing number of Catholic institutions (Morey & Piderit, 2006). Interestingly, the largest worldview group represented in my study was “spiritual,” while Catholic, Muslim, and agnostic worldviews were equally represented by three students each. These demographics mirror national trends related to religious-minority students and “nones” (Astin et al., 1997; Eagan et al., 2014), and point to the timeliness of seeking strategies for
improving sense of belonging among students who do not identify with the worldview majority at faith-based institutions.

Second, literature on interfaith engagement and pluralism contextualized findings related to the climate for worldview diversity at Ignatian. Because I studied a Catholic university, I expected to encounter symbols of Christian privilege like crucifixes in the classroom and Mass on Sundays. Interestingly, though non-Catholic students referenced these and other symbols as evidence of their institution’s Catholic identity, they seemed indifferent to their presence. While some literature suggests that “ubiquitous Catholic ideologies” can lead to marginalization, and may even undercut developmental outcomes (Bowman & Small, 2010, p. 608; Seifert, 2007), I found students to be at best curious about—and at worst unconcerned with—the Catholic heritage of their campus. Somewhat surprisingly, and in contrast to Mayhew et al.’s (2014) assertion that a sectarian institution’s historic legacy can negatively impact perceptions of campus climate, most of the students I talked to had overwhelmingly positive views of the worldview diversity climate on campus.

The bigger concern I noted with respect to campus climate involved religious-minority students’ dissatisfaction with resources available for their spiritual expression (despite the availability of student clubs and prayer rooms). This seemed especially salient for students who found broad-based support under the umbrella of a particular religion (e.g., Protestant, Islam) but whose specific worldview traditions within those religions were not reflected on campus. However, though research demonstrates that perceived lack of space and support for worldview groups can hinder opportunities for ecumenical growth (see Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013), all the students I met demonstrated high levels of
pluralism in terms of their willingness to engage across worldview and their appreciation for others’ views amidst their own beliefs (Eck, 1993). Their favorable attitudes toward diverse others perhaps grew out of positive interfaith interactions with peers, which they frequently talked about and which are positively associated with ecumenism (Bryant Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013). Overall, my findings revealed that Ignatian University carefully balances its Catholic identity and worldview diversity commitments and—with a few notable exceptions—their efforts appeared to be successful insofar as students exhibited feelings of inclusion and described positive experiences with interfaith engagement on their campus.

The final strand of literature I used as a backdrop for the current research addressed challenges and opportunities in the vein of institutional religious identity. Many Catholic institutions struggle to navigate the line Ignatian University is walking between Catholic identity and worldview diversity, and they often end up suffering from a crisis of (Catholic) culture in the process (Morey & Piderit, 2006). Findings for the current study provide strong evidence that social justice engagement can help religious, spiritual, and nonreligious students connect meaningfully within a Catholic context, thus pointing to a viable avenue for supporting students with diverse worldviews. Promisingly, one study in the Catholic higher education literature suggests that community-based initiatives can also help “make the Catholic environment more palpable” for students (Jessup-Anger et al., 2016, p. 534), while another study recommends CST as tool for connecting students to their institution’s mission and Catholic heritage (Hill & Hill, 2008). While the current research did not uncover evidence demonstrating that CST contributes to sense of belonging, it did identify fertile
ground for experimenting with more mission-driven social justice strategies to reinforce Catholic identity among students of diverse worldviews.

**Theoretical Significance**

The fertile ground that exists at Ignatian University seems to be the product of an inclusive campus climate for worldview diversity. Non-Catholic students I met with at the institution seemed open, and often curious, to learn more about their institution’s faith tradition. Perhaps because the worldview composition at Ignatian is fairly diverse, students did not feel beleaguered by peers in the religious majority and their associated ideologies. Alternately, it could be that non-Catholic students previously experienced positive interfaith interactions and welcomed more opportunities to learn about different worldviews. Or it could be that in an environment where the institutional religion is “laid at their feet” rather than thrust upon them, students find it nonthreatening and even intriguing. In any case, it seems that any Catholic institution seeking to invite religiously-diverse students into a deeper understanding of the Catholic faith (via CST or other channels) would be well served to first determine if the campus climate is ripe for doing so.

Figure 4 illustrates a campus climate framework for assessing worldview diversity in sectarian higher education. The five climate dimensions (see Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005) have been reconceptualized based on lessons learned from model application in the current study. Specifically, the *historical legacy* climate factor was expanded to account for the inclusive or exclusive tendencies of an institution that evolve based on when, where, and by whom it was founded. This modification reflects what I learned through this research about the mission and history of inclusion among Jesuit institutions relative to some other
Catholic colleges and universities. The organizational structures aspect of climate was simply adapted to capture the depth and breadth of worldview support conveyed through policies, curriculum, campus offices, and staff; I made this change after learning from students that the size and scope of existing support structures can affect the extent to which they foster inclusion on campus.

**Compositional diversity** as a dimension of climate was refined to include intrafaith diversity, thus ensuring that lack of representation within a religious subgroup (e.g., the African Methodist Episcopal church) would not be masked by larger numbers in its umbrella group (e.g., the Protestant church) when assessing the worldview makeup of the campus community. With respect to behavioral interactions, I came to understand through my research that, on sectarian campuses, discussions about worldview differences were particularly common between students from within and outside of the institutional religious identity. It therefore seemed important to specifically explore these interactions and determine whether they were productive exchanges or sources of coercion. As such, I added this caveat to the modified framework. Finally, sense of belonging was elevated as a central construct within the psychological climate after study findings revealed the importance of identifying experiences that enhance perceptions of group relations, mitigate perceptions of discrimination, and strengthen feelings of acceptance on campus among students from myriad worldview backgrounds (Hurtado et al., 1998).

The revised model also incorporates guidelines for assessing institutional religious identity that were used— with considerable success—in the current study. It proposes that evidence of religious identity may be sought within each climate dimension, including: a
longstanding commitment to religious identity (historical), support for student formation within the faith tradition of the university (organizational), a critical mass of students whose worldview aligns with the institution’s religious identity (compositional), substantive interactions between students who share the religious faith embedded in their campus community (behavioral), and student perceptions of institutional religious identity as salient on campus (psychological). When the model is expanded in this way, it offers a potentially valuable tool for institutional leaders in sectarian colleges and universities who wish to determine whether they are striking an appropriate balance between worldview diversity and religious identity on their campuses.

Practical Significance

The modified campus climate framework will perhaps be of greatest use from a practical perspective. While it may certainly prove valuable (after sufficient testing) to guide future research, this model is primarily intended to help practitioners at faith-based colleges and universities conduct on-campus assessments. If a campus seems to have an inclusive climate for worldview diversity and is also maintaining a robust religious identity, it might be primed to introduce CST (or another faith-based social justice frame) to students as a tool for connecting within their sectarian context via social justice. Findings from the current study demonstrated that Ignatian University satisfied multiple criteria indicative of strong worldview inclusion and a rich faith tradition. Further, students on the campus demonstrated some affinity for themes that underlie the CST principles but had limited knowledge of CST language or the Catholic doctrine it represents, highlighting an educational opportunity.
Introducing students at Ignatian to CST under these conditions may serve to deepen their connection to the university’s religious identity and perhaps enhance their sense of belonging at the institution. The current research findings suggest that achieving this aim (i.e., cultivating feelings of connectedness) will require that: a) enough students learn about CST to ensure it becomes a commonly used social justice language, and b) CST is consistently—and thoroughly—conveyed to students so everyone has a similar understanding of its scope and origins. In other words, faculty and staff should be trained such that messaging about CST is conveyed to a broad swath of students in myriad facets of campus life, and all messages are drawn from a shared curriculum for teaching students about the church’s social teachings. When these two criteria are met, students will be better equipped to recognize when they are participating in the Catholic social justice tradition of their institution (i.e., an experience of mattering) by enacting CST (Strayhorn, 2012).

One additional practical implication with regards to CST involves how CST knowledge should be introduced to students with different worldviews at Ignatian to ensure it is well received. First, CST should be shared with students in the spirit of interfaith cooperation to protect and preserve the campus’s positive climate for worldview diversity. In other words, CST ought to be presented as a conduit for gaining appreciative knowledge about a worldview tradition outside of one’s own (namely Catholicism) rather than as a vehicle for indoctrination. Second, and in a similar vein, it would be prudent to introduce CST to students alongside other faith-based social justice frames. Doing so allows students from different worldview traditions to engage in the conversation without having to translate their social justice conceptions into a different framework, yet still exposes them to a new
way of thinking about issues of justice. Though this approach is discussed here specifically as it relates to Catholic universities, it could also prove valuable for higher education leaders in other sectarian settings who are seeking greater inclusion for students with diverse worldviews.

A final set of emergent implications from the current study move beyond CST, faith-based social justice frames, and sectarian higher education. Rather, they point to avenues for enhancing sense of belonging in any collegiate context by increasing student participation in high-impact programs and activities. As previously mentioned, findings from my study of Ignatian University highlight two characteristics of successful social justice initiatives vis-à-vis belongingness. First, programs are either highly immersive and thus facilitate rapid relationship building over a short period, or they require long-term engagement, thus allowing for meaningful communities to develop over time. Second, social justice activities that most readily promote sense of belonging give students access to a diverse array of on- and off-campus communities that can draw them away from the margins and toward experiences of connectedness and mattering (Strayhorn, 2012). For staff and administrators in higher education who are seeking ways to improve sense of belonging for students from various worldview backgrounds, it would be wise to increase the size, scope, and accessibility of justice-focused initiatives that meet the above criteria so more minority-religious, spiritual, and nonreligious individuals can get involved. They might also consider ways to connect organizations that support students from different worldview groups with social justice-related communities based on shared identities, interests, and ideologies. Investing resources in this way has the potential to improve sense of belonging—and the
worldview diversity climate more broadly—in a number of different higher education settings.

**Avenues for Further Inquiry**

I deeply appreciate the role of sectarian institutions in U.S. higher education, and therefore value CST as a tool that can help enrich institutional religious identity at Catholic colleges and universities. However, my primary interest in CST rests in its utility for improving the collegiate experience for religious, spiritual, and nonreligious students who attend faith-based colleges and universities by enhancing their sense of belonging. I am therefore equally interested in how to refine and improve the sense of belonging construct to more accurately capture students’ perceptions of connectedness and mattering in the midst of different campus activities. Study findings indicate that students experience belongingness within many different social justice communities on and off campus. However, extant research typically measures sense of belonging with items that ask broadly about whether students feel they belong at their institution, feel part of their campus community, feel comfortable on their campus, or some variation thereof (see Johnson, 2012). These items do not specifically capture student perceptions about sub-communities within or beyond the campus borders. Future research could address this issue by testing different sense of belonging measures in relation to social justice involvement. Constructs may include questions that ascertain whether students feel they belong to a particular student organization, feel comfortable in the community beyond their campus, or feel connected to a local community organization. A sense of belonging construct that enables more fine-tuned
analysis could be useful to scholars studying a variety of collegiate activities that provide community for students.

A second avenue for future research relates to the social justice programs students described as being most formative when it came to fostering sense of belonging. While the current study pointed to several activities that were especially effective in generating feelings of connectedness and experiences of mattering, there is still much to learn about specific aspects of these programs that elicited sense of belonging. It could be valuable to assess students’ interactions with peers, faculty, student affairs professionals, or people off campus in social justice programs, to learn more about where and with whom students spend their time (Astin, 1984). Doing so at Ignatian could help university leaders identify key characteristics of strong social justice communities and incorporate them into other programs on campus. Findings from this research would also make it possible to replicate or adapt social justice programs that engender sense of belonging for other campus contexts.

The original research questions point to a final line of future inquiry. Because I was unable to fully ascertain whether CST serves as a conduit for sense of belonging, a quantitative examination of CST as a predictor of sense of belonging might be in order. A sense of belonging construct that measures connectedness within a variety of social justice communities could serve as the dependent variable, and a CST knowledge scale could be included as an independent variable among others that capture different curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities in which students are involved, as well as relevant demographic characteristics (including worldview). The CST scale could then be used to look for direct or indirect relationships between CST and sense of belonging on Catholic
campuses. Quantitative data would also make it possible to confirm which specific campus activities are strongly associated with sense of belonging, whether social justice-focused or otherwise. To maximize utility of quantitative research findings, it would be ideal to include students from a variety of institution types in the study, though not everyone would need to receive CST-related questions. Data could then illuminate between-institution differences when it comes to campus activities that foster sense of belonging for various worldview groups. It would also make possible rigorous analyses of the interplay between worldview identification, social justice engagement, and sense of belonging in higher education at large.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

Multiple limitations and delimitations related to this dissertation study should be discussed to ensure an accurate and holistic interpretation of the findings. First, limitations include resource constraints that restricted my stay at Ignatian University to four weeks. It is possible this fixed data collection time frame affected my ability to present a holistic account of the case (Creswell, 2013) or to construct a truly comprehensive portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Relatedly, the timing of my visit near the end of the academic year was challenging to the extent that I was unable to observe relevant events that occurred earlier in the semester. Third, my research required that participants represent a diversity of religious, spiritual, and nonreligious worldview perspectives. While I was largely successful in recruiting a diversity of students with non-majority worldviews, the study did include more Catholic students than initially planned. Further, only two of the worldview-minority students I recruited held religious perspectives that were underrepresented on campus—one Muslim student and one Protestant student. As such, it is impossible to ascertain how
experiences with social justice and sense of belonging are similar or different for members of other religious identity groups on campus (e.g., Hindu, Jewish), particularly those that may not receive institutional support to the same degree as Muslims and other Christians. Finally, the students who participated in this study were highly engaged in an array of curricular and co-curricular programs on campus. Not only did this make it difficult to coordinate schedules for focus group gatherings, but it also made it challenging to determine whether students’ sense of belonging was the product of social justice engagement or involvement in other campus communities.

Four delimitations are also worthy of note at this time. In the spirit of portraiture, I focused my research on sense of belonging among students who are highly engaged in social justice programs. However, these students are likely not at risk of marginalization and isolation to the same extent as their less-engaged peers. Now that more is known about the capacity for social justice programs to foster sense of belonging, it may be worthwhile to conduct additional research that investigates how to elicit participation from uninvolved students. In addition, this study did not seek out students who are opposed to religious engagement, but their perspective would be important to understand before considering the viability of institutionalizing CST as a common social justice language.

A third delimitation relates to my principal focus on social justice programs in the co-curricular realm. Though I did include students in the study who participated in the credit-bearing Community Engagement Internship Program, I primarily talked with them about their experiential learning at the internship sites. There were also occasions in various interviews when students referred to class discussions about social justice, but for the most
part I focused my line of inquiry on out-of-class social justice encounters. I did so because it was clear that exploring curricular social justice engagement at Ignatian would require the inclusion of faculty participants and was thus beyond the scope of a study. Finally, I elected to conduct my research at a Jesuit university because its historic commitment to inclusion aligned with my site selection criteria. However, it is important to note that Ignatian’s Jesuit identity interplays with its Catholic identity in distinct ways that may not translate easily to other sectarian contexts. Fortunately, because Ignatian is one of 28 U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities, there is still ample opportunity to extend findings to other campuses.

Concluding Thoughts

Sectarian colleges and universities today are at an important juncture when it comes to their mission and purpose. For many, the challenge of upholding institutional religious identity when the college-going population is more religiously diverse than ever before can be daunting. At the same time, these campuses have an enormous opportunity to welcome students from myriad religious, spiritual, and nonreligious backgrounds, offer them unique outlets for spiritual growth, and create environments where students learn about different worldviews from and with each other to enrich the college experience for all. I am grateful that my research can contribute to a timely and relevant conversation about navigating religious identity and worldview diversity. Further, I am excited that social justice engagement has emerged as a viable pathway for engendering sense of belonging among students with diverse worldviews in sectarian higher education. I am also affirmed by the knowledge that there is willingness—perhaps even desire—among many students to engage meaningfully with their institution’s religious tradition, even if it differs from their own. I
look forward to continuing this line of inquiry to ensure that we *do justice to* faith-based institutions, and *enact justice through* faith-based institutions, thus enabling institutional religious identity and worldview diversity to simultaneously thrive.
REFERENCES


Beer, L. E. (2012). "It was beautiful, but it wasn't supposed to be there": Spirituality in the work lives of higher education administrative leaders. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest dissertations & theses. (1038367573)


APPENDICES
# Appendix A

## Institutional Characteristics Used for Site Selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Institutional Characteristics: Ignatian University$^{16}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Historical Legacy of Inclusion or Exclusion – Resistance to Diversification and Institutional Mission</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional history:</td>
<td>Ignatian University is a mid-sized, urban, Jesuit Catholic institution founded in the late 19$^{th}$ century. Its founding order of Jesuit Catholics claims a historic commitment to social justice and education for all (Kolvenbach, 1989), thus suggesting a legacy of inclusion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| I am seeking an institution that was founded in the Roman Catholic and Jesuit traditions. | The institutional mission statement emphasizes justice and faith, and articulates the Catholic tradition and Jesuit heritage of the university. The institution lives out its mission by:  
- Engaging in the larger Roman Catholic church community  
- Enacting the Jesuit principle of “men and women for others” through service  
- Participating in the national and global Jesuit higher education network  
- Attending to the sacramental and spiritual needs of its Roman Catholic community  
- Providing space and support on campus for diverse communities of faith  
- Promoting social responsibility and global solidarity |
| Mission and identity:   | Form and informal diversity statements exist within various departments and divisions, all of which explicitly list religion as an important aspect of diversity. A student-led diversity council is also in place to promote diversity on campus through awareness and action. |
| I am seeking explicit, articulated commitments to the institution’s Catholic identity, to inclusion for students of diverse faiths, and to the enactment of social justice. | Curricula at Ignatian University that emphasize religious studies or social justice issues include:  
- Advocacy and social change (emphasis)  
- Catholic studies (minor)  
- Environmental leadership (minor)  
- Interfaith studies (minor)  
- Islamic studies (minor)  
- Peace studies (minor)  
- Student leadership and social change (certificate program)  
- Urban studies/sustainability (minor) |
| **Organizational Diversity – Curriculum, Institutional Policies, Budgeting, Decision-Making** |
| Policies and practices: | Formal and informal diversity statements exist within various departments and divisions, all of which explicitly list religion as an important aspect of diversity. A student-led diversity council is also in place to promote diversity on campus through awareness and action. |
| I am seeking policies or infrastructure that guide university decision-making related to diversity. | Curricula at Ignatian University that emphasize religious studies or social justice issues include:  
- Advocacy and social change (emphasis)  
- Catholic studies (minor)  
- Environmental leadership (minor)  
- Interfaith studies (minor)  
- Islamic studies (minor)  
- Peace studies (minor)  
- Student leadership and social change (certificate program)  
- Urban studies/sustainability (minor) |
| Academic programs:      |                                                         |
| I am seeking programs of study that enable students to explore within and across faith traditions, and/or to incorporate social justice into their majors. |                                                         |

$^{16}$ All data referenced in Appendix A were taken from the institutional website for Ignatian University. Data are presented without formal citation to protect the anonymity of the study site.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Institutional Characteristics: Ignatian University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Diversity – Curriculum, Institutional Policies, Budgeting, Decision-Making (Cont.)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Offices and staff positions: **I am seeking offices and staff positions that receive institutional resources to promote (a) the religious, nonreligious, or spiritual development of students; (b) interfaith engagement; and (c) social justice objectives.** | Offices at the university that support religious and spiritual development, interfaith engagement, and/or social justice include:  
- Campus Ministry  
- Community Service Office  
- Multicultural Affairs Office  
Examples of university staff positions that oversee religious, interfaith, and/or social justice efforts:  
- Presidential cabinet member devoted to diversity and inclusion  
- Campus ministers/representatives for non-Catholic students (e.g. Jews, Protestants, Muslims)  
- Campus ministers for Catholic faith formation, Catholic student support, and social justice in a Catholic context  
- Interfaith campus minister  
- Community Service Office staff |
| **Behavioral Climate – Social Interaction Across Difference** | Ignatian University encourages students to attend events and services sponsored by its many religious, spiritual, and nonreligious student organizations (e.g., Catholic Student Organization, CRU, Hillel, Muslim Student Association, Secular Student Alliance). The institution also sponsors myriad social justice student organizations, which provide opportunities for students of diverse faiths to work together toward a common cause. These groups address issues such as the environment, equality, global issues, health disparities, hunger and homelessness, and poverty. |
| Student organizations: **I am seeking student groups that make possible engagement and learning among different religious, spiritual, or nonreligious student populations, and that encourage social justice involvement.** | The university provides a broad range of social justice and interfaith programs that bring together students who hold differing beliefs. Examples include:  
- Alternative break immersion programs  
- Service-learning opportunities addressing local community needs  
- Interfaith ally training (to enhance interfaith literacy, knowledge, and skills)  
- Interfaith retreats  
- Social justice advocacy training  
- Urban outreach ministry |
| Campus programs: **I am seeking university-sponsored programs that are intentionally designed to facilitate interfaith interaction.** | |

201
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Institutional Characteristics: Ignatian University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavioral Climate – Social Interaction Across Difference (Cont.)</strong></td>
<td>Two national measures of institutional commitment to service and community engagement are the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll and the Carnegie Foundation’s Community Engagement Classification. High levels of service and community engagement activity suggest greater opportunities for engaging with social justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional commitment to social justice:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I am seeking objective evidence of an institutional commitment to service and community engagement, and high levels of student participation therein.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compositional Diversity – Diverse Student Enrollments and Hiring of Diverse Faculty/Staff</strong></td>
<td>The most recent incoming class of undergraduates at Ignatian University is comprised of 42% Roman Catholic students and 58% Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, or “other” affiliation. A recent exit survey of graduating seniors found that 17% did not identify with any religion, suggesting there is a sizable portion of students who identify as spiritual or nonreligious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student demographics:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I am seeking a diverse student body in terms of religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives. Religious diversity of the faculty/staff is also of interest but data was not readily available.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Appendix B
Recruitment Email to Staff

Dear [insert name],

[Insert personalized greeting and indicate if/how we have been connected, e.g. through a mutual campus colleague.]

I am coordinating a visit to your campus on [insert dates] to conduct my dissertation research, which focuses on the collegiate experiences of students who hold differing religious, spiritual, and nonreligious beliefs and who participate in university-sponsored curricular and co-curricular social justice programs. Of primary interest are the ways that students from different worldview groups perceive the campus climate at Ignatian, and develop a sense of belonging through their involvement in social justice activities.

I will be present on campus for 3-4 weeks to talk with students and staff, and observe different features of the campus environment that are relevant to my study. I would be grateful for your help with this study in either or both of the following ways:

- **Email students who would be eligible and interested in participating.** I plan to conduct interviews with undergraduates who are: In their sophomore year or higher, physically on campus this semester, actively engaged in social justice programs, and who represent a variety of religious, spiritual, or nonreligious worldviews. If you are willing to email students who meet these criteria and invite them to participate in this research, I will provide details about the study to include in your message (e.g., study overview, what is required of participants, etc.).

- **Take part in an interview as a study participant.** I would value your insights about the students and campus environment at Ignatian, and if you are willing to do so, I ask that you participate in a 45-60 minute interview while I am on campus, at a time and location of your choosing.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. A decision to participate (or not) will have no bearing on your employment activities or status, nor will others on campus be informed of your involvement as a participant. If you are willing to assist, either by recommending students or taking part in an interview, please let me know by responding to this email. Once I hear from you, I will follow up with more details about next steps.

Thank you for your support of this project! I look forward to talking with you soon should you choose to participate.

Shauna Morin, Doctoral Candidate
Educational Research and Policy Analysis – Higher Education Specialization
North Carolina State University
Appendix C
Student Screening Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in the study of institutional religious identity and worldview diversity at Ignatian University. As you may know, this research is being conducted by a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University in order to learn more about the collegiate experiences of students on your campus who (a) hold differing religious, spiritual, and nonreligious beliefs, and (b) participate in university-sponsored curricular and co-curricular social justice programs. Participation in the study includes taking part in one (1) 60-90 minute focus group interview with 5-7 other students from your university, and up to three (3) additional one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The following questionnaire will be used to determine your eligibility for this study. If you are selected to participate, you will receive an incentive in appreciation of your time and contributions. The incentive will be in the form of an Amazon gift card for up to $30. The amount of the incentive will be determined as follows: $10 for participating in the focus group interview, $10 for the initial individual interview, and $5 for each subsequent individual interview. Thank you for responding to the questions below. You will be notified about your status as a study participant by [DEADLINE].

First Name:

Last Name:

Email Address:

Date of Birth (DD/MM/YYYY):

Class Standing for Academic Year 2015-16:
☑ Freshman/First-Year student
☑ Sophomore
☑ Junior
☑ Senior
☑ Other; please specify: ____________________

Are you currently enrolled at your institution and physically present on campus?
☑ Yes
☑ No

---------------------------------------------------------------- PAGE BREAK ----------------------------------------------------------------
Regarding your current religious or nonreligious perspective, with which of the following descriptors do you most closely identify?

- Agnosticism
- Atheism
- Baha’i Faith
- Buddhism
- Christianity, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormonism)
- Christianity, Protestant
- Christianity, Orthodox
- Christianity, Roman Catholic
- Confucianism
- Daoism
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Jainism
- Judaism
- Native American Tradition(s)
- Nonreligious
- None
- Paganism
- Secular Humanism
- Sikhism
- Spiritual
- Unitarian Universalism
- Zoroastrianism
- Another worldview; please specify: ______________________
- I prefer not to respond

In the space below, please briefly share how you define the term “social justice”:

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------ PAGE BREAK ---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
The following questions ask about your involvement in university-sponsored social justice programs. Please use the following definition of social justice to guide your responses:

Social justice describes the full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice is realized through:

- Equitable distribution of resources
- Physical and psychological safety and security
- Self-determination and independent agency
- A sense of self and responsibility to society as a whole


Please list the name(s) of university-sponsored social justice programs in which you are involved:

Describe any leadership roles you have held related to the above-listed social justice programs:

On average, how many hours per month do you devote to university-sponsored social justice programs?
- Less than one hour per month
- 2-5 hours per month
- 5-10 hours per month
- More than 10 hours per month

Please indicate the level of your involvement in university-sponsored social justice programs by year in school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Little or No Involvement</th>
<th>Moderate Involvement</th>
<th>Significant Involvement</th>
<th>High-Level Involvement</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman/First-Year</td>
<td>Less than one hour per month</td>
<td>2-5 hours per month</td>
<td>5-10 hours per month, had a leadership role</td>
<td>&gt; 10 hours per month, multiple leadership roles</td>
<td>Not yet known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

------------------------------------------ PAGE BREAK ------------------------------------------
If you are selected to participate in this study, in which activities are you willing to participate (check all that apply):

- One (1) 60-90 minute focus group interview with 5-7 other students from your campus. Incentive: $10 toward an Amazon gift card
- Up to three (3) one-on-one 45-60 minute interviews with the researcher. Incentive: $10 Amazon gift for the first individual interview, and $5 for each subsequent interview

If you are willing to do so, please share more about yourself by answering the following questions.

What is your gender identity?

What is your race/ethnicity?

Are you an international student?
- Yes
- No

Are you attending your institution full time?
- Yes
- No

Did you transfer to your institution from another college or university?
- Yes
- No
## Appendix D
Student Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Worldview Identification</th>
<th>Gender (Self-described)</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity (Self-described)</th>
<th>Social Justice Activities</th>
<th>Interviews Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Agnosticism</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Indian-American</td>
<td>ASB, V4C, Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Female, Cisgender</td>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>ASB, OMSA, Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falcon</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>SOW, Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>ASB</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allie</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>ASB, GSM</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>SOUP</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>Agnosticism</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>ASB, CEIP, Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>CEIP, OMSA, Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bert</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>ASB, V4C, Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White/Native American</td>
<td>ASB, GSM, SOUP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>CEIP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Protestant/Spiritual</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>V4C, Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taryn</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South Asian/Bangladeshi</td>
<td>CEIP, Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Ja</td>
<td>Agnosticism</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mixed – Korean/Mexican</td>
<td>ASB, Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Social Justice Activities:

- **ASB** – Alternative Spring Break
- **CEIP** – Community Engagement Internship Program
- **GSM** – Good Samaritan Ministry
- **OMSA** – Office of Multicultural Student Affairs
- **SOUP** – Soup Kitchen Ministry
- **SOW** – Students Organizing for Workers
- **V4C** – Volunteers for the City

Other – Social justice activities referenced as peripheral involvements or that that were only cited by one participant
Appendix E
Interview Protocol for Student Focus Groups

1. Let’s begin by sharing a bit about ourselves with one another. I will begin by sharing a few details about my personal background and research interests. [Possible prompts:]
   - a. Where did you grow up?
   - b. What brought you to Ignatian?
   - c. What are you studying in college?
   - d. How are you involved in student life on campus?
   - e. How would you describe your overall experience at Ignatian thus far?
   - f. What long-term goals do you have after leaving this institution?

2. As you know, this study is exploring the experiences of students with different religious, spiritual, or nonreligious beliefs who participate in social justice programs on this campus. Therefore, I would like to spend some time talking about your beliefs.
   - a. How would you describe your religious, spiritual, or non-religious outlook on life? (I will also refer to this as your worldview.)
   - b. Tell me about your experiences on this campus given the worldview to which you ascribe.
      [Possible prompts:]
      i. Are there times when any of you have socialized with other students who share your worldview? If so, please describe.
      ii. Describe your knowledge of/involvement in campus groups or activities that support your various worldviews.
      iii. Do you feel part of the campus community at Ignatian? Please talk more about the campus community with respect to your worldview.
      iv. Tell me about your interactions with students who have different worldviews than your own.

3. Now let’s turn our attention to the topic of social justice. How do you define social justice?
   - a. Where does your definition of social justice come from?
   - b. How has your understanding of social justice been shaped by your experiences at Ignatian?

4. Tell me about the university-sponsored social justice programs you’re involved in as a student here.
   [Possible prompts:]
   - a. What prompted you to get involved in these programs?
   - b. Describe your level of involvement in these programs.
   - c. What role(s) do/did you play in these programs (e.g., leadership roles, administrative roles)?
   - d. What do you think is worthwhile or beneficial about the social justice programs on campus?
   - e. As you consider your involvement in social justice programs, what has been particularly significant or meaningful to you?

5. Now I would like to talk about social justice in the context of Ignatian’s religious identity.
   - a. In what ways do social justice programs at Ignatian further the mission of the institution?
   - b. How does social justice relate to the Catholic identity of this institution?
6. Lastly, I want to ask a few questions about the benefits of involvement in social justice programs at Ignatian.
   a. What have you learned (e.g., about yourself, others, the institution, social justice) through your involvement in these programs?
   b. Has your involvement in social justice programs helped you feel part of the campus community? If so, please describe.
   c. Earlier, I asked about your long-term goals. Do you believe your involvement in social justice programs at Ignatian will help you attain these goals? If so, please describe.

7. Those are all of the questions I have at this time.
   a. Based on our conversation today, do you have any questions for me?
   b. Do you have additional thoughts or comments related to what we discussed?
   c. Are there other questions you wish I had asked? If so, please describe.
Appendix F
Interview Protocol for Student Follow-Up Interviews

1. I will begin by revisiting prior conversation(s) with the interviewee. [Possible directions:]
   a. Discussing additional thoughts the student has had since participating in the previous interview(s).
   b. Allowing an opportunity for the student to elaborate on anything that was shared in other interviews.
   c. Clarifying points that were made in earlier interviews.

2. I will continue to explore the participant’s worldview. [Possible directions:]
   a. Salience of worldview as an aspect of the student’s identity.
   b. The relationship between the student’s worldview and motivations and/or outcomes of involvement in social justice activities.

3. I will seek more details about the interviewee’s involvement in social justice programs at Ignatian. [Possible directions:]
   a. When, why, how, and to what extent the student became involved in various social justice activities.
   b. Any leadership roles held and associated responsibilities/expectations.
   c. Communities to which the student belongs as a result of involvement in these activities.
   d. Why the student has gravitated toward or away from different social justice offerings on campus.

4. I will gather information about the participant’s other curricular and co-curricular pursuits as they relate to social justice and/or sense of belonging. [Possible directions:]
   a. The student’s field of study, courses taken, and participation in academic groups (i.e. honors program), if applicable.
   b. Other activities to which the student has devoted significant time or energy, and the significance of those experiences for the student.

5. I will attempt to ascertain the interviewee’s perceptions of Ignatian’s Catholic identity. [Possible directions:]
   a. How the Catholic identity of the institution is conveyed (by the university) and experienced/understood (by the student).
   b. The student’s familiarity with the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.
   c. The student’s familiarity with the Jesuit/Ignatian tradition of Ignatian.
   d. The relationship between Ignatian’s Jesuit Catholic identity and social justice.
   e. The relationship between Ignatian’s Jesuit Catholic identity and the student’s sense of belonging therein.

6. Finally, I will provide space to discuss the participant’s perceptions of campus climate. [Possible directions:]
   a. How the student perceives the climate for diversity in general, as well as for worldview diversity in particular.
   b. Aspects of the campus environment (physical, organizational, compositional, behavioral, perceptual) that convey messages about the climate to the student.
Appendix G
Interview Protocol for Staff

1. Let’s begin by sharing a bit about ourselves with one another. *I will begin by sharing a few details about my personal background and research interests.* [Possible prompts:]
   a. What brought you to Ignatian?
   b. What is your professional role at the university?
   c. How are you involved in student life on campus?
   d. How would you describe your overall experience working at Ignatian?

2. As you know, this study is exploring the experiences of students with different religious, spiritual, or nonreligious beliefs who participate in social justice programs on this campus. Therefore, I would like to spend some time talking about your work with students from different worldview backgrounds.
   a. Tell me about your experiences on this campus working with students who hold different religious, nonreligious, and spiritual perspectives.
   b. Talk about the campus groups, activities, or services available at Ignatian to support students with different worldviews.
   c. From your perspective, do students feel part of the campus community regardless of their worldview?

3. Now let’s turn our attention to the topic of social justice. How does Ignatian as an institution define social justice?
   a. Where does this definition of social justice come from?
   b. How do students understand social justice on this campus?

4. Tell me about the university-sponsored social justice programs you’re involved in as a staff/administrator here. [Possible prompts:]
   a. What role(s) do you play in these programs?
   b. What do you think is worthwhile or beneficial about these programs?
   c. As you consider the social justice programs available at Ignatian, in what ways are they particularly significant or meaningful for students?

5. Now I would like to talk about social justice in the context of Ignatian’s religious identity.
   a. How do social justice programs at Ignatian further the mission of the institution?
   b. How does social justice relate to the Catholic identity of this institution?

6. Lastly, I want to ask a few questions about the benefits of involvement in social justice programs at Ignatian.
   a. What do students learn through their involvement in these programs?
   b. Earlier, I asked whether students from different worldview backgrounds feel part of the community at Ignatian. Do you believe involvement in social justice programs can foster a sense of belonging for these students? If so, please describe.

7. Those are all of the questions I have at this time.
   a. Based on our conversation today, do you have any questions for me?
   b. Do you have additional thoughts or comments related to what we discussed?
   c. Are there other questions you wish I had asked? If so, please describe.
Appendix H
Observation Protocol

1. Description of physical setting.
   a. What does it look like?
   b. What is the configuration (e.g., for a meeting or event)?
   c. What activity is taking place?

2. Description of the actors within the setting.
   a. Who is present?
   b. What are they doing?
   c. Where are they positioned?
   d. Who are the “insiders” and “outsiders”? 
   e. What are the distinct and/or common characteristics of actors?
   f. What is unique/notable about the specific actor(s) I am observing?

3. Description of interactions between actors.
   a. What is being conveyed verbally?
   b. Who is talking to whom?
   c. What nonverbal cues are being given?

4. Description of cultural dimensions.
   a. What are the repetitive refrains?
   b. What are the resonant metaphors?
   c. What are the unspoken values and norms?
   d. What are the salient rituals and artifacts?
Appendix I
Informed Consent for Students

This consent information is valid March 3, 2016 through March 3, 2017
North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH – Student

Title of Study: At the Intersection of Institutional Religious Identity and Worldview Diversity: Exploring Students’ Sense of Belonging at a Catholic University

Principal Investigator: Shauna M. Morin Faculty Sponsor: Alyssa N. Rockenbach

The purpose of a research study is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. Research studies may pose risks to those that participate, and you are not guaranteed any personal benefits for participating in a study. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form, it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

Please review the details of this study, outlined below, before you decide to participate.

Thank you for your interest in the study of institutional religious identity and worldview diversity at Ignatian University. As you may know, I am a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University and I am conducting my dissertation research study at Ignatian University to learn more about the collegiate experiences of students on your campus who hold differing religious, spiritual, and nonreligious beliefs and who participate in university-sponsored curricular and co-curricular social justice programs.

You are being asked to participate in this research study. There are no known risks associated with the study beyond those of everyday life, and participation is completely voluntary. You may make a decision to participate or not, without affecting your status at school. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in at least one of the following:

- One (1) 60-90 minute focus group interview with the researcher and 5-7 other students from your university. The focus group interview will be held in a secure location on your campus.
- Up to three (3) one-on-one interviews with the researcher. Each of these interviews will be 45-60 minutes in length, and will take place in a secure, on-campus location of your choosing.

You may also be asked to review study information or transcripts via email to verify accuracy.

Any interviews in which you participate will be audio-recorded and transcribed for later use by the researcher. To protect your identity, you will be assigned a pseudonym at the time of your first interview. You may also choose not to answer questions you are asked during the interviews. Finally, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
Information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer or in a Google Drive folder within North Carolina State University Google Apps, and printed data will be stored in a locked office at North Carolina State University. Audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed after completion of the study, and no personal identifiers will be used in published findings.

Your participation in this study will provide an opportunity for self-reflection about your own experience at Ignatian University. Additionally, it will facilitate understanding about the experiences of students from diverse religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives on your campus. The insights gained from this study may have useful implications for scholars and practitioners at your university and/or in the field of higher education.

In appreciation of your participation, you will receive an incentive in the form of an Amazon gift card for up to $30. The amount of the incentive will be determined as follows: $10 for participating in the focus group interview, $10 for the first completed individual interview, and $5 for each subsequent individual interview. The gift card will be emailed to you upon completion of the final interview in which you participate. If you withdraw from the study prior to completion, you will receive a partial incentive according to the above guidelines.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Shauna Morin, at smmorin@ncsu.edu or (919) 928-4348. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dapaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at (919) 515-4514.

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this consent form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Subject’s signature ___________________________________________ Date ______________

Investigator’s signature _________________________________________ Date ______________
Appendix J
Informed Consent for Staff

This consent information is valid March 3, 2016 through March 3, 2017

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH – Staff

Title of Study: At the Intersection of Institutional Religious Identity and Worldview Diversity: Exploring Students’ Sense of Belonging at a Catholic University

Principal Investigator: Shauna M. Morin
Faculty Sponsor: Alyssa N. Rockenbach

The purpose of a research study is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. Research studies may pose risks to those that participate, and you are not guaranteed any personal benefits for participating in a study. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form, it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

Please review the details of this study, outlined below, before you decide to participate.

Thank you for your interest in the study of institutional religious identity and worldview diversity at Ignatian University. As you may know, I am a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University and I am conducting my dissertation research study at Ignatian University to learn more about the collegiate experiences of students on your campus who hold differing religious, spiritual, and nonreligious beliefs and who participate in university-sponsored curricular and co-curricular social justice programs.

You are being asked to participate in this research study. There are no known risks associated with the study beyond those of everyday life, and participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a single interview with the researcher, 45-60 minutes in length. The interview will take place in a secure, on-campus location of your choosing.

The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed for later use by the researcher. To protect your identity, you will be assigned a pseudonym at the time of your interview. You may also choose not to answer questions you are asked during the interview. Finally, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer or in a Google Drive folder within North Carolina State University Google Apps, and printed data will be stored in a locked office at North Carolina State University. Audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed after completion of the study, and no personal identifiers will be used in published findings.

Your participation in this study will provide an opportunity for self-reflection about your own experience at Ignatian University. Additionally, it will facilitate understanding about the experiences of students from diverse religious, spiritual, and nonreligious perspectives on your campus. The insights gained from this study may have useful implications for scholars and practitioners at your university and/or in the field of higher education.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Shauna Morin, at smmorin@ncsu.edu or (919) 928-4348. If you have questions about your rights as a research
participant, or if your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dapaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at (919) 515-4514.

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this consent form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Subject's signature_______________________________________ Date ________________

Investigator's signature____________________________________ Date ________________
Appendix K
Summary of Interviews and Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group #1</td>
<td>Allie, Cassidy, Mary</td>
<td>1h 45m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group #2</td>
<td>Bert, Ella</td>
<td>1h 15m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group #3</td>
<td>Jessica, Sarah</td>
<td>50m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group #4</td>
<td>Bob, Elizabeth, Falcon, Michelle</td>
<td>1h 45m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Round Interview</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Round Interview</td>
<td>Taryn</td>
<td>50m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Round Interview</td>
<td>Young-Ja</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #1</td>
<td>Allie</td>
<td>40m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #1</td>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #1</td>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>1h 15m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #1</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>35m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #1</td>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #1</td>
<td>Falcon</td>
<td>50m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #1</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #1</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>40m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #2</td>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #2</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>40m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #2</td>
<td>Falcon</td>
<td>30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Conversation #2</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
<td>Christina, Assistant Director of the Office of</td>
<td>1h 5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multicultural Student Affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
<td>David, Service-Learning Coordinator</td>
<td>45m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
<td>Greg, Interfaith Program Coordinator</td>
<td>30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
<td>Kelly, Community Service Director</td>
<td>1h 30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
<td>Linda, Alternative Spring Break Coordinator</td>
<td>1h 15m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
<td>Michael, Community Engagement Internship Program</td>
<td>40m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Spring Break Reunion</td>
<td>Students who recently participated in an Alternative Spring Break trip through Ignatian University (approximately 50 people)</td>
<td>2h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Engagement Internship Presentations</td>
<td>Four interns in the Community Engagement Internship Program, including Ella and Sarah; audience members (approximately 20 people)</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight for $15 Campaign Protest and Rally</td>
<td>Students Organizing for Workers, Ignatian University faculty, and members of the local community (approximately 150 people)</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Samaritan Ministry Outing</td>
<td>Allie and fellow Ignatian students; homeless men and women in the city surrounding the university (approximately 30 students)</td>
<td>2h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix L
Qualitative Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus Climate for Worldview Diversity</th>
<th>(Hurtado et al., 1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological climate</td>
<td>Perceptions of behaviors and attitudes related to worldview diversity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catholic Social Teaching</th>
<th>(USCCB, 1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Origins of knowledge/exposure</td>
<td>People, places, or experiences that have informed students' understanding of Catholic social teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Explicit references to Catholic social teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Implicit references to themes of Catholic social teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>&quot;Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights and responsibilities</td>
<td>Central to the Catholic tradition is the idea that &quot;every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency&quot; and &quot;corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferential option for the poor</td>
<td>According to Catholic social teaching, our efforts to &quot;achieve fulfillment in community&quot; should ultimately promote the common good, with special attention given to the most vulnerable members of society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human dignity</td>
<td>The Catholic church upholds &quot;the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and community</td>
<td>Catholic teaching asserts that &quot;how we organize our society … directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community,&quot; and that family lies at the heart of all social institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity of work</td>
<td>In order to protect those who are most vulnerable, the Catholic church demands &quot;the economy must serve the people, not the other way around.&quot; To achieve this aim, &quot;basic rights of workers must be respected&quot; (e.g., the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, unionization).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for creation</td>
<td>The Catholic church calls on its members to &quot;protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Religious Identity</th>
<th>(Kolvenbach, 1989)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic tradition</td>
<td>Different ways that students experience the Catholic identity of their institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How it is conveyed</td>
<td>When and where students encounter the Catholic tradition on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersection with worldview diversity</td>
<td>Students' awareness of tensions or intersections between Ignatian's Catholic identity and its commitment to worldview diversity and inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Religious Identity (Cont.)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic tradition (cont.)</td>
<td>Different ways that students experience the Catholic identity of their institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Laid at your feet&quot;</td>
<td>Student perceptions that Ignatian University introduces Catholicism using a take-it-or-leave-it approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding among non-Catholics</td>
<td>Indicators of non-Catholic students' knowledge specifically about the Catholic tradition of which their university is part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesuit tradition</td>
<td>Different ways that students experience the foundational Jesuit values of their institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins of knowledge/exposure</td>
<td>People, places, or experiences that have informed students' understanding of the Jesuit tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Explicit references to Jesuit values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective practices</td>
<td>Engagement in activities aligning with an Ignatian emphasis on &quot;forming habits of critical reflection.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Implicit references to central tenets of the Jesuit tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Setting</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus features</td>
<td>Salient aspects of the campus environment that are articulated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrounding community</td>
<td>References to Ignatian University's surrounding community and/or the institution's relationship with its surrounding community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Justice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avenues for involvement</td>
<td>Descriptions of entry points to social justice involvement that exist within the university, and/or what was learned therein.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Alternative spring break (ASB)</em></td>
<td>Social justice-focused immersion trips sponsored by Campus Ministry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Community engagement internship program (CEIP)</em></td>
<td>Yearlong, credit-bearing internship program placing students in Catholic-based nonprofits in the local community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Good Samaritan ministry (GSM)</em></td>
<td>A weekly outreach program via Campus Ministry that places students in the community to engage with homeless individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Office of multicultural student affairs (OMSA)</em></td>
<td>Programs that promote multicultural education, retention and success of underrepresented groups (e.g., first-generation students, students of color), and an inclusive campus climate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Other</em></td>
<td>Any other campus programs students or staff reference as entry points for social justice involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Soup kitchen ministry (SOUP)</em></td>
<td>A co-curricular, peer-led, drop-in community service opportunity in partnership with a Catholic-based soup kitchen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Students organizing for workers (SOW)</em></td>
<td>Student-conceived initiative to advocate for workers rights on campus and in the surrounding community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Social Justice (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Avenues for involvement (cont.)</strong></th>
<th>Descriptions of entry points to social justice involvement that exist within the university, and/or what was learned therein.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volunteers for the city (V4C)</strong></td>
<td>Co-curricular service program that engages students (and corresponding student leaders) in a once-weekly service opportunity at a consistent community site for the duration of a semester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;Different things for different people&quot;</strong></td>
<td>References to the idea that the definition of social justice can vary depending on the person you ask.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;Doorways&quot; to social justice opportunities</strong></td>
<td>The accessibility or desirability of different social justice &quot;doorways&quot; for students holding diverse identities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Openness as a prerequisite</strong></td>
<td>The notion that individuals must be open to new experiences in order to take part in, or benefit from, social justice opportunities at Ignatian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social justice-focused communities</strong></td>
<td>Different conceptions of community that grow out of students' social justice experiences. These encompass both on- and off-campus communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social justice - Institution</strong></td>
<td>Institutional understanding and engagement of social justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment (or lack thereof)</strong></td>
<td>Evidence of Ignatian University's commitment level vis-à-vis social justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional conception of social justice</strong></td>
<td>Student/staff perceptions of how their university defines social justice, and/or institution-produced definitions of justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practice vs. preach (dissonance)</strong></td>
<td>Instances of disconnect between the institutional message/mission of social justice and Ignatian's actions or behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tools, platforms, and catalysts</strong></td>
<td>Perceived or actual ways in which Ignatian provides students with tools to enact social justice, platforms to promote it, or catalysts to enhance their social justice understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social justice - Students</strong></td>
<td>Students’ understanding and engagement of social justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual conceptions of social justice</strong></td>
<td>Student explanations of how they understand and/or live out social justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origins of definitions</strong></td>
<td>People, places, or experiences that have informed students' understanding of social justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reasons for participation</strong></td>
<td>Motivating factors or goals associated with students' social justice involvement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Student Background

<p>| <strong>College choice</strong> | Factors considered when students decided to attend Ignatian University. |
| <strong>General college activities</strong> | Students' co-curricular pursuits beyond those related to worldview and/or social justice. |
| <strong>Primary communities (besides social justice)</strong> | Communities to which students assign significance and/or draw a sense of belonging outside of social justice-focused communities. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Background (Cont.)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salient identities (besides worldview)</td>
<td>Identities seemingly at the forefront of students’ minds that intersect with their worldview identities or otherwise shape their college experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upbringing (e.g., family influences, worldview)</td>
<td>Information about students’ pre-college background.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Worldview Diversity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current worldview</td>
<td>How students arrive at, and articulate, their outlook on life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Students’ worldview perspectives, defined in their own words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-authorship</td>
<td>Indicators suggesting that students' current worldviews are the product of self-reflection on their beliefs and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldview engagement</td>
<td>How students deepen or broaden worldview perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interfaith curiosity</td>
<td>Student desires to learn more about other worldviews, including the religious identity of their institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interfaith interactions or exposure</td>
<td>Instances when students engaged directly with individuals whose belief system differed from their own, or were introduced to worldviews other than their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrafaith interactions or exposure</td>
<td>Instances when students engaged directly with individuals who shared their worldview, or participated in activities related to their own worldview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness as a prerequisite</td>
<td>The notion that individuals must be open to new experiences in order to take part in, or benefit from, worldview-related opportunities at Ignatian.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>