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Assessing the Denominational Identity of American Evangelical Colleges and Universities, Part I: Denominational Patronage and Institutional Policy

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Assessing the Denominational Identity of American Evangelical Colleges and Universities, Part I: Denominational Patronage and Institutional Policy

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In an effort to better understand the role of denominational identity among its member institutions, the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) commissioned a three phase study of its institutions, faculty, and students. This article provides an overview of the study as a whole, as well as an in depth examination into the responses from the institutional portion of the study. Seventy-nine of the CCCU's member institutions in the United States responded to the online survey, yielding a response rate of 72%. Results suggest that a number of policies and practices currently in place at many church-related colleges serve to maintain denominational identity. In particular, college governance practices, annual appropriations from ecclesiastical bodies, and employment policies were generally found to support the denominational character of the institutions sampled. However, longitudinal trends suggest potential challenges on the horizon, as denominations have provided smaller annual appropriations and fewer students who identify with the sponsoring denomination are enrolling in church-related colleges and universities. In short, study findings indicate that American evangelical Protestant denominations continue to provide a measure of oversight and funding to their affiliated postsecondary institutions, and the policies and practices of these institutions privilege their ecclesiastical patrons in varying degrees. Subsequent articles from this study will examine faculty perspectives and practices as well as the student experience at CCCU institutions.

Since the creation of Harvard College in 1636 by Congregationalists, Christian higher education in America has largely been created and sustained through the work of denominations. For example, by the Civil War, the Presbyterians had founded 49 colleges, the Methodists 34, the Baptists 25, and the Congregationalists 21 (Tewksbury, 1932, pp. 55–132). In light of this history, it should be

The authors wish to thank the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities for providing data for this study. This article reflects the views and opinions of the authors and not necessarily the Council of Christian Colleges & Universities.

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no surprise that scholars have traditionally approached the topic of faith-based higher education in North America by focusing upon “church-related” colleges and universities (e.g., Cuninggim, 1994). In some cases, more recent scholars have used a slightly broader categorization but one still linked to denominational identity. For example, when composing their edited volume, *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, Richard Hughes and William Adrian (1997) organized the book by faith traditions (e.g., Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Mennonite, Baptist, Restorationist). Hughes and Adrian suggest “to the extent that these institutions seek to structure their work around a Christian mission at all, they inevitably must draw upon their own historical Christian identities or church connections” (p. 4). They even suggest that the supposed exceptions, such as Wheaton College, were formed by their early Wesleyan roots.

Despite this scholarly pattern of relying upon denominational identity to understand faith-related higher education, a change can actually be seen in the terminology used in the field. Today, one is more likely to read about Christian higher education instead of church-related higher education. There are two primary reasons for this change of terminology. One reason stems from the simple fact that describing a college or university as “church-related” provides little information about the degree to which a particular church or its theological beliefs and practices actually influence a college or university. In the light of the secularization of a vast number of these institutions and the range of church relations they hold, many would question whether some of these institutions would identify themselves as Christian and in what way they might do so. Robert Benne has developed a well-known typology (2001) that addresses this wide variety among church-related institutions; however, his typology applies more to Christianity in general and does not necessarily help us understand variations in the strength of commitment to the denominational identity of an institution. After all, an institution could actually choose to place more emphasis on a general Christian identity and thereby strengthen its Christian mission while simultaneously downplaying or even abandoning its specific denominational identity.

Second, the criterion of “church-related” becomes more problematic in the contemporary environment as increasing numbers of individuals who are associated with particular movements or churches, but not a specific denomination, have founded universities (e.g., Oral Roberts University, Regent University). In addition, a significant number of historically Christian colleges and universities have become nondenominational or always were (e.g., Asbury University, Azusa Pacific University, Gordon College, Taylor University, Wheaton College). In fact, this latter set of institutions gives evidence of a common evangelical tendency throughout American history—the propensity to focus on certain common Christian beliefs about the Bible, Christ, salvation, and activism that cross denominational boundaries as a source for common partnerships (Bebbington, 1989). The YMCA and Student Volunteer Movement are two common historical examples, as are the numerous parachurch organizations active today (e.g., InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, etc.). With regard to higher education associations, the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) and the Lilly Fellows Network provide examples of partnerships based less on denominational loyalty and more upon a common theological or broad Christian identity (Patterson, 2001).

An emerging question among scholars is whether this turn from specific denominational identities to a more generic Christian identity may be starting to penetrate denominational and church life. Beginning in the late 1980s, scholars found that individuals were identifying less and less with denominations than in past generations (Roof & McKinney, 1987; Wuthnow, 1988). More recent

studies have also affirmed this decline in denominational affiliation among American Protestants (Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1994; Miller, 1997; Mullin & Richey, 1994; Smith & Kim, 2005). As Dougherty, Johnson, and Polson observed (2007), “In the past, national denominations functioned to provide individuals with a sense of belonging, locating them within a fixed set of religious and cultural identities in their communities. Increasingly, however, local congregations are becoming the primary source of religious identification and belonging for many Americans” (p. 484).

Other scholars, however, have questioned the supposed demise of denominations (e.g., the essays in Roozen & Nieman, 2005). Denominations are not dying, these scholars argue; they are transitioning. In particular, they argue that denominations are merely transforming how they officially think about God and are restructuring such reflection in their organizational identity and practice. Part of the belief that denominations are dying, these scholars maintain, stems from an overemphasis upon traditional mainline Protestant denominations that are indeed shrinking.

There is no doubt, however, that Protestant denominations are under unique forms of stress and change. Consequently, what these changes might mean for church-related colleges and universities becomes an important question. Just as individuals and churches may be deemphasizing denominational identity, might Christian colleges and universities be joining this trend? The answer to this question proves important for discerning the health of denominations and perhaps the future health of Christian colleges and universities. For example, James Burtchaell (1998) argued in his book, *The Dying of the Light*, that denominational disengagement ultimately leads to secularization of Christian colleges and universities. While this article will not specifically address the effects of denominational disengagement, it undertakes the prior first step of collecting empirical evidence regarding the status of denominational identity at church-related colleges and universities.

Our current knowledge in this area is rather limited. In a 2011 *Christianity Today* article, “Generic Christian University,” Bobby Ross observed that among Churches of Christ schools and certain other church-related institutions, such as Eastern Mennonite University and Point Loma Nazarene University, denominational identity is reported to be declining among students (Ross, 2011). Ross noted, however, “Much of the evidence of the trend remains anecdotal” (p. 14).

To address the apparent dearth of empirical evidence in the research literature, the CCCU assembled a team of higher education scholars to explore the current state of denominational identity within its member institutions. Taking place in three phases, the CCCU Denominational Study was designed to build an empirical basis from which discussions about the role of denominational identity in Christian higher education might proceed. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the study and to present the findings from the first phase of this research. In subsequent issues of *Christian Higher Education*, two additional articles will explore the results of the second and third phases of the project and will provide summative conclusions for the study as a whole.

CONCEPTUAL CONCERNS

At the outset, an important conceptual issue had to be addressed, namely, how one can determine if a church-related college has adopted a more generically Christian institutional identity. Is such a move signaled by a college’s decision to no longer privilege the theological perspective of its sponsoring denomination? Does it result from greater heterogeneity among a college’s membership? Has it occurred when a college’s ecclesiastical patron no longer provides financial support or formal oversight?

These questions underscore the general complexity involved in assessing a college's identity, a socially constructed phenomenon (Berger & Luckman, 1967). As an organization, the Christian college represents a collection of differing constituencies (Scott, 2003), resulting in a diffuse, rather than centralized, locus of identity (Scott & Lane, 2000). Put another way, a Christian college's identity is a multifaceted construct arising from the commitments and behaviors of a diverse array of stakeholders. For example, the identity of a particular Christian college could be informed by its ecclesiastical patron, board of trustees, chief executive, administrative staff, faculty, and students.

It is therefore possible for an institution to become more generically Christian in some areas while still retaining a strong denominational identity in others. Consequently, institutional identity (or shifts therein) must be measured on multiple dimensions to ensure its accurate representation. In recognition of this reality, this study sought to gather information regarding a diverse group of constituencies likely to contribute to institutional identity, including students, faculty, college presidents, governing boards, and sponsoring denominations.

QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

In order to investigate whether or not denominationally affiliated colleges and universities in the United States have begun to adopt a more generic evangelical Christian identity, the CCCU Denominational Study endeavored to answer three primary research questions:

1. What level of financial support and formal oversight do evangelical Protestant denominations provide to their affiliated colleges and universities, and how has this relationship changed over time?
2. To what extent do Christian colleges emphasize their denominational identities? Do the current employment policies, enrollment practices, and curricular choices of Christian colleges privilege their sponsoring denominations, and have these standards changed over time?
3. How strongly do faculty who serve in and students who attend Christian colleges identify with their sponsoring denominations?

The following section outlines the general procedures we employed to gather data in response to these three research questions.

METHOD

In recognition of the complex and multifaceted nature of institutional identity, we sought to gather sector-level data from multiple constituencies associated with CCCU member institutions across the United States. In particular, the study adopted a tiered design in which institutional researchers, faculty, and students completed quantitative surveys in three separate phases. Taken together, the survey items from each of the three phases of the study addressed all three of the study's primary research questions. For instance, the phase described in this paper sought to collect longitudinal data to determine whether change was occurring over time in any of these three areas. Table 1 lists the survey items for each instrument type, organized by category, and indicates which research question each category addresses.

TABLE 1
Survey Items Organized by Category and Research Question Addressed

| <i>Institutional Survey (Phase I)</i> | <i>Faculty Survey (Phase II)</i> | <i>Student Survey (Phase III)</i> |
|--|---|---|
| <p><u>Denominational Oversight (Q1)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the affiliated denomination appoint any of the institution's trustees? • Are members of the board of trustees required to have the same denominational affiliation as the institution? Has this standard changed in the past 20 years? <p><u>Denominational Financial Support (Q1)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the affiliated denomination currently provide funding to the institution? • What is the amount and percentage of the institution's annual budget supplied by affiliated denomination over the past 20 years? <p><u>Employment Expectations (Q2)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of the following individuals are required to have the same denominational affiliation as the institution? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – College President – Faculty Members (all) – Religion/Theology Faculty • Have these standards changed in the past 20 years? <p><u>Hiring and Enrollment Patterns (Q2)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the current distribution of the faculty by denominational affiliation? • Over the past 20 years, what percentage of students has had the same denominational affiliation as the institution? • What is the current distribution of the student body by denominational affiliation? | <p><u>Emphasis of Denominational Identity (Q2)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what degree does the institution emphasize its denominational identity in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Marketing and public rhetoric – Curriculum – Campus ethos – Hiring decisions – Promotion and tenure decisions – Worship or chapel on campus – Governance and institutional leadership • What importance is currently placed on the institution's denominational affiliation by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The College President – The Board of Trustees • Could the faith statement endorsed by the institution be considered "generic" or "Mere Christianity" (i.e., Apostles Creed)? <p><u>Institutional Policy Preferences (Q3)</u></p> <p><i>Hiring</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is it for the majority of faculty to belong to the institution's affiliated denomination? • How would certain religious descriptors affect your opinion of faculty job candidates? • Should Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Christians be able to serve as full-time faculty at the institution? Why or why not? <p><i>Student Enrollment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is it for the majority of students to belong to the institution's affiliated denomination? | <p><u>Denominational Financial Support (Q1)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What percentage of your college expenses (tuition, room, board) was provided by your denomination? <p><u>Importance of Denominational Affiliation (Q3)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important was/is denominational affiliation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To your parents in your college choice – In your decision to attend this institution – In your choice of the church you attend while at college – To your current faith life • Is the emphasis your college or university places on its denominational affiliation about right, too much, or too little? • How does a faculty member's affiliation with the institution's sponsoring denomination affect your opinion of that person? <p><u>Personal Background (Q3)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often have you participated in the following activities that were sponsored by your denomination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Conferences – Missions trips – Summer camps – Retreats – Denominational conventions • How many of your friends from home share your denominational affiliation? How many at college? • Do you share the same denominational affiliation as the institution? |

(Continued on next page)

TABLE 1
Survey Items Organized by Category and Research Question Addressed (Continued)

| <i>Institutional Survey (Phase I)</i> | <i>Faculty Survey (Phase II)</i> | <i>Student Survey (Phase III)</i> |
|--|---|---|
| <p><u>Co/Curricular Policies (Q2)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are students required to take a course about the history or theology of the denomination with which the institution is affiliated? • Are Christian groups not connected to your institution's affiliated denomination allowed official recognition on campus? Has this standard changed in the past 20 years? | <p><u>Statement of Faith</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you prefer the institution's statement of faith to be more "generic" or "Mere Christianity" (i.e., Apostles Creed)? <p><u>Classroom Practice (Q3)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your personal theological tradition influence the following areas of your teaching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Course objectives – Foundations, worldview, or narrative guiding the course – Motivations for or attitude toward the class – Ethical approach – Teaching methods <p><u>Personal Background & Beliefs (Q3)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you hold a degree from a college or university with the same denominational affiliation as your current institution? • Do you have a strong sense of affinity to the institution's affiliated denomination? • Is your religious identity best described by your denominational affiliation, or a more general religious movement? • Do you share the same denominational affiliation as the institution? If given a choice, would you prefer to teach at an institution that shares your personal denominational affiliation? • How do your personal beliefs compare to the positions of the institution's affiliated denomination? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is your religious identity best described by your denominational affiliation or by a more general religious movement? • How do your personal beliefs compare to the positions of your college or university? |

Data collection for Phase I of the study was accomplished via an online survey created using Qualtrics software. The institutional survey addressed five areas:

1. Denominational Oversight: What role does the institution's affiliated denomination play in institutional governance?
2. Denominational Financial Support: Does the affiliated denomination provide funding to the institution, and if so, has the level of funding changed over time?
3. Employment Expectations: Which members of the college leadership are required to belong to the institution's affiliated denomination?
4. Hiring and Enrollment Patterns: What is the denominational distribution of the college community and how has it changed over time?
5. Co/curricular Policies: Does the institution privilege its affiliated denomination in its curricular and cocurricular offerings?

Invitation letters detailing the purposes of the study were sent by post to the director of institutional research at each CCCU member institution in the United States as of fall 2011 ($n = 110$). A follow up e-mail was sent two weeks later with a link to the online survey, as were two additional e-mail reminders at two-week intervals. Shortly before the survey's closing date, the research team sent a final reminder e-mail to those institutional researchers who had only partially completed the online survey.¹ Lastly, because of the relatively high turnover rate among institutional researchers at Christian colleges, a member of the research team placed phone calls to each of the nonresponsive institutions to ensure that the institutional research office had indeed received the invitation to participate in the study.

Limitations

Two related challenges arose in the process of data collection. First, our assumption that institutional researchers would have easy access to the data we requested was incorrect in many cases, resulting in longer response times than originally expected. In some instances, individuals were willing to participate but simply could not provide complete responses to the survey questions. For example, one participant wrote, "I completed a portion of the survey, but I am unable to provide you with the percentages going back 20 years on multiple questions without a significant amount of work on my part, which I'm afraid I'm not in a position to do."

Second, some participants indicated that collecting denominational data was not an institutional priority, particularly for institutions that lacked a strong denominational identity or had no official denominational affiliation. For example, one participant wrote, "Would love to participate in your survey. However we only have denominational statistics on our students. Not faculty and staff (seems odd as I put that in writing!)." Similarly, a participant from a denominationally unaffiliated institution e-mailed, "The only question for which we can provide a response is for student denominational affiliation, although student response is only about 40%, with nondenominational being steadily more predominant." Decreases in both the number of participants and the quality of their responses resulted from these two challenges, posing varying degrees of limitation to the

¹ Some of these partial responses stemmed from the fact that our initial version of the survey would not allow participants to return to their original responses to input additional data after they had closed the browser window.

TABLE 2
Frequency of Denominationally Affiliated CCCU Member Institutions by Protestant Faith Traditions

| | <i>Sample (n = 64)*</i> | <i>Population (n = 89)</i> |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Wesleyan/Holiness | 31% | 25% |
| Baptist | 30% | 30% |
| Reformed/Presbyterian | 9% | 15% |
| Pentecostal | 9% | 7% |
| Brethren/Mennonite | 8% | 9% |
| Restoration Movement | 6% | 8% |
| Other | 6% | 6% |

*values do not sum to 100% because of rounding

generalizability of study results. Despite these limitations, we were able to collect a significant amount of data that offers an empirical base from which to evaluate denominational identity within and among CCCU member institutions.

Sample

Participants from 79 of the 110 CCCU member institutions in the United States completed at least a portion of the online survey, for an overall response rate of 72%. The degree to which the institutions responded to each survey item varied for a number of reasons. Fifteen of the respondents were not officially affiliated with a denomination, so they were not asked all of the survey questions.² Of the 64 institutions related to a denomination, some simply did not track all of the data we requested, since in some cases we requested longitudinal data from the past 20 years.

Analyses presented in this paper focus solely on the 64 denominationally affiliated institutions that participated in Phase I of the CCCU Denominational Study. This subset of institutions closely resembled the overall population of denominationally affiliated CCCU member institutions ($n = 89$) on a number of dimensions.³ A wide swath of Protestant faith traditions were present in this sample (see Table 2). Moreover, sample statistics were comparable to population parameters for a number of institutional variables (see Table 3).

² The term "official" is important since one institution was placed in the unaffiliated category even though its response stated, "We're officially NOT affiliated, but 'unofficially' we're so strongly affiliated we might as well be. We practically eat, drink, and breathe Wesley here." In addition, although a second participating institution had been listed in academic publications as nondenominational, it was identified as denominationally affiliated by our respondent.

³ One of the 90 CCCU member institutions listed in the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) as having a denominational affiliation indicated that it was nondenominational on our survey. Consequently, the population total used in this paper is 89, rather than 90.

TABLE 3
Sample Statistics vs. Population Parameters: Key Institutional Factors

| | <i>Sample (n = 64)</i> | <i>Population (n = 89)</i> |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Total FTE Enrollment, Fall 2011 | | |
| Mean | 2,226 | 2,118 |
| Range | 14,525 | 14,525 |
| Standard Deviation | 1,911 | 1,708 |
| Total Employees, Fall 2011 | | |
| Mean | 473 | 448 |
| Range | 2,202 | 2,212 |
| Standard Deviation | 320 | 292 |
| Operating Budget, FY 2011 | | |
| Mean | \$41.8M | \$40.3M |
| Range | \$139.0M | \$139.0M |
| Standard Deviation | \$28.0M | \$26.3M |
| Total Cost of Attendance, AY 2010–2011 | | |
| Mean | \$32,214 | \$32,273 |
| Range | \$20,493 | \$20,493 |
| Standard Deviation | \$4,694 | \$4,503 |
| Endowment Value, End of FY 2011 | | |
| Mean | \$33.4M | \$35.1M |
| Range | \$299.8M | \$328.1M |
| Standard Deviation | \$46.4M | \$51.8M |

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

RESULTS

Denominational Oversight

An institution's denominational identity is formed in part by its formal relationship to its ecclesiastical sponsor. A key aspect of this relationship is the extent to which a denominational body exercises oversight in the governance of its affiliated colleges and universities. Does the denomination appoint the trustees of its sponsored institutions? Are college trustees required to belong to the sponsoring denomination, and has this standard changed over time? Results for these questions are found in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Trustees and Denominational Affiliation

| | <i>Yes (all)</i> | <i>Some</i> | <i>No</i> |
|---|------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Are college trustees | | | |
| appointed by sponsoring denomination (<i>n</i> = 61) | 31.0% | 43.0% | 26.0% |
| required to hold membership in sponsoring denomination (<i>n</i> = 62) | 43.5% | 43.5% | 13.0% |
| Have membership requirements changed in the past 20 years? (<i>n</i> = 61) | 21.0% | 0.0% | 79.0% |

TABLE 5
Denominational Funding ($n = 60$)

| <i>Does your institution currently receive funding from its sponsoring denomination?</i> | <i>Percentage of Respondents</i> |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Yes | 73% |
| No, but has within the past 20 years | 5% |
| No, not within the past 20 years | 22% |

Responses to these questions varied considerably, with only one particular denominational pattern emerging. Due to the congregational organization of the Churches of Christ, no denominational structure appointed trustees for any of their four institutions that responded. The practices of most other denominations represented within our sample, however, were not as uniform. Baptists had institutions in every category, although the denomination or convention of most Southern Baptist schools appointed either all ($n = 9$) or some ($n = 6$) of the trustees, while none of the trustees at the American Baptist institutions in the sample ($n = 2$) were appointed by the sponsoring denomination. Other denominations also exhibited a variety of approaches. For instance, although the Assemblies of God denomination appointed the entire board of trustees at one of its affiliated institutions, it appointed only part of the trustees at two of its other affiliated schools, and did not appoint any trustees at a fourth institution. The Nazarene schools evidenced a similar diversity (all trustees appointed at three schools, some appointed at three, and none appointed at one). The percentage of denominational appointees in the “some” category also varied quite a bit with no clear pattern, except that at least 75% of trustees at Southern Baptist institutions were usually appointed by the denomination or state convention.

The vast majority of respondents (87%) indicated that all or some of their institution’s trustees were required to belong to the sponsoring denomination. No particular denominational pattern emerged regarding the 13% of institutions that did not have any requirements for trustees. Two were Baptists and the other six were from six different denominations. The requirements indicated under the “some” category were so varied that no generalizations can be made. Thirteen institutions indicated that this standard changed within the past 20 years. Unfortunately, the exact nature of the change was not fully explained in almost all cases with one exception (one respondent noted, “Previously, all board members were associated with the parent denomination”), although not one institution indicating a change currently had all trustees appointed by the denomination.

Denominational Financial Support

Financial support is a second key aspect of an institution’s relationship to its founding denomination. Does the ecclesiastical sponsor make annual contributions to the operating budgets of its affiliated colleges and universities? If so, has the amount of these payments changed over time? Participants were first asked to indicate whether or not their institution currently receives funding from its affiliated denomination (see Table 5). Survey results indicate that nearly three-quarters (74%) of the institutions represented in the study sample currently receive funding from their sponsoring denominations. Among the institutions that do not currently receive funding from their ecclesiastical patrons, only two of were financially supported by their denomination in the past. It should be noted that, in some cases, a lack of financial support does not necessarily signify

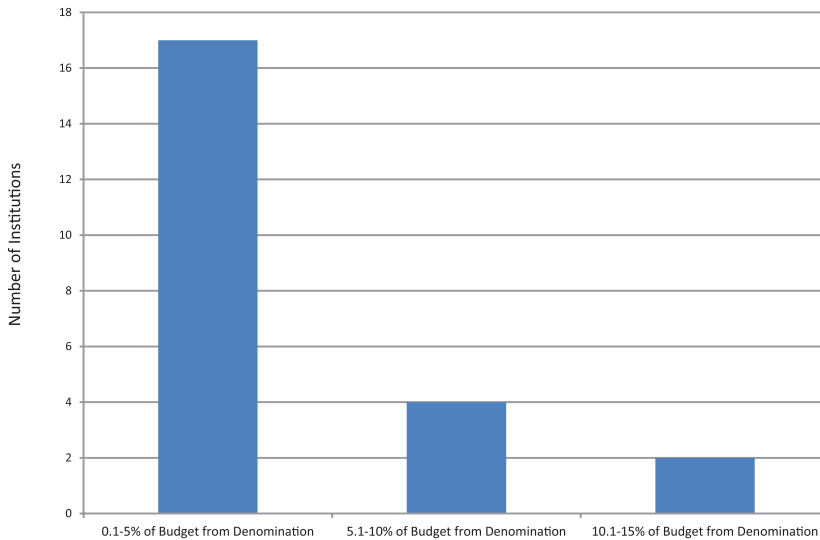


FIGURE 1 Percentage of Operating Budget Provided by Sponsoring Denomination, FY 2011 ($n = 23$). (Color figure available online.)

a weak relationship between a denominational body and its affiliated college and universities, but rather the absence of ecclesiastical infrastructure. For example, although participants from the four Churches of Christ colleges and universities indicated that their institutions do not receive denominational financial support, one respondent explained that “Churches of Christ do not have a denominational governing board or institutional budget appropriations.”

Participants who indicated that their institution had received financial support were also asked to name the amount provided annually by the denomination for the past 20 years, both as a percentage of the institution’s operating budget and in nominal dollars (i.e., not adjusted for inflation). Forty-eight percent ($n = 23$) of these participants were able to provide denominational funding amounts for the current year and the percentage of the budget the funding represented (although in six of these cases, the institutions provided only one figure). On average, these institutions reported receiving 4.07% of their annual operating budget from their sponsoring church, and in the majority of cases (74%), the denomination provided less than 5% (see Figure 1). Four institutions reported annual funding in the 5–10% range, while two institutions received 10–15% of their operating budget from their sponsoring denomination. In not one case did the denomination provide more than 15% of the institution’s annual operating budget.

The actual amount of funding institutions received from their sponsoring denominations varied much more, demonstrating a reflection, perhaps, of the significant diversity by institutional size found within the CCCU membership. Funding levels in 2011 ranged from \$4,000 to \$2,910,000, with an average of \$1,003,048. A majority of institutions (75%) received less than \$1.5 million from their sponsoring denominations (see Figure 2).

In order to contextualize current funding levels, participants were also asked to provide budget allocations from their institutions’ sponsoring denominations for the past 20 years. Not surprisingly, this longitudinal data was more difficult to acquire; none of the respondents could

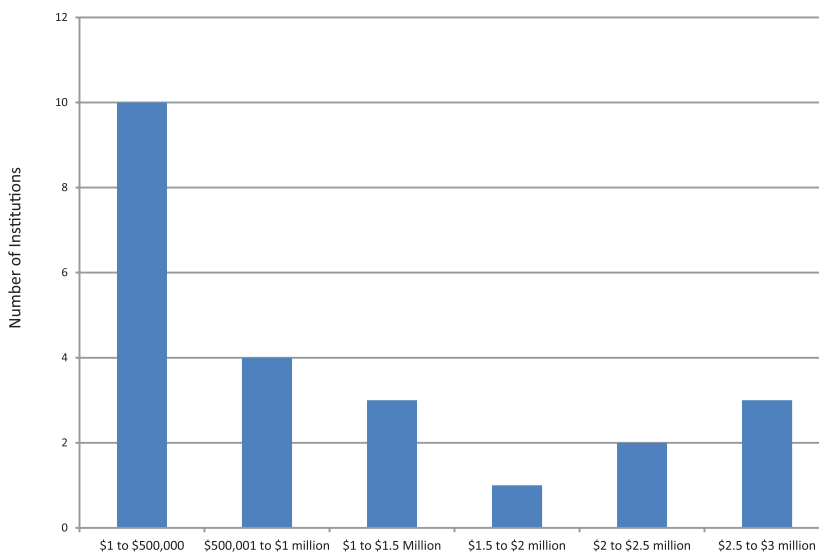


FIGURE 2 Total Nominal Dollars Provided by Sponsoring Denominations, FY 2011 ($n = 23$). (Color figure available online.)

provide data for the full period that we requested. However, survey participants from 11 institutions were able to provide funding amounts for the past decade, both in nominal dollars and as a percentage of the institution's annual operating budget.

In 2002, denominational appropriations received by these 11 institutions funded 5% of their operating budgets, on average. This average declined every year until it reached 2.7% in 2011, a drop of 46% in just 10 years. Figure 3 illustrates the change over time in denominational funding for these 11 institutions. It should be noted that, on occasion, individual institutions did experience a slight uptick on this measure at points during this period. However, a downward trend was evident, as every one of these 11 institutions received less denominational financial support as a percentage of the operating budget in 2011 than had been the case a decade earlier.

In addition, the actual amount of funding reported by participants suggests that these declines were not simply the result of institutional growth outpacing annual increases in denominational giving. In 2002, these 11 institutions received an average of \$1.18 million from their sponsoring denomination. A decade later, the average denominational appropriation in nominal dollars had declined almost 20%, to \$950,498. Although the trend for this measure was negative overall, it is important to note that the average denominational appropriation in nominal dollars remained nearly unchanged for the first half of the decade, and then began to steadily drop after 2008. Figure 4 presents the funding amounts reported by each institution for this period of time. Only one institution (#6 on Figure 4) actually reported an increase in nominal dollars from 2002 to 2011 (+\$24,025).

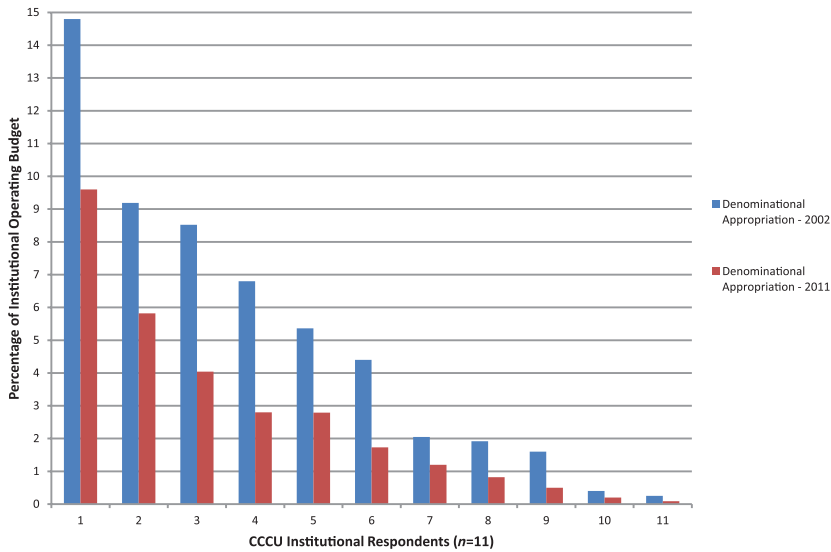


FIGURE 3 Denominational Appropriations as a Percentage of Institutional Operating Budget, 2002–2011. (Color figure available online.)

Employment Expectations

The emphasis an institution places on its denominational affiliation is revealed in part by the personal commitments required of its leaders. Participants were asked to indicate whether or not

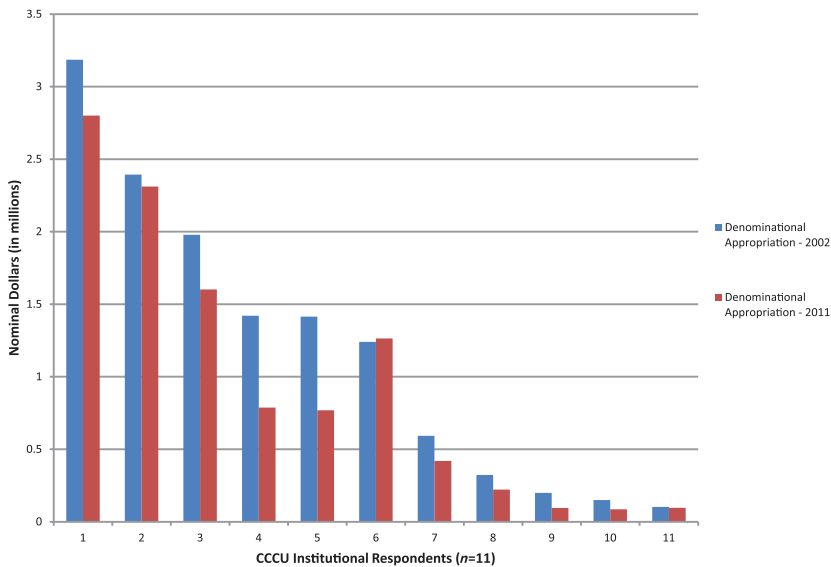


FIGURE 4 Denominational Appropriations in Nominal Dollars, 2002–2011. (Color figure available online.)

TABLE 6
Employment Expectations: President's Denominational Affiliation ($n = 63$)

| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|---|------------|-----------|--------------|
| College president required to hold membership in the sponsoring denomination? | 73% | 17% | 10% |
| Has this requirement changed in the past 20 years? | 8% | 92% | 0% |

three types of institutional leaders were required to share the denominational affiliation of the institution: the college president, all faculty members, and faculty serving in the religion/theology department. In order to collect data for the period of time when other scholars began to notice declines in denominational identity among American Protestants, we also asked participants if these standards had changed over the past 20 years. Table 6 presents results regarding expectations for CCCU college presidents.

A majority of respondents (73%) indicated that the president was required to share the denominational affiliation of the college, while 17% indicated that no such requirement existed at their institution. The remaining 10% of participants chose the open-ended response option labeled "other," and offered comments that fell into two general categories. One group ($n = 3$) indicated that, although someone who belonged to the sponsoring denomination of the institution traditionally held the presidency, no written policy required this arrangement. A second group ($n = 3$) responded that the president must evidence general agreement with the sponsoring denomination's positions, a requirement met through adherence to the denomination's statement of faith or personal membership in a church body in ecclesiastical fellowship with the sponsoring denomination.

Only 8% of respondents ($n = 5$) reported a change in the denominational affiliation expectation for the president. Again, respondents did not provide enough information to ascertain the nature of the changes. In the one case where the change was explained, the standard was expanded slightly to include membership in "a denomination in ecclesiastical fellowship."

With respect to denominational restrictions for faculty hiring, most respondents indicated that their institutions were less restrictive (see Table 7). Respondents from only five schools—three affiliated with the Churches of Christ and two sponsored by the Assemblies of God—indicated that all faculty members were required to belong to their institutions' sponsoring denominations.

Nonetheless, 51% of respondents ($n = 32$) indicated that some faculty at their institution were required to belong to the sponsoring denomination. Open-ended responses given to explain this choice revealed three different standards for faculty denominational affiliation. Two institutions required all faculty to be members of the institutional denomination or a "denomination in ecclesiastical fellowship." Seven other institutions utilized a target percentage or institutional goals for faculty membership in the sponsoring denomination, which ranged from as little as a

TABLE 7
Employment Expectations: Denominational Affiliation of Faculty ($n = 63$)

| | <i>Yes (all)</i> | <i>Some are</i> | <i>No</i> |
|---|------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Are faculty members required to hold membership in the sponsoring denomination? | 8% | 51% | 41% |
| Has this requirement changed in the past 20 years? | 11% | 0% | 89% |

TABLE 8
Employment Expectations: Denominational Affiliation of Religion/Theology Faculty ($n = 63$)

| | <i>Yes (all)</i> | <i>Some are</i> | <i>No</i> |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Are faculty members in Religion/Theology required to hold membership in the sponsoring denomination? | 43% | 18% | 39% |
| Has this requirement changed in the past 20 years? | 13% | 0% | 87% |

third to as many as nine out of 10 faculty members. Another group of 22 institutions required either that a certain percentage of faculty associated with the Christian studies, Biblical studies, or theology department, must belong to the institution's sponsoring denomination.⁴

In general, employment expectations for faculty appear to have remained relatively stable over the past two decades, as only seven respondents indicated that denominational standards for faculty had changed during that time period. Three institutions indicated that denominational expectations for faculty were relaxed, while one institution indicated that their standard did become stricter for faculty serving in the religion department. Loosening of denominational expectations for faculty took the form of lowering a target percentage for faculty (e.g., from 80% to 75%), allowing faculty to be members of churches in "ecclesiastical fellowship" with the sponsoring denomination of the institution, or hiring less from the denomination since "with regional accreditation the faculty have been selected from a broader evangelical range."

The final question posed to respondents regarding employment expectations asked if faculty members serving in the religion, theology, Christian Studies, or Bible departments were required to hold membership in the institution's affiliated denomination (see Table 8). A majority of respondents (59%) indicated that at least some of the religion/theology faculty were expected to belong to the sponsoring denomination, with a plurality (41%) noting that their institution required all religion/theology faculty to meet this standard. Eight respondents listed a target percentage for the denominational commitments of their religion/theology faculty, and in six of these cases the number provided was greater than two thirds. Changes to this employment expectation were somewhat rare, as only eight respondents reported adjustments to institutional policy in this area over the past 20 years. Of those indicating the nature of the change, one institution required more of its religion/theology faculty to belong to its sponsoring denomination, one indicated a small reduction in the required percentage (from 80% to 75%), and one simply said the requirements "had been broadened."

Hiring and Enrollment Patterns

The denominational composition of the faculty and student body provides another metric for assessing the extent to which a Christian college privileges its founding church. In particular, hiring and enrollment patterns offer a window into the campus culture an institution has created through its faculty and student recruitment efforts. Somewhat surprisingly, less than half (47%)

⁴ Thirteen of these respondents actually answered "no" to this question, but then proceeded to affirm and explain in a subsequent question that all or some of their faculty in the religion, theology, or Christian studies department were required to be affiliated with the denomination. In light of the contradiction, we assumed they misunderstood the question or failed to see the "some are" option and changed their answer to "some are."

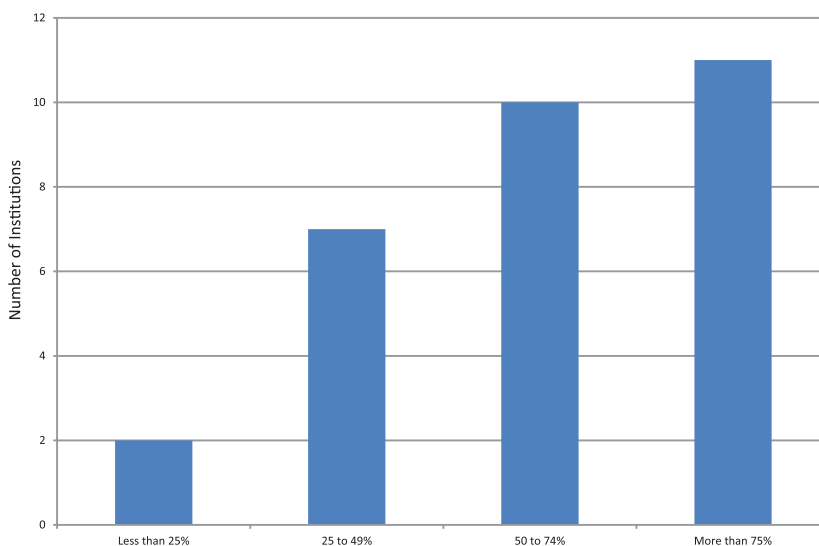


FIGURE 5 Percentage of Faculty Who Belong to Institution's Sponsoring Denomination, Fall 2011 ($n = 30$). (Color figure available online.)

of survey participants from denominationally affiliated colleges and universities could provide a current distribution of their institution's faculty by denominational membership. In most cases, participants noted that their institutions simply did not track these data, although one person indicated that potential faculty are required to state their denominational affiliation on the employment application, but the responses are not compiled in any systematic manner. Results for institutions that did track faculty denominational affiliation are found in Figure 5.

Among survey participants working at denominationally affiliated colleges, responses for this item ranged from 5% to 100%, with a mean of 59%. In fact, 70% of respondents who provided data for this measure ($n = 21$) indicated that more than half of the faculty serving at their school belonged to the institution's founding church. Moreover, in only three cases did faculty who identified with the institution's sponsoring denomination not constitute a plurality. Put another way, at least one additional denominational subpopulation of faculty was larger than the group of faculty who belonged to the founding church at these three institutions. In two of these cases, however, the institution's sponsoring denomination was one of the smaller evangelical Protestant denominations in America.

In general, we found that respondents from institutions that were affiliated with smaller denominations tended to report smaller percentages of faculty who identified with their institution's ecclesiastical patron. Furthermore, some of the greatest variability was observed within the larger denominations. For example, percentages reported by participants working at Baptist institutions ranged from 32% to 77%. This variability could stem from the decentralized nature of Baptist polity (i.e., Baptist colleges and universities are typically governed by state conventions, rather than a national assembly), or it might simply be a function of receiving more responses from participants serving in Baptist institutions (37% of the persons who completed this survey item were from Baptist schools).

As with our earlier question about annual funding provided by the institution's ecclesiastical patron, we attempted to collect longitudinal data regarding the percentage of faculty belonging to the institution's sponsoring denomination in order to examine change over time. As might be expected, these data were even more difficult to obtain; only 23% of respondents ($n = 15$) from denominationally affiliated sample institutions could provide data for years prior to the current year. Within this subgroup, six respondents worked at institutions requiring nearly all (e.g., 95–100%) of their faculty to belong to the founding denomination of the college. Consequently, little change over time occurred among these institutions. Although we requested data for the past two decades, the remaining nine respondents could only provide percentages for the previous six years (in addition to the present year). In contrast to the results regarding annual denominational appropriations to their affiliated institutions, these data did not reveal any discernible patterns, perhaps because of the truncated time frame and/or the relatively small number of institutions in the subsample. Generally speaking, results showed that the percentage of faculty belonging to each institution's sponsoring denomination tended to ebb and flow from year to year within a 5–10-point range.

Longitudinal student enrollment figures were a different story. In contrast to the relatively low response rate (48%) regarding the denominational commitments of faculty members, almost three-quarters of survey participants (73% total, with 44 respondents from denominationally affiliated schools and 14 from nondenominational institutions) were able to provide data regarding the denominational affiliation of the students at their institution. Of particular note, participants from all but one of the nondenominational institutions provided the current denominational distribution of their students, versus only 68% of the institutions formally connected to an ecclesiastical body. Ironically, our sample suggests that nondenominational Christian colleges may be more intentional about tracking the church membership of their students than their denominationally affiliated peers.

Most respondents ($n = 34$) serving in denominationally related institutions indicated that a plurality of their students belonged to the sponsoring church. Among these schools, the average percentage of students who identified with the institution's sponsoring denomination ranged from 15% to 63% of the total student body, with an average of 41%. At some institutions, the percentage of students who identified with the sponsoring denomination was relatively low. However, because the student body represented a wide range of denominational affiliations, the sponsoring church still enjoyed majority status. At institutions where the sponsoring church was not the top denominational affiliation among students ($n = 14$), the range was more narrow (2% to 27%) and the average was far lower (10%). At one institution, the sponsoring denomination did not even rank within the top 10 denominational affiliations of its students.

To aid our interpretation of these data, we also asked respondents to provide the percentage of students at their institution who belonged to the sponsoring denomination for each of the past 20 years. Again, this type of longitudinal data was more difficult to obtain than figures from the current year, although respondents from 35 of the denominationally affiliated institutions did provide percentages for the previous 8 years.

Two of the 35 responding institutions reported increases in the percentage of students who belonged to the institution's affiliated denomination, while the percentage remained the same at two other institutions. However, these results should be viewed as the exception to a general pattern revealed by Figure 6, namely, that Christian colleges are educating fewer students from their sponsoring churches than they were just eight years ago. Although a few institutions avoided

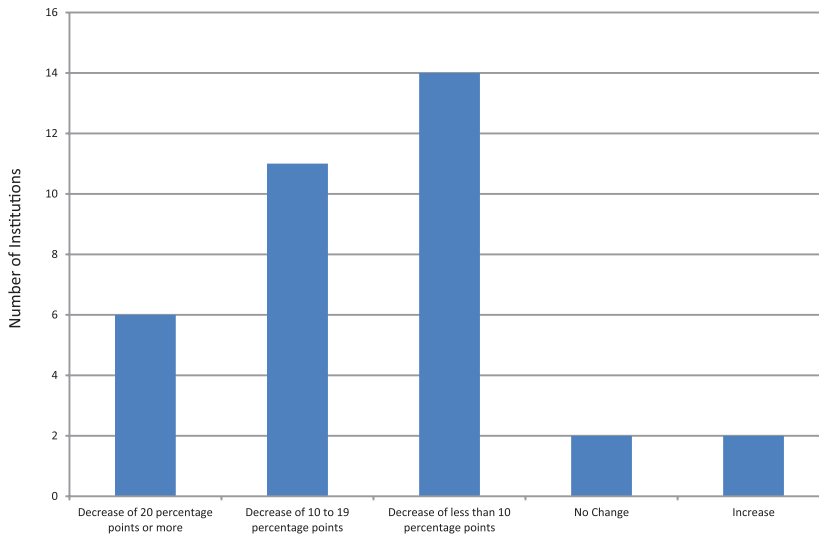


FIGURE 6 Difference in Percentage of Students Who Belong to the Institution's Sponsoring Denomination, 2003–2011 ($n = 35$). (Color figure available online.)

decline during this period, the vast majority enrolled fewer students from their sponsoring denominations in 2011 than they had less than a decade before. Moreover, although some of these institutions experienced a slight uptick at points during this period, the overall trend for this measure was negative. Declines for these institutions ranged from as little as one to as much as 29 percentage points, with an average decrease of nearly 12 percentage points.

A few respondents ($n = 14$) were able to provide percentages from as early as 1996. The change over time in denominational affiliation for students attending these institutions during this period is presented in Figure 7. Although the rates of decline vary by institution, the downward trend suggested earlier appears to be confirmed by these data. In fact, every one of the institutions that provided data for this 16-year period experienced a decline in the percentage of students they enrolled from their affiliated denominations. Notably, the decline at two institutions was less than a percentage point. However, at each of these colleges, less than 6% of the student body identified with the institution's sponsoring denomination in 1996, leaving little room for decline. At the remaining 12 institutions, declines ranged from just under 5 percentage points at one institution, to a staggering 37 percentage point drop at another. On average, the number of students who identified with the sponsoring denominations of these 12 institutions declined by nearly 19 percentage points, a remarkable decline for a relatively short time span.

Co/Curricular Policies

One final way to assess a Christian college's commitment to its ecclesiastical sponsor is to examine the ways in which it privileges its denomination in the formal curriculum and cocurriculum. Are classes covering the sponsoring denomination's history or theology included in the undergraduate curriculum as required coursework? Are Christian groups (i.e., parachurch student organizations)

TABLE 9
Curricular and Cocurricular Policies at Denominationally Affiliated Christian Colleges

| | Yes | No |
|---|-----|-----|
| Are students required to complete a course about the history or theology of the institution's sponsoring denomination? ($n = 62$) | 19% | 81% |
| Are Christian groups not affiliated with the institution's sponsoring denomination allowed official recognition on campus? ($n = 62$) | 94% | 6% |
| Has the policy regarding Christian groups changed in the past 20 years? ($n = 57$) | 9% | 91% |

not affiliated with the sponsoring denomination allowed official status on campus? Has the standard changed for official recognition of such groups? Survey participants were asked to provide responses to each of these three questions.

Our findings suggest that institutions rarely make denominational identity a subject of curricular requirements or a source of cocurricular restrictions (see Table 9). For instance, only 19% of respondents ($n = 12$) indicated that their college required all students to complete a course about the history or theology of the sponsoring denomination. Notably, on further inspection of the course titles provided by these respondents, it appeared that only half were stand-alone classes specifically designed to introduce students to the history or theology of the sponsoring denomination. Finally, just 6% of respondents ($n = 4$) indicated that Christian groups had to be affiliated with their institution's sponsoring denomination to be granted official status at their school. In five cases, institutional policy had been changed over the past 20 years, and institutions explained the change thus: the policy was relaxed to allow nondenominational Christian groups to receive official recognition on campus.

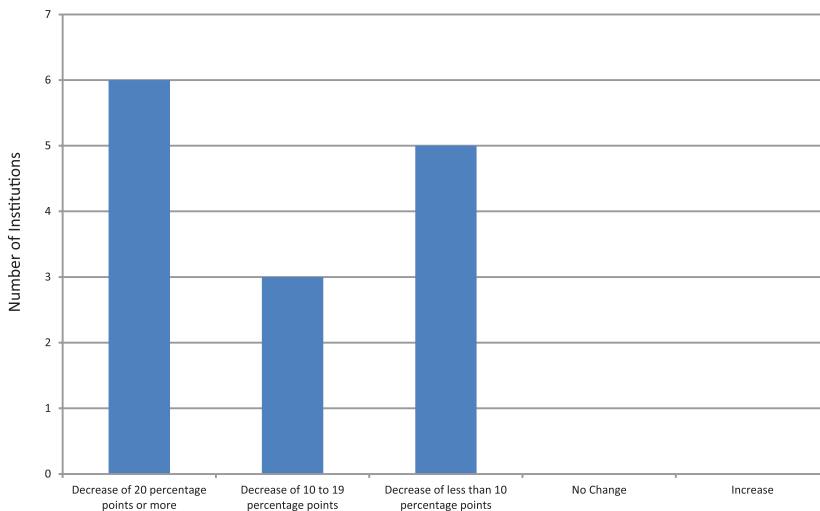


FIGURE 7 Difference in Percentage of Students Who Belong to the Institution's Sponsoring Denomination 1996–2011 ($n = 14$). (Color figure available online.)

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In reviewing our findings regarding denominational identity at church-related CCCU member institutions, our concluding discussion regarding the first phase of the CCCU Denominational Study is divided into two parts: (a) observations about the current state of denominational identity maintenance and (b) observations about longitudinal patterns affecting denominational identity maintenance.

Our findings from the institutional survey suggest that a number of policies and practices currently in place at many church-related colleges serve to maintain and support denominational identity. One particularly strong example is in the area of college governance. Ecclesiastical bodies appointed some or all of the trustees at an overwhelming majority (87%) of the institutions we sampled, suggesting that a significant denominational voice is still present in institutional policy at most church-related Christian colleges. In addition, we found that denominations have continued to serve as patrons to their affiliated colleges, as a strong majority (74%) of the institutions we sampled currently receive appropriations from their sponsoring church. Finally, our results revealed that employment expectations also serve to maintain denominational identity on many Christian college campuses. We found that nearly three-quarters of church-related schools (73%) required their presidents to belong to the sponsoring denomination, while more than half (59%) required denominational membership for at least some of their faculty (often in the religion/theology department). Taken together, these current policies and practices represent significant efforts made by ecclesiastical bodies and college officials to maintain the denominational identity of the institutions they serve.

Our findings regarding institutional co/curricular policies tell a different story. Church-sponsored colleges appear far less willing to use their formal curricula and cocurricular programming to emphasize their denominational backgrounds and beliefs. Students are rarely required to complete any specific coursework regarding the history or theology of their institutions' sponsoring traditions. Although consistent with past research (Glanzer & Ream, 2005), this finding presents a striking example of how many Christian colleges decline a clear opportunity to emphasize their denominational heritages and commitments. Our results suggest a similar phenomenon with regard to the cocurriculum, as very few Christian colleges (8%) reported that they granted exclusivity to campus groups affiliated with their sponsoring denominations.

Results of longitudinal data analysis revealed trends in the areas of university financing and student enrollment patterns that could affect denominational identity maintenance going forward, should those trends continue. As we noted earlier, ecclesiastical bodies have continued to financially support their affiliated colleges and universities. However, the levels of annual funding they have provided, both as a percentage of the overall budget and in total dollar amounts, have waned since 2008. Whether this decline simply mirrors recent decreases in state appropriations for public higher education as a result of the 2008 financial crisis (Kelderman, 2013), or signals a more fundamental shift in denominational support for higher education, it is difficult to say.

More obvious, perhaps, is the longitudinal change we found in the area of student enrollment. Enrollment figures quite clearly indicate that church-related colleges are simply not educating as many students who report affiliation with their sponsoring denominations as they did 15 years ago. Unknown is whether this phenomenon is the result of declines in denominational membership, intentional deemphasis of denominational brand (but not denominational beliefs) by local

congregations, or changes in student recruitment practices by the colleges themselves. Regardless, this shift in the denominational composition of Christian college student bodies presents a significant challenge for institutional identity maintenance at church-related institutions.

Perhaps the best way to summarize the findings of Phase I of the CCCU Denominational Study is to say that denominations linked to CCCU institutions continue to provide a measure of oversight and funding to their affiliated colleges and universities, and the policies and practices of these institutions privilege their ecclesiastical patrons in varying degrees. We found clear evidence that change is afoot in certain areas of institutional life, most notably in the area of student enrollment. However, based on our initial findings, we think it premature to declare that church-related CCCU institutions are losing their denominational identity or becoming more generically Christian.

Further exploration of this question will occur in parts II (faculty perspectives and practices) and III (the student experience) of this article series. Our next article will examine both faculty perceptions of the extent to which their institutions emphasize their denominational identity, and faculty preferences regarding institutional policies related to the denominational character of their respective colleges and universities. In addition, we will report on the theological beliefs of faculty serving in church-related colleges, and the ways in which those beliefs inform their classroom practice. The final article in this three-part series will investigate various dimensions of the student experience, including level of involvement with denominational programming and events, perspectives on the importance of denominational identity in the Christian college context, and the degree of alignment between personal beliefs and denominational positions. The third article will also seek to offer a summative evaluation of the state of denominational identity within the church-related member institutions of the CCCU.

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