

Human Communication. A Publication of the Pacific and Asian Communication Association.
Vol. 12, No. 1, pp.33 - 52.

**The Effects of Communication, Religiosity, and Organizational Support
on Student Commitment at a Church-Related University**

G. L. Forward
Natalie Daugherty
Heather Michel
Danica Sandberg

Point Loma Nazarene University
Department of Communication & Theatre
3900 Lomaland Drive
San Diego, CA 92106

Email: GLForward@pointloma.edu

This paper was accepted by the Organizational Communication Division of the Western States Communication Association for inclusion in the February 13-17, 2009 convention in Mesa, AZ. G.L. Forward (Ph.D., The Ohio State University) is a Professor of Organizational Communication at Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, CA. Natalie Daugherty, Heather Michel, and Danica Sandberg are all undergraduate students in the Department of Communication & Theatre at PLNU. The authors would like to thank Christy Schmidt for her help with this project. Address correspondence to GLForward@pointloma.edu.

Abstract

This study investigated the influence of religious and communication variables on student organizational commitment at a religiously-affiliated university. Specifically, we utilized data (N=131) collected from a convenience sample of students at a small, church-related university in southern California. Canonical correlation and multiple regression procedures revealed a strong relationship between organizational commitment and identity and perceived organizational support, communication satisfaction, and intensity of religious faith. A t-Test revealed statistically significant differences between freshman/sophomores and seniors in their level of organizational commitment. Likewise, students with non-evangelical or no religious affiliation showed significantly lower levels of organizational commitment in comparison to those classified as evangelical Christians. Lastly, attitudes toward chapel attendance requirements and university behavioral policies showed strong, positive correlations with organizational commitment, religious faith, perceived organizational support, and organizational identity.

Key words: organizational commitment, social support, religiosity, religious faith, chapel, and organizational identification.

Organizational commitment is important to institutional health. A growing body of literature has identified several communicative and environmental variables that impact commitment in the workplace (Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006; Boshoff & Mels, 1995). Perceptions of fairness, procedural justice, interactional justice, and trust have long been identified as predictors of organizational commitment (Hubbell & Chory-Assad, 2005). In addition, research has revealed a relationship between communication satisfaction and uncertainty and perceptions of organizational support in multiple contexts (Prisbell, 1985; Forward, 1999). Lastly, a person may become committed to an organization based on resources, relational rewards, and external prestige (Fuller, Hester, Barnett, Frey, Relyea, & Beu, 2006).

Commitment to an institution will often coincide with feelings of overall satisfaction, a sense of belonging, and one's impression of institutional quality (Fuller, Hester, Barnett, Frey, Relyea, & Beu, 2006). In an academic context, the most important predictors of institutional commitment are academic and social integration, intellectual growth and development, and financial aid (Elliott, 2003). Other characteristics that may affect attitudes toward an educational organization are age, ethnicity, and marital status (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). In addition, Nora & Cabrera (1993) found that institutional quality, practical educational utility, and student-institution fit were also correlated with student commitment.

However, this dynamic may be more complicated than usual when the academic institution has a religious identity and mission. Researchers have found that those affiliated with religious institutions will not readily express organizational commitment if their religious, environmental, and operational expectations of the institution are not met. Unfortunately, religious identity often results in idealistic and exaggerated expectations and can become problematic at both the organizational and individual levels (Bonewits-Feldner, 2006).

In an effort to further explore commitment in the context of a church-related university, we focus on several religious and communication variables which may contribute to this dynamic. In addition, we highlight differences in organizational commitment based on class rank (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior), religious affiliation, and attitudes toward institutional behavioral policies and chapel attendance requirements. We hope that these findings will help students, staff, and faculty of denominationally affiliated universities to enhance their understanding of current dynamics related to student commitment, provide insight into student / institutional fit, and improve institutional policies.

Literature Review

Organizational Commitment and Identification

Organizational Commitment

Commitment can be described as a pattern of behaviors, behavioral intentions, motivation, or attitudes expressed as loyalty towards a relationship, place, or organization (Dunham, Grube, & Casteneda, 1994; Liou & Nyhan, 1994). Organizational commitment, in particular, has been defined as the degree to which a person identifies with and participates in the life of an organization (Porter, Steers, Mowday, Boulian, 1974). Some of the main predictors of organizational commitment include a positive communication climate, meaningful relationships, and a high level of trust (Varona, 2002). Additionally, demographic factors, including sex and education achievement, can

also contribute to the level of organizational commitment (Barker, Rimler, Moreno, & Kaplan, 2004). Older and more educated males expressed more identification and participation in an organization as their expression of commitment. On the other hand, younger, less educated females expressed their commitment with loyalty (passive) to an organization resulting from a limited amount of outside job opportunities (Bar-Hayim & Berman, 1992).

In the context of educational institutions, commitment has been operationalized as the overall satisfaction, sense of belonging, impression of education quality, and willingness to remain at the institution (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). According to Strauss and Volkwein (2004), the most important factors in commitment in this context are academic and social integration, academic growth and development, and amount of financial aid. Furthermore, an organization that communications concern and interest for its members will have stronger organizational commitment (Boshoff & Mels, 1995). As a result of strong organizational support, members are more likely to develop a stronger attachment to the organization and experience a lower desire to exit (Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006).

Organizational Identification.

There is a robust relationship between organizational commitment and identification although they are not isomorphic (Sass & Canary, 1991). People identify with an organization not only based on material possession or membership, but also based on their positive and/or negative psychology. A person's lack of identification with an organization of which they are a part is typically tied to a lack of congruency with the organization's values and practices (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002).

Some predictors of organizational identification are organizational distinctiveness, organizational prestige, tenure, satisfaction with organization, and sentimentality. High levels of organizational identification with a college or university often results in financial contributions, recommendations to others considering college, and participation in various university-sponsored organizations (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Some methods of enhancing intra-organizational unity include emphasizing us-them ideation, subordinate goals, and institutional rituals that celebrate the organization's identity (like orientation festivals, pep rallies, homecoming parades, and graduation ceremonies). Rituals like these are important because they enhance self-esteem, transcend self, and provide meaning and belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 2001).

Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS) involves an individual's assessment of the extent to which an organization values its members' contributions and cares about their well-being (Dovidio, 1984). This perception of support results in higher levels of trust and increases the likelihood that organizational membership will become an important component of self-identity. POS originates in the tendency to personify organizations and relate to them interpersonally (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986). Although co-workers matter as sources of support, those in top management and supervisor positions have an even greater effect on employee's perceived organizational support. Consequently, it is essential that top managers and supervisors communicate regularly and positively with their employees (Allen, 1995).

In the academic context, Elliott (2003) found that student centeredness and instructional effectiveness were most important in influencing student communication

satisfaction. Significant relationships were found between student satisfaction with the organization and (1) information, instrumental, and emotional support; (2) high communication satisfaction; and (3) positive classroom learning and evaluations (Prisbell, 1985). Research has also found that relational closeness, requiring fewer links to communicate to others in the organization, resulted in reduced turnover (Feeley, 2000). The more interpersonal closeness there is in an organization, the more committed are its members.

Religiosity

Religious identification

Two related but distinct meanings that can be attached to religious identification including identification with a deity and identification with a religious group. Religious identification is often a lifetime commitment since “nothing in life matches the power of religion to evoke commitment and inspire loyalty” (Ashforth & Mael, 2001, p. 12).

A person’s beliefs affect their attitudes and behaviors, which structure their values (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Religious identity is first shaped through family interactions and household environment, and then affected by general socialization. Factors that can have a large impact on the formation and development of a young person’s religious identity include their sex, parental communication and example, peer influences, college environment, and media messages (Forward, Sansom-Livolsi, & McGovern, 2008).

Religion continues to have a profound influence in American life. Eighty-six percent of college-aged Americans believe that religion is an important part of life (Hulett, 2004). Accordingly, a growing trend for organizations is to become more spiritually conscious (Sass, 2000). Organizations that identify spirituality as part of their corporate mission, as do church-sponsored universities, must effectively communicate in ways that have meaning for all of their members (Konz & Ryan, 1999). Regardless of the context, religious-based organizations exert pressure to maintain the distinct religious character of the organization and to socialize newcomers to identify with the religious priorities of the organization (Steinfels, 2003).

The sponsoring denomination

According to Benefiel (2000), the sponsoring denomination of the university, from which we drew our sample, is evangelical Christian theologically and socially conservative. According to its mission statement, the university “exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service becomes an expression of faith” (Mission and Vision, 2008). Forward, Czech, and Allen (2007) observed that CAOs from institutions affiliated with the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU), such as our present institution, were responsible for maintaining the religious identity and culture of the organization. CAOs with greater frequency of religious activity tended to have greater job satisfaction: “It may be easier for those who serve in church-related institutions to see their religious activity as an expression of their understanding of vocation-as-calling” (p. 174).

Nonetheless, the university is an important reflection of changes in the sponsoring denomination as it becomes more lax in its traditions and practices (Benefiel & Crow, 1998). For example, previous proscriptions against movies and dancing are changing to reflect what is socially accepted within North American culture. As such, there is a mood of pessimism among some within the church who believe that the change is for the worse

(Crow & Houseal, 1999). Consequently, declining trust in religious explanations is a growing concern for supporters of the university.

The denomination-affiliated university has a student handbook with a personal conduct section. It lists unacceptable behaviors which may lead to disciplinary action and possible dismissal from the university. Many of the proscribed behaviors are consistent with nearly all academic institutions such as cheating, forgery, or harassment, but other behaviors are unique to the Christian university setting. These behaviors are university-sponsored dancing, dissent or protest, obscene language, literature, or music, immodest dress, inappropriate physical/sexual behavior, cohabitation, pregnancy, and profanity (Handbook, 2008).

The investigation and implications of the denomination-affiliated university and the sponsoring denomination contribute significantly to the measurement of organizational commitment and identification of students to religious educational institutions. To extract reasonable conclusions upon this population, the following research questions were designed to focus on the specific setting of a small Christian university in Southern California.

Research Questions

RQ1: What religious (intensity, motivation) and communication (satisfaction, organizational support) variables contribute to student organizational identification and commitment?

RQ 2: Does level of organizational commitment differ on the basis of class rank?

RQ 3: Does level of organizational commitment differ on the basis of religious affiliation?

RQ 4: What is the relationship between student's attitudes toward mandatory chapel and behavioral policies and their level of organizational commitment?

Methodology

Research Setting and Subjects

The setting for our research was a small, church-related university in southern California. Although a majority of the students (71%) do not belong to the sponsoring denomination, most report that a significant reason for attending this institution is the evangelical Christian orientation of the university. This particular sample frame allows us to explore more fully the effects enumerated in our research questions. After securing informed consent, the respondents completed a written survey and returned it to the researchers when done. Questions or concerns raised at any point in the process were answered by the researcher present. This procedure resulted in a convenience sample of N=137. We eliminated surveys with significant missing data resulting in a final data sample of 131 usable surveys.

Survey Procedure

We created a three-page, 47-item survey instrument measuring organizational commitment, extrinsic religious motivation, religiosity, perceived organizational support, organizational identification, and communication satisfaction using extant instrumentation. In addition, we included two original questions measuring global attitudes toward required chapel attendance (three times per week for most students) as well as the university's conservative behavioral covenant for students (e.g., no smoking, drinking, pornography, or dancing on campus). All of the questions, except demographics, consisted of Likert-type questions utilizing a five point metric scaled from

one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). The project description and completed survey instrument was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in accordance with university and department regulations. Following IRB approval, the survey was pilot tested. Feedback from the pilot test participants prompted some minor modifications, including rewording of certain items, prior to printing and distributing the survey.

Instrumentation

All but two of the survey questions utilized in our instrument came from extant instruments that had been previously evaluated in terms of validity and reliability. The specific wording of some questions was altered in order to fit the current context and sample. For example, the words “organization” and “employee” were changed to “university” and “student” where appropriate, in order to reflect the focus of this research. We assessed the internal reliability of each summated variable using Cronbach’s alpha. Keyton (2001) has suggested that a coefficient alpha of .70, or greater, is a well established standard in communication research. Each of our summated variables significantly exceeded this benchmark for measurement consistency. Table 1 contains descriptive statistics that show the mean, standard deviation and Cronbach’s alpha for each of our continuous variables. The correlation matrix is in Table 2. All statistical procedures were calculated using the SPSS 16.0 statistical package.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha
Perceived Organizational Support	3.26	.86	.87
Extrinsic Religious Motivation	2.60	.88	.81
Strength of Religious Faith	4.18	.84	.93
Communication Satisfaction	3.68	.72	.83
Organizational Identification	3.65	.95	.90
Organizational Commitment	3.67	.90	.89

Religious motivation

Personal religious motivation was measured using three items selected from the Religious Beliefs Scale originally developed by Allport and Ross (1967) and modified by Gorsuch and McPherson (1989). The instrument measures the degree to which one’s

religious involvement is motivated by some personal or social gain (extrinsic motivation) compared to a desire for inner spiritual connection (intrinsic motivation). Selected questions included the following: "I go to church because it helps me to make friends." A high score on this scale indicated an extrinsic religious motivation whereas a low score indicated an intrinsic motivation ($M=2.6$; $SD=.88$; $\alpha=.81$).

Religious intensity

The intensity of respondent's religious faith was measured by seven items from the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997). An example question includes: "I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life." High scores on this scale suggest that participants strongly value the spiritual dimension of their life ($M=4.18$; $SD=.84$; $\alpha=.93$).

Organizational support

Five items from the Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa's Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (1986) were used to identify students' feelings in regards to the university's support of students' goals, concerns, and problems. High scores on this variable indicate higher levels of perceived support and feelings of a positive relationship between the student and the university ($M=3.26$; $SD=.86$; $\alpha=.87$).

Communication satisfaction

Communication satisfaction was assessed using Goldhaber and Rogers' (1978) six-item Communication Satisfaction Scale. The wording within each item was altered to fit the setting of a university. Low scores on communication satisfaction would indicate an unhealthy state of communication on the university's campus whereas higher scores indicate positive feelings about communication on the campus ($M=3.68$; $SD=.72$; $\alpha=.83$).

University identification

The students' identification with the university was measured with five of the ten items in Scott, Corman & Cheney's (1998) Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ). This instrument evaluates identification in the organization through scaled questions like, "I am proud to be an employee of _____." To apply these questions to the university setting, such a question was worded as "I am proud to be a student at _____." High scores of organizational identification indicate a positive association with the university and its core values and low scores the opposite ($M=3.65$; $SD=.95$; $\alpha=.90$).

University commitment

Commitment to the university was measured by using five items from the Mowday, Porter & Steers' (1979) Organizational Commitment Instrument (OCI). Again, the word "organization" was changed to "university" where appropriate. An example question is, "I am extremely glad I chose _____ over the other universities I considered." A high score indicates higher commitment to the university and lower scores indicate a lack of commitment on the part of the student ($M=3.67$; $SD=.90$; $\alpha=.89$).

Chapel and behavior covenant

Individual issues that may impact commitment to the university as an organization may be the campus chapel requirement and behavioral covenant applied to students. In order to measure opinions of these issues, two original questions were

included in the instrument on favorable or unfavorable attitude towards chapel ($M=3.00$; $SD=1.24$) and favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the behavioral covenant ($M=2.44$; $SD=1.28$). High scores in each would indicate positive feelings toward both policies.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix (N=131)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Perceived Organizational Support							
2. Extrinsic Religious Motivation	.26						
3. Strength of Religious Faith	.56**	.34**					
4. Communication Satisfaction	.65**	.24**	.36**				
5. Organizational Identification	.74**	.27**	.58**	.73**			
6. Organizational Commitment	.72**	.26**	.55**	.71**	.85**		
7. Attitude Towards Behavior Policy	.53**	.04	.46**	.35**	.53**	.59**	
8. Attitude Towards Chapel	.52**	.07	.54**	.26**	.47**	.52**	.67**

Note: ** correlation is significant at a $p < .01$.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The sample included 83 females and 48 males. The mean age was 20.8 years old with a range between 18 and 53 ($SD=4.08$). Although there were a variety of ethnic groups represented, the sample was predominately Caucasian, which is consistent with the population of the university itself. In addition, most students identified themselves with an evangelical Christian denomination or congregation ($n=76$), followed by those who identify with the sponsoring denomination (also evangelical Christian) ($n=37$). The remaining respondents represented a wide diversity of Christian denominations and were classified as other ($n=18$). Further analysis showed no statistically significant difference based on sex, age, or race.

Communication, Religiosity, and Organizational Outcomes

To answer research question 1, we performed a canonical correlation analysis to assess the pattern of relationships between communication, religiosity, and perceived organizational support and the two organizational outcome variables of commitment and identification. Canonical correlation is a commonly used exploratory technique that allows a researcher to evaluate the way differences in one set of variables is related to differences in a second set of variables. The canonical coefficients and structure loadings are found in Table 3.

The procedure extracted one statistically significant canonical root with a correlation of .86 (74% overlapping variance). The Chi Square (8) for the procedure was 166.04 at $p < .001$.

42 The Effects of Communication, Religiosity, and Organizational Support

Examination of the loadings suggests that Perceived Organizational Support, Communication Satisfaction, and to an important but somewhat lesser extent Strength of Religious Faith, all contribute significantly to Organizational Commitment and Identification.

Table 3
Canonical Correlation

Item Content	Canonical Correlation	
	Loadings	Coefficients
<i>Set 1</i>		
Extrinsic Religious Motivation	-.32	.00
Intensity of Religious Faith	-.69	-.28
Communication Satisfaction	-.88	-.52
Perceived Organizational Support	-.89	-.39
<i>Set 2</i>		
Organizational Identification	-.98	-.63
Organizational Commitment	-.94	-.41

In order to further explore this research question, we used a stepwise multiple regression procedure to identify which variables contributed to a student's level of commitment to the university (see Table 4). We accounted for 65 percent of the total variance in scores of organizational commitment. Fifty-three percent was explained by perceived organizational support alone, 9 percent was explained by organizational satisfaction, and another 3 percent was explained by extrinsic religious motivation.

In addition, examination of the beta weights reveals the relative contribution of each of these three variables to student commitment to the university. A one-unit increase in perceived organizational support resulted in a .76 increase in organizational commitment. A one-unit increase in organizational satisfaction resulted in a .51 increase in organizational commitment. A one-unit increase in religious motivation resulted in a .22 increase in organizational commitment.

Table 4

Stepwise Regression of Organizational Commitment (n = 131)

Variables	R ²	R ² Cha	b	t
Perceived Organizational Support	.53	.53	.76	11.93***
Communication Satisfaction	.62	.09	.51	5.74***
Extrinsic Religious Motivation	.65	.03	.22	3.28**

Note. Standard Error = .57; Adjusted R² = .59

For model: F = 79.13; P < .001; df = 3, 127

Note: Only Variables with significant t values (*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001) are presented.

Class Rank and Organizational Commitment

We ran an ANOVA to determine whether organizational commitment differed on the basis of class rank (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). The procedure (F (3, 127) = 6.02; p < .01) indicated there was some statistically significant difference between the groups (see Table 5). A Post Hoc (Tukey HSD) analysis revealed that seniors report significantly lower levels of organizational commitment than do freshmen and sophomores. However, freshman, sophomores, and juniors did not differ in a statistically significant way from each other in level of organizational commitment.

Religious Affiliation and Organizational Commitment

Again, we ran an ANOVA procedure to determine whether organizational commitment differed on the basis of religious affiliation—evangelical Christian, Nazarene (the sponsoring denomination), and other. The procedure (F (2, 128) = 10.63; p < .01) indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between groups (see Table 6). A Post Hoc (Tukey HSD) analysis revealed that student’s who labeled their religious affiliation as “other” reported significantly lower levels of organizational commitment to the university than those who identified themselves as some type of evangelical Christian. Those students did not differ from one another in their level of organizational commitment.

Table 5

Comparison of Class Rank to Organizational Commitment

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Organizational commitment				
Between Groups	3	13.15	4.38	6.02**
Within Groups	127	92.46	.78	
Total	130	105.61		

** p < .01

Table 6*Comparison of Religious Affiliation to Organizational Commitment*

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Organizational Commitment				
Between Groups 10.63**	2	15.04	7.52	
Within Groups	128	90.57	.71	
Total	130	105.61		

**p < .01

Chapel and Behavioral Policies and Organizational Commitment

This last question sought to explore the impact that required chapel attendance and other behavioral restrictions might have on student commitment to the university. In order to answer this question we examined the correlation matrix (see Table 4). We found significant positive correlations between attitude towards chapel requirements and intensity of religious faith ($r=.539$, $p<.01$), perceived organizational support ($r=.521$, $p<.01$), and organizational commitment ($r=.521$, $p<.01$). Likewise, we found significant positive correlations between attitudes toward university behavioral policies and organizational commitment ($r=.589$, $p<.01$), perceived organizational support ($r=.532$, $p<.01$), organizational identification ($r=.529$, $p<.01$), and intensity of religious faith ($r=.464$, $p<.01$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of several religious, communication, and demographic variables on organizational commitment in a church-related university. We found that commitment had a strong, positive correlation with perceived organizational support, religious motivation, intensity of religious faith, communication satisfaction, organizational identification, and attitudes towards the institution's behavioral policies and chapel attendance requirement. These findings demonstrate that a multitude of variables affect the degree to which students feel committed to the university and are discussed in more detail below.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is defined as a pattern of behaviors, behavioral intentions, motivation, or attitudes expressed as loyalty toward an organization (Dunham, Grube, & Casteneda, 1994; Liou & Nyhan, 1994). Our research revealed seven variables

that were predictive of organizational commitment including perceived organizational support, religious motivation, intensity of religious faith, communication satisfaction, and attitudes toward behavioral policies and mandatory chapel attendance. All seven of these variables were positively correlated with organizational commitment.

In addition, a multiple regression procedure explained 65 percent of the total variance in organizational commitment in our sample. The predictor variable that had the largest effect in explaining commitment scores was perceived organizational support, which alone accounted for 53 percent of the variance. An additional nine percent of variance was explained by communication satisfaction and three percent was explained by intensity of religious faith.

Well being of students. Perceived organizational support involves the perception regarding the extent to which an organization values its members' contributions and cares about their well-being and involves both trust and membership in self-identity (Dovidio, 1984). Students who feel that the university genuinely cares about their well-being, both academically and personally, will have higher levels of perceived organizational support. As a result, these students are more likely to reciprocate that support by being highly committed to the institution. In other words, if a student believes the institution cares about his or her goals and values, they are more likely to express support for the mission and values of the university.

Communication satisfaction in the organization. A main factor in organizational commitment is whether or not a person is satisfied by their interaction within the organization. If a student feels satisfied with their experiences at the school, including the level of education offered by the institution, they will more likely display higher levels of organizational commitment, as opposed to a student who feels unsatisfied by their communication and interaction with the organization (Elliott, 2003). One explanation for this could be that students that are more engaged in their area of study feel more connected. The more they engage classmates and professors, the greater their overall commitment to the university.

Religious similarities. A person's level of spirituality or intensity of religious faith can also have an impact on how they feel towards an organization, especially if the organization is intentionally religious. If a student's religious beliefs and values are congruent with the religious values and practices of the organization, they will tend to have higher levels of commitment to that organization (Bonewits-Feldner, 2006). However, students with no religious affiliation or an incongruent religious identity, will have a lower level of commitment to the religious identity and mission of the institution (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002) which is consistent with our findings in this research.

Class Rank

The second research question explored whether the level of organizational commitment was impacted by class rank. Analysis of the data revealed that class rank does play a role in determining one's level of organizational commitment. The effect is especially noticeable when the commitment levels of both freshmen and sophomores are compared to that of seniors. Data from the survey revealed that underclassmen had higher levels of organizational commitment compared to seniors, suggesting a negative correlation between commitment and class rank.

Freshman and sophomores

An explanation for the high levels of organizational commitment in freshmen and sophomores is that they are newer to the organization. Freshmen and sophomores have not experienced the policies and requirements as long as seniors. Because they have been at the university for a shorter time period, underclassmen will probably have fewer negative experiences with the institution.

Additionally, freshman and sophomores are also eager to fit into the new environment and the image that the organization portrays. Events like orientation, pep rallies, homecoming parades, and student mixers are especially important during transitional times, like the freshman year, when much of their identity is emerging (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). These events both encourage the underclassmen to become united as a class and to the organization and its policies, resulting in higher levels of organizational commitment.

Seniors

Because seniors have been with the organization for a longer period of time, they have been required to follow the organization's policies longer than the freshmen and sophomores. As a result, they could feel as if their freedoms have been restricted by the organization for too long of a period and are thus eager to graduate and leave the organization. Seniors are also more likely to have experienced negative encounters with the organization, such as punishment for disobeying policies, which would in turn reduce the level of commitment that they have for the organization. Seniors are permitted to miss a larger number of the mandatory chapels than freshmen, resulting in them feeling less obligated to the institution. Seniors have also attended four years of chapel dealing with redundant themes leaving many feeling that the chapel service no longer meaningfully contributes to their religious faith.

Religious Affiliation

The third research question investigated whether a student's religious affiliation had an impact on his or her level of organizational commitment. Our research found that one's religious affiliation does indeed have a significant impact on his or her organizational commitment. Survey participants categorized as Evangelical Christian (including Baptists, Lutherans, Non-Denominational) had significantly higher levels of commitment to the university. However, survey participants categorized as "other" (including mainline Protestants, Catholics, Decline to state, and No current religious affiliation) reported lower levels of organizational commitment. The reason why Evangelical Christians report higher levels of organizational commitment is most likely due to the congruence between their own religious belief system with that of the sponsoring denomination (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002). When your beliefs are vastly different from someone else's, it will be more difficult to identify with the other person because your values and world view may contradict each other. So if a student at a religious, evangelical institution is not evangelical or not particularly religious, they may feel coerced into participating in activities and endorsing religious beliefs they do not actually share.

Behavioral Policies and Chapel Attendance Requirements

Our final research question examined the extent to which attitude towards required chapel attendance and the universities behavioral covenant correlated with all of the other variables. The strongest correlations exist between attitude towards chapel requirements and intensity of religious faith. Again, this seems to be a matter of

congruence. Chapel begins with Christian worship music usually followed by a religious sermon from a guest speaker or faculty from the department of Christian Ministry and Theology. Students with a low score on intensity of religious faith would probably not favor mandatory chapel attendance since they do not value the religious focus and purpose of the chapel services. Attitude towards behavioral policies also had a strong correlation with religious faith. Religiously motivated students may see the behavioral policies as a reflection of the university's religious affiliation with which they agree. On the contrary, dissenting students may see the policies as little more than unwanted manipulation.

The chapel and behavioral policies questions both had strong, positive correlations with perceived organizational support. Students may feel like the chapel service is a means of university support (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Occasionally, students are prayed for during troubling times like when a parent dies from a terminal illness or from a tragic accident. Students who deal with severe illnesses are also prayed for, and the rest of the student body is given updates. Leadership in chapel also sends school-wide emails asking for their prayer requests; consequently, students will perceive more support from the institution. Furthermore, the university values its policies; however, there are many students that do not. The university will not support students that do not uphold the policies; therefore, those students will have lower scores on perceived organizational support (Dovidio, 1984).

Likewise, the chapel and behavioral policies questions both had strong, positive correlations with our dependent variable, organizational commitment. When expectations of students are raised because of religiosity, expectations of the institution are raised as well (Bonewits-Feldner, 2006). If students feel the university expects, or even requires, certain religious beliefs, their willingness to participate in religious affiliated meetings, like chapel, will be very low. In addition, if students observe failure from the university to meet expectations reflected in its mission and vision, then their motivation to live up to expectations put upon them simply has less logical justification (Benefiel & Crow, 1998). Students' attitudes toward requirements and restrictions will influence the level to which they commit to the organization. Ironically though, the students are buying into the institution, and therefore placing themselves in a religious setting where expectations are likely to follow (Bonewits-Feldner, 2006).

Conclusion

This research examined the impact of religious, communication, and demographic variables on students' levels of organizational commitment. Based on this research, we think we can make several recommendations to admissions, prospective students, student development, administration and faculty in church-related universities. First, while it might seem logical to only accept religious affiliated students since they generally have higher commitment levels; however, that would not be our recommendation for admissions. Because religious identity often results in idealistic and exaggerated expectations and can become problematic (Bonewits-Feldner, 2006), admissions should communicate to prospective students the effects of the church has on the function of university to reduce the shock of initial entry into the university. Furthermore, admissions of church-related universities should recruit and accept students with the knowledge that factors such as college environments and peer influences that can have a large impact on the formation and development of a young person's religious identity

(Forward, Sansom-Livolsi, & McGovern, 2008). Also, prospective students should note that having a higher intensity of religiosity might lead to a higher commitment of the university. If a prospective student has a lower intensity of religiosity, they should consider whether or not that would affect their overall experience at a church-related university.

Because those with a high level of religious intensity had more of a positive attitude towards chapel requirements, chapel should be adjusted. Rituals enhance intra-organizational unity and provide meaning and belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 2001); as a result, chapel should also encompass those with a lower level of religious intensity. In addition to regular religious chapel services, different chapel services should be blended that focus on topics that pertain to the developmental stage of college students. While we would not suggest that programs lose their religious identification, we would suggest that more programs that does not have explicit religious identification. religious-based organizations exert pressure to maintain the distinct religious character of the organization and to socialize newcomers to identify with the religious priorities of the organization (Steinfels, 2003). We would not suggest student development to diminish or replace existing religious programs because since the intensity of religiosity affects commitment, it is needed to continue to support those students.

Also, administration should consider how a behavioral policy affects students with lower religious intensity since it correlated with lower levels of organizational commitment. Organizations that identify spirituality as part of their corporate mission, as do church-sponsored universities, must effectively communicate in ways that have meaning for all of their members (Konz & Ryan, 1999). Administration should consider whether or not a behavioral policy is beneficial to the well-being of students or whether it creates a gap between students and the university.

In addition to institutional quality, practical educational utility, and student-institution fit (Nora & Cabrera, 1993), potential students should look for a university that supports its students. Overall, prospective students should observe the communicative environment of the university. How does the administration communicate to the students? Furthermore, if they are looking at a particular program or department, students should observe the communication that they have between faculty and staff. In an academic context, the most important predictors of institutional commitment are academic and social integration, intellectual growth and development, and financial aid (Elliott, 2003).

Student Development plays a large role in the experience of the students. Students live on or off campus, and that could be a place for programming. How can student development show more support to the residents? Further study would examine what variables affect students' perceived organizational support, so that they may focus programming on those specific areas. Student development should also evaluate the programs for seniors and see if it is effective for supporting seniors. Furthermore, administration should support students. Having fewer communication links increases relational closeness; thus, reducing turnover (Feeley, 2000). Since they make many decisions that affect the educational experience of students, administration should improve how open communication is from the administrative level to the student level.

Faculty can also play a large role in increasing the level of commitment by finding and implementing the ways that students feel supported. Student centeredness

and instructional effectiveness are the most influential on student communication satisfaction in the academic context (Elliott, 2003). More faculty to student interaction and communication should take place in order to increase commitment. Also as students reach their senior year, faculty should find ways to help students feel more supported. Since seniors are thinking about post-graduation, faculty should support their students in their post-undergrad goals. On the other hand, students should seek relationships with faculty and staff in ways that they will be more supported and in ways that would improve their satisfaction of communication.

References

- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Allen, M.W. (1995) Communication concepts related to perceived organizational support. *Western Journal of Communication*, 59, 326-346.
- Allport, G., & Ross, J. (1967). Personal religious orientation and prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 5, 432-443.
- Ashforth, B. E. & Mael, F. E. (2001). Identification in work, war, sports, and religion: Contrasting the benefits and risks. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 31, 197-223.
- Bar-Hayim, A., & Berman, G.S. (1992). The dimensions of organizational commitment. *The Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 13, 379-387.
- Barker, R., Rimler, G., Moreno, E., & Kaplan, T. (2004). Family business members' narrative perceptions: Values, succession, and commitment. *Journal of Technical Writing & Communication*, 34, 291-320.
- Benefiel, R. (2000). Cultivating community through core values and commitment: A reflective essay. The Church of the Nazarene. Retrieved August 11, 2008, from <http://www.nazarene.org/ministries/administration/ansr/author/display.aspx>
- Benefiel, R., & Crow G. (1998). Beliefs, attitudes and norms of students on Nazarene college and university campuses: Then and now. The Church of the Nazarene. Retrieved August 11, 2008 from <http://www.nazarene.org/ministries/administration/ansr/author/display.aspx>
- Bhattacharya, C., & Elsbach, K. (2002). Us versus them: The roles of organizational identification and disidentification in social marketing initiatives. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 21(1), 26-36.
- Bonewits-Feldner, S. (2006). Living our mission: A study of university mission building. *Communication Studies*, 57, 67-85.
- Boshoff, C., & Mels, G. (1995). A causal model to evaluate the relationships among supervision, role stress, organizational commitment and internal service quality. *European Journal of Marketing*, 29(2), 23-42.
- Crow, K., & Houseal, R. (1999). Secularization within the Church of the Nazarene. The Church of the Nazarene. Retrieved August 11, 2008, from <http://www.nazarene.org/ministries/administration/ansr/author/display.aspx>
- Dovidio, J. F. (1984). Helping behavior and altruism: An empirical and conceptual overview. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (pp. 361-427). New York: Academic Press.
- Dunham, R.B., Grube, J.A., Castaneda, M.B. (1994). Organizational commitment: The utility of an integrative definition. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79, 370-380.
- Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchinson, S., & Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71, 500-507.
- Elliott, K.M. (2003). Key determinants of student satisfaction. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 4, 271-279.
- Feeley, T. (2000). Testing a communication network model of employee turnover based on centrality. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 28, 262-277.
- Forward, G.L. (1999). Encountering the nonprofit organization : Clergy uncertainty and

- information-seeking during organizational entry. *The Journal of Communication and Religion*, 22(2), 190-213.
- Forward, G.L., Czech, K., & Allen, P. (2007). Leadership, communication and religiosity in higher education administration: Distinctions that make a difference. *Journal of Communication and Religion*, 30, 153-185.
- Forward, G.L., Sansom-Livolsi, A., & McGovern, J. (2008). College Student communication, religiosity, and family satisfaction: The importance of opposite-sex parent relationships. *The Journal of Communication and Religion*, 31, 245-271.
- Fuller, J., Hester, K., Barnett, T., Frey, L., Relyea, C., & Beu, D. (2006). Perceived external prestige and internal respect: New insights into the organizational identification process. *Human Relations*, 59, 815-846.
- Goldhaber, G.M., & Rogers, O.P. (1978). Auditing organizational communication systems: The ICA Communication Audit. Buffalo: State University of New York.
- Gorsuch, R., & McPherson, S. (1989). Intrinsic/extrinsic measurement: I/E revised and single-item scales. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 28, 348-354.
- Handbook (2008). Personal conduct. Retrieved April 16, 2008, from <http://www.pointloma.edu/Handbook.htm>.
- Hubbell, A. P., & Chory-Assad, R. M. (2005). Motivating factors: Perceptions of justice and their relationship with managerial and organizational trust. *Communication Studies*, 56, 47-70.
- Hulett, L. S. (2004). Being religious at Knox College: Attitudes toward religion, Christian expression, and conservative values on campus. *Religion and Education* 31(2), 41-61.
- Keyton, J. (2001) *Communication research: Asking questions, finding answers*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Konz, G. N. P., & Ryan, F. X. (1999). Maintaining an organizational spirituality: No easy task. *Journal of Organizational Change*, 12, 200-210.
- Liou, K.T., & Nyhan, R.C. (1994). Dimensions of organizational commitment in public organizations: An empirical assessment. *Public Administrative Quarterly*, 18, 99-118.
- Loi, R., Hang-yue, N., & Foley, S. (2006). Linking employees' justice perceptions to organizational commitment and intention to leave: The mediating role of perceived organizational support. *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, 79(1), 101-120.
- Mael, F., & Ashforth, B. E. (1992). Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 13, 103-123.
- Mission and Vision (2008). Mission and Vision. Retrieved April 16, 2008, from <http://www.pointloma.edu/AboutPLNU/MissionandVision.htm>.
- Mowday, R.T., Porter, L.W., & Steers, R.M. (1979). The measurement of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 14, 224-247.
- Nora, A., & Cabrera, A. F. (1993). The construct validity of institutional commitment: A confirmatory factor analysis. *Research in Higher Education*, 34, 243-251.
- Plante, T.G., & Boccaccini, M.T. (1997). The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire. *Pastoral Psychology*, 45, 375-387.

- Porter, L.W., Steers, R.M., Mowday, R.T., & Boulian, P. (1974). Organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover among psychiatric technicians. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 59*, 603-609.
- Prisbell, M. (1985). Interpersonal perception variables and communication satisfaction in the classroom. *Communication Research Reports, 2*, 90-96.
- Sass, J. S. (2000). Characterizing organizational spirituality: An organizational communication approach. *Communication Studies, 51*(3), 195-217.
- Sass, J. S., & Canary, D.J. (1991). Organizational commitment and identification: An examination of conceptual and operational convergence. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 55*, 275-293.
- Scott, C. R., Corman, S. R., & Cheney, G. (1998). Development of a structural model of identification in the organization. *Communication Theory, 8*, 298-336.
- Steinfels, P. (2003). *A people adrift*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Strauss, L. C., & Volkwein, J. F. (2004). Predictors of student commitment at two-year and four-year institutions. *The Journal of Higher Education, 75*, 203-227.
- Varona, F. (2002). Conceptualization and management of communication satisfaction and organizational commitment in three Guatemalan organizations. *American Communication Journal, 5*(3), 1. Retrieved August 11, 2008 from <http://acjournal.org/holdings/vol5/iss3/articles/concept.htm>.