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A Survey of Graduate Students' Perspectives on the Integration of Faith and Learning

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Abstract

Little scholarly attention has been dedicated to the integration of faith and learning (IFL) for graduate students in Christian higher education. While the spiritual development of students is central to the mission of the Christian higher education institution, graduate students often have limited opportunities for spiritual development outside of class attendance, which highlights the need for the use of effective approaches to IFL by faculty within their courses. This research utilized an online survey completed by graduate students across disciplines in a private Christian university. Survey questions focused on students' ratings of the general importance of IFL in choosing a graduate program, their perceptions of the effect of IFL on their spiritual development, the importance of specific IFL approaches used by their professors in the classroom, and examples of effective IFL. Results indicate that most students valued IFL in selecting a graduate program and felt their spiritual identity and understanding of their faith had deepened due to IFL. Most students valued all types of IFL presented in the survey, but it was most important to students that their professors model Christian values and attitudes as a means of IFL in the classroom. Selected narrative descriptions of students' explanations of effective IFL are presented thematically, and the implications of the data are discussed.

Key words: Graduate students; Faith Integration

Christian colleges and universities have long been leaders in the complex process of a specific type of interdisciplinary education, the integration of faith and learning (IFL). IFL is a primary distinctive of Christian higher education. The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) is a higher education association serving almost 200 Christian colleges and universities globally, providing leadership and advocacy for institutions that are "Christ-centered and rooted in the historic Christian faith." The CCCU describes the first 'commitment' of Christian higher education as:

> *First*, we integrate biblical truth not just into "spiritual" aspects of the institution but throughout the academic enterprise. Our professors pursue academic excellence because they are committed to God as the author of truth, and that truth has implications for every academic discipline. The classroom and the laboratory are just as much arenas of Christian integration as the college chapel. (CCCU, 2018, p. 3)

Historically, as IFL has been discussed, evaluated, and debated by scholars and practitioners, the emphasis has been more on professors' practice than on students' experiences and learning (Bailey, 2012; Ripley et al., 2009). As a private Christian institution of higher education in Southern California, effective IFL is central to fulfilling our mission. All students who graduate from a degree program are expected to meet the four University Student Outcomes (USOs), also called the "Core Four": 1) *Biblically Rooted*, 2) *Academically Prepared*, 3) *Globally Minded*, and 4) *Equipped to Serve*. The university's deep commitment to IFL is represented in the first USO, *Biblically Rooted*. Students admitted to degree programs are not required to be Christians and, as such, come with varying levels of knowledge and interest in the Christian faith. This means that the commitment to IFL by every professor in every classroom, in all disciplines, is critical to ensuring students will have been exposed to and meet the expectations for what is *Biblically Rooted*. Significant resources have been allocated to hiring and training the faculty to ensure

students achieve this outcome. Like the pedagogical practices designed to promote learning, the effectiveness of the IFL approaches used within academic programs and courses can be improved with research and evaluation.

Problem and Purpose

In traditional undergraduate programs, the IFL by professors in all academic disciplines is typically part of a broader program to develop Biblical literacy and knowledge of the Christian faith and practice. For example, in addition to their required undergraduate coursework, all students are required to complete 12 units within the general education curriculum (nine in Christian studies and three in philosophy) that include direct instruction about the Christian faith and the Bible. Undergraduate students must also attend 15 chapel services each semester and have other co-curricular faith development opportunities, particularly if they reside in on-campus housing. This comprehensive approach supports students' achievement of the goals outlined in the *Biblically Rooted* USO, which include "demonstrating spiritual literacy, including knowledge of the Biblical Christian faith and practice, Baptist perspectives, and the Christian's role in fulfilling the Great Commission, and respecting diverse religious, cultural, philosophical, and aesthetic experiences and perspectives" (California Baptist University Catalog, 2023).

Graduate students at the university are also expected to meet the *Biblically Rooted* USO in their degree programs, but unlike undergraduate students, they have no requirements for any courses that primarily provide direct instruction in the Christian faith; there are also no requirements for chapel attendance and far fewer co-curricular faith development opportunities. The IFL that occurs in graduate programs happens almost exclusively within discipline-specific course requirements, so the only means of promoting graduate students becoming *biblically rooted* is through IFL in the classes they complete to earn their degree. Although the university provides some training and resources to faculty on practicing IFL, faculty approaches are varied, individualistic, and dependent on course content, program design, learning modality, personal preference, and other factors. Few organized efforts to gather data on students' experience of IFL have yet been made at the university. Other than a single question at the end of course evaluations that references the overall integration of faith in the course, there is currently no structured means of assessing graduate students' level of *biblically rooted*.

The purpose of this article is to describe the results of an IFL survey project implemented in a private Christian university in Southern California with graduate students in programs across campus. To learn more about how graduate students value and perceive IFL and to gain information about approaches to IFL "that are less fruitful than other methods," graduate students' perspectives on IFL were gathered (Ripley et al., 2009, p. 7). The survey asked students to rate the general importance of IFL in choosing a graduate program, their perceptions of the effect of IFL on their personal spiritual development, the importance of specific IFL approaches used by their professors in the classroom, and the perceived effectiveness of selected IFL approaches. Demographic information was gathered, and there were open-ended questions at the end of the survey for students to provide additional information and examples of effective IFL. Related literature, survey results, and implications are discussed in the sections below.

Supporting Literature

Selecting a university and graduate degree program requires the consideration of many factors, such as cost, program length, modality, flexibility of time, accreditation status, focus or specialty, and location, among other considerations. Another factor that students may consider is the mission of the institution. Boyer (1990) elevates the mission or vision of an institution by asking, "How can each of the nation's colleges and universities define, with clarity, its own special purposes?" (p. 18). A faith-based institution can support the essence of the organizational mission by integrating faith and learning (IFL). This distinction can be an essential factor in choosing a graduate school for some students. Every accredited institution is expected to define the institutional mission and provide regular assessment data demonstrating successful efforts to fulfill that mission. While specific assignments can be assessed for understanding the mission, cognitive measures should not be the only stream of assessment data. Students' perceptions and satisfaction can also prove to be valuable and effective data when measuring the vision or mission of an institution of higher learning.

Faith integration is a complex concept and process. Cosgrove (2015) notes that there is "not one standard conceptual model of integration," highlighting the "semantic ambiguity and rich theological diversity" of how IFL can be viewed by scholars and learners (p. 230). As Purper et al. (2020) pointed out, "what comprises appropriate faith integration in higher education may differ depending on factors such as the college or university, the specific faith tradition or denomination, the subject matter, the learning context (face to face, online, or hybrid), the individual faculty member, and the student" (p. 1). For the purposes of this paper, the authors regarded the definition of IFL by Ripley et al. (2009) as fitting, especially with the intended focus on graduate students. Ripley et al. understand IFL as "engaging students in a dialogue to

integrate existing shared aspects of the faith into their training for a profession while simultaneously appreciating each student's uniqueness" (2009, p. 5). The authors also support the assertion of Burton and Nwosu (2003) that, ideally, effective IFL "leads to integration of faith in aspects of a person's life and character" (p. 102).

While curriculum can create the opportunity, faculty are likely the single most important factor in the effective delivery of IFL. Faith-based institutions usually have a hiring requirement of faith that includes all employees. Ideally, employees' commitment to the Christian faith permeates through the institution and is visible in faculty development, assessment practices, scholarship opportunities, student care and interactions, and the overall climate of the educational experience. As Farbishel et al. (2020) emphasized, "Christian educational institutions need to be intentional, not only for holding onto their foundational beliefs and values but also for providing the necessary platform for instructors to teach from a Christian worldview" (p. 15).

Intentional IFL in the classroom can take many forms. Dulaney et al. (2015) described faith integration by three distinct dimensions: 1) Inside Integration; 2) Outside Integration, and 3) Mentoring. Inside integration "revolves around the professor intentionally bringing faith into the discussion of the academic at hand" (p. 57). This has been a focus for most faith-based institutions in the last decade and is possibly the most difficult dimension to implement and measure. Textbooks do not typically include a faith integration component, leaving the professor with the task of adding to an already tight schedule around specific content, some of which "seem more suited to faith integration (FI) than others" (Nehrbass, 2022, p. 13). Outside integration is described as a supplement to the inside integration. Inviting speakers and guest lecturers who speak to the value of a Christian worldview, combined with community service and experiential learning is "another way students can see the value of integrating their faith" (Dulaney et al., 2015, p. 58). Mentoring, the third dimension, captures the one-on-one interactions between the student and the professor or a university-sponsored mentor and is crucial in supporting IFL. Burton and Nwosu (2005) explain the importance of the "role that the classroom climate plays in setting the stage for faith-learning integration" (p. 18). Topics related to the university culture and climate included "feeling accepted by classmates, feeling safe to respond honestly in class, perceiving the classroom as a pleasant place to be and the feeling of being supported by the professor and their classmates" (Burton & Nwosu, 2005, p. 19).

Research specific to IFL in graduate programs is limited. Sorenson (1997) focused his quantitative work on student perceptions of IFL in a doctoral psychology program and found that "a professor's ongoing process in a personal relationship with God is the single most important dimension that accounts for what students found helpful for their own integration of clinical psychology and faith" (p. 541). Sorensen's (1997) work on graduate student IFL was furthered by Ripley et al. (2009), who expanded the theoretical framework beyond an attachment model, and developed a third domain of "environmental factors" such as scripture reading and in-class prayer, forms of IFL which are included in the present study. More research is needed to understand the perspectives of graduate students related to IFL.

Methodology

This research used a quantitative online survey distributed to all graduate students at a private Christian university in Southern California. In addition to a series of Likert scale responses, a few open-ended narrative questions were included at the survey's end. The Institutional Review Board approved this project at the university. Subjects provided electronic consent before completing the survey. All participants were informed of the process to ensure full confidentiality and their ability to opt out at any time in the survey, provided contact information for questions, and advised of the availability of counseling services in case of an adverse reaction to the survey experience.

Survey Instrument

The researchers modeled the organization of an integration of faith and learning (IFL) survey on the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory™ (SSI), which measures two aspects of student experience: 1) importance (to the student) and 2) satisfaction. The SSI was chosen as a model because of the instrument's conceptual design, with prompts revolving around the duality of students' perceptions of a) value and b) satisfaction, concepts that matched our own interests in graduate students' value and satisfaction with their experiences of IFL. In addition, students at our university are already familiar with completing the SSI, so we hoped this familiarity might enhance the IFL survey completion by the graduate population. The IFL survey was designed to measure graduate students' views on the *importance* of IFL generally and specifically, and to measure the *effectiveness of* the various types of IFL implemented in their graduate school experiences. Basic demographic data was also gathered.

Beyond standard demographic questions, the survey had 22 questions about IFL in the classroom. Each question used a five-point Likert scale, with students rating the level of agreement with a series of prompts related to IFL. The survey asked the respondent to identify how *important* that

item was to their graduate experience and how *effectively* it had been implemented in their experiences. The types of IFL were inspired by the forms of IFL discussed in Dulaney et al. (2015) and Purper et al. (2020), as well as the discussion of how faculty typically approach IFL in our institution. After completing these sections, respondents had the opportunity to answer a final open-ended question asking them to "describe an effective example of the integration of faith and learning you have experienced during your current graduate program and explain the impact it had on you."

Participants

The population surveyed in this research were all graduate students enrolled at a private Christian university in Southern California in Fall 2022. The university had 2,217 graduate students enrolled in 47 (40 master and 7 doctoral) different graduate programs in the Fall 2022 semester. In total, 160 graduate students from 25 different graduate programs completed the demographic sections of the survey, with slightly fewer completing the entire survey. Approximately 31% of respondents were White, 30% were Hispanic/Latino, 16% were Black/African American, and 8% were Asian. These numbers align with the overall racial/ethnic breakdown of the university student population. Regarding religious preference, approximately 77% of the respondents self-identified as Christian (Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox), while 9% identified as Not Religious.

Data Management and Analysis

All graduate students enrolled at the university during Fall 2022 were sent an email explaining the study and inviting them to participate by responding to the survey. The survey was available for four weeks, and a second invitation to participate was sent via email approximately five weeks after the first email. Students who elected to take the survey submitted a digital consent form and were then directed to the survey in Qualtrics. All responses were anonymous. The data was collected, stored, and analyzed using the Qualtrics program managed by the university's Office of Educational Effectiveness (OEE). The invitation to participate in the survey, reminder emails, questions, and responses were also routed through the OEE email account.

Numerical responses to each Likert scale question were calculated individually by number and percentage, after which the two disagree responses (somewhat or strongly agree), and the two agree responses (somewhat or strongly agree) were aggregated for a more simplified presentation of the data. Narrative responses to the last question on effective examples of IFL were coded and sorted by specific type of IFL. This process began with creating a master list of statements in Microsoft Word. Thematic analysis was then performed by reading the students' comments and highlighting keywords to identify the comment's meaning. The primary author created a coding frame and completed an initial thematic analysis independently; co-researchers then reviewed the results independently to confirm the themes. The entire research group met to discuss the results and resolve any discrepancies. In this way, the reliability of the coding process was enhanced.

Design and Instrument Limitations

The study design and instrument used to gather data have inherent limitations. This survey was implemented with approximately 160 students from one university, so it could be that the sample is too small and homogenous for maximum generalizability. Because this was a convenience sample, it is also possible that students who do not value IFL self-selected out of the study rather than take the time to answer the questions. If this is the case, a more positive view of student valuation of IFL is expressed in the findings.

Results

The IFL survey results provided below were grouped as presented in the survey into sections by related content. The first section includes data on the importance of integrating faith and learning (IFL) in students' graduate programs and their perception of how the IFL has impacted them. The following section provides information about students' ratings of importance concerning various approaches to IFL. Finally, selected narrative excerpts are included below for each IFL type that emerged thematically from the narrative responses provided by students.

The Importance of and Response to IFL in Graduate Programs

Approximately 155 participants rated their level of agreement to all prompts in the first part of the survey, in which students were asked to rate the importance of IFL as a graduate student and their response to the experience of IFL during their degree program. About 55% of the participants agreed that the Christian mission of the university was significant to their selection of a graduate program. The average level of student agreement with the other three questions was slightly higher. Between 60% to 70% of the respondents agreed that a) IFL is important to them, b) their understanding of the Bible and Christianity has grown as a result of the IFL in their graduate programs, and c) that the IFL has strengthened their spiritual identity in their graduate programs. A quantitative summary of students' responses to prompts in the first section of the survey is summarized in Table 1 below, ranked by level of importance to students.

Table 1: The Importance/Response to the Integration of Faith and Learning in Graduate Program (ranked in order of level of importance to students)

Prompt:	Somewhat or Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Somewhat or Strongly Agree		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	Total n
The integration of faith and learning in my graduate courses is important to me.	27	17.42	25	16.13	103	66.45	155
My overall spiritual identity has been strengthened as a result of the integration of faith and learning in my graduate program.	36	23.22	21	13.55	98	63.23	155
My understanding of the Bible and Christian beliefs has grown as a result of the integration of faith and learning in my graduate program.	34	21.94	27	17.42	94	60.64	155
The Christian mission of [the university] was a significant factor in my choice to attend [the university].	39	25.16	30	19.35	86	55.49	155

The Importance of Specific Types of IFL

Approximately 137 participants rated their level of agreement with all nine prompts in this section. Although a majority of students agreed that all nine types of IFL were important, some types were rated as more important than others. The highest number (over 80%) of participants agreed that 1) my professors model Christian values and attitudes and 2) my professors facilitate learning experiences that promote the expression and discussion of diverse beliefs were important types of IFL used by their professors. Between 70% and 80% of participants believed that the following types of IFL by their professors were important: 1) my professors pray with and/or for me; 2) my professors intentionally connect Christian principles to topics we are studying in class, 3) my professors structure classroom activities and assignments that allow students to practice intentional integration of the Bible and Christian beliefs, 4) my professors help me apply principles of the Christian faith to professional challenges I may encounter in my workplace/profession, 5) my professors help me apply principles of the Christian faith to personal challenges I may encounter in my life, and 6) my professors share and discuss their personal beliefs and experience of the Christian faith in the classroom. The lowest number (62%) of participants agreed it was important that "my professors facilitate learning experiences outside the classroom which allow me to see the Christian faith in action, such as interviews, fieldwork, observation, or service learning." A quantitative summary of students' responses to prompts in the second section is summarized in Table 2 below, ranked by level of importance to students.

Table 2: The Importance of Specific Types of Integration of Faith and Learning (ranked in order of level of importance to students)

Prompt:	Somewhat or Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Somewhat or Strongly Agree		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	Total n
My professors model Christian values and attitudes.	5	3.65	19	13.87	113	82.48	137
My professors facilitate learning experiences which promote the expression and discussion of diverse beliefs.	9	6.57	16	11.68	112	81.75	137
My professors intentionally connect Christian principles to topics we are studying in class.	11	8.03	18	13.14	108	78.83	137

Table 2 (Continued)

My professors help me apply principles of the Christian faith to professional challenges I may encounter in my workplace/profession.	10	7.3	24	17.52	103	75.18	137
My professors share and discuss their own personal beliefs and experience of the Christian faith in the classroom.	12	8.76	22	16.06	103	75.18	137
My professors help me apply principles of the Christian faith to personal challenges I may encounter in my life.	13	9.49	23	16.79	101	73.73	137
My professors pray with and/or for me.	17	12.41	20	14.6	100	73.0	137
My professors structure classroom activities and assignments that allow students to practice intentional integration of the Bible and Christian beliefs.	14	10.22	26	18.98	97	70.81	137
My professors facilitate learning experiences outside the classroom which allow me to see the Christian faith in action, such as interviews, fieldwork, observation, or service learning.	18	13.14	34	24.82	85	62.05	137

Examples of Effective IFL

In this section, participants were asked to "describe an effective example of the integration of faith and learning you have experienced during your current graduate program and explain the impact it had on you." A text box was provided to capture a narrative response, which was utilized by 87 of the study participants. The responses were reviewed, coded by keywords related to the approach to IFL, and then sorted into four emergent categories of approaches to IFL. Examples of effective IFL provided by students fell into the following four categories: Prayer, Connecting to the Content, Connecting to the Professor, and Supporting Diversity. Some student responses included examples from various categories, and a few students (approximately three) said they could not provide an example. Select examples of student comments from each category that emerged from these narrative responses are provided below.

Prayer

Many students cited individual and group prayer by their professors as examples of effective IFL. Some representative responses from students include:

> *"As a class, we take prayer requests, pray before session, and take turns with leading prayer. The impact it has had on me is substantial, it gives me the confidence that I do belong in spaces, even when I feel inferior."*
>
> *"My professors begin and end each session with bible teaching and prayer, which allows me time to get grounded and focus."*
>
> *"Opening class with prayer has significantly strengthened God in my life. I hear Him in my education and I apply His teachings into my studies."*
>
> *"I enjoyed when our professors ask for prayer requests or pray over all of us because it shows they care and it does not feel like too much for those who may not be believers."*
>
> *"In an online environment…the ways I have experienced Christ's influence on professorship have been professors reaching out to me in my time of need and praying with me via email, telephone, or LinkedIn."*

Connecting to the Content

Other students discussed examples of professors intentionally connecting Biblical knowledge and scripture to academic course content as being effective for IFL. For example:

> *"My professor will start the lecture with an example from the Bible on what we are going to talk about…It allows me to gain further knowledge about the Bible and have a deeper understanding on the topic."*
>
> *"Although I'm agnostic, having to look up a Bible verse and compare it to disability and explain its meaning and how I interpret it is interesting."*
>
> *"When my piano professor used a verse in Ephesians that talks about the different roles in the church, and used it to describe the fingers on the hand and their strengths in piano playing."*
>
> *"Searching out the Bible to find out how my project is validated by the word of God."*
>
> *"I read an article written by the professor about the biblical foundations for leadership and it reinforced my convictions. It reminded me of my biblical worldview and made me critically evaluate why I believe what I believe."*

Connecting to the Professor

Some students felt that opportunities for connecting with their professors and for seeing the faith of their professors on display was an effective way of promoting IFL. For example:

> *The professor "shared her struggles during COVID and how the Lord brought her through. She spoke with so much passion and faith that it made me truly believe that her faith was deep rooted in Christ. She also shared her testimony about how working at CBU has changed her life for the better because she is able to express her faith with students as well."*
>
> *The professor's "vulnerability in classroom settings."*
>
> *The professor's "caring and Christian demeanor during our live video lectures*

> *helped me make it through week two, which was one of the most challenging weeks in my life for many reasons. His encouragement to not be so hard on ourselves and not compare ourselves to others helped me mentally to find the focus needed."*
>
> *"I love how the professors know their students by name. Professors are close to students."*

Supporting Diversity

The final category of student responses involved comments related to the appreciation of diversity as an effective method of IFL. For example:

> *"During our diversity and inclusion course we spoke a lot about the value of being mindful of different beliefs and lifestyles and respectful of those individuals."*
>
> *"In all of our papers, a Christian integration portion is required. This is helpful, as it forces me to identify how I can work with individuals from a diverse group of people with a wide range of religious or spiritual beliefs."*
>
> *"The practice of cultural humility and addressing diverse groups."*

Discussion and Reflection

The results of the survey data gathered from graduate students are discussed by section below. Reflections on the narrative responses are also provided, and selected recommendations are provided.

The Importance of and Response to IFL in Graduate Programs

While distinct Christian commitment, identity, and dedication to IFL are central to the vision of Christian higher education, the survey data gathered here indicate that graduate students do not seek this vision in quite the same way. In this case, 55% of students deemed the Christian mission significant to their choice of university, meaning that 45% of students did not strongly consider this when choosing a graduate school. For the respondents who indicated that the university's Christian identity was important in their decision to attend, it is difficult to say precisely how this influenced their decision. For some, it may have been essential; for others, it may have been seen as "value added" rather than the deciding factor in selecting a school. Further research could elucidate the importance of a university's distinct Christian identity for graduate student matriculation decisions.

Regardless of how much value students placed on IFL for enrollment decisions, the data indicate that the IFL efforts are important and effective for the majority of graduate students. Though there are currently no religion courses required for graduate students at the university, the IFL efforts of individual faculty in their courses do appear to have a positive impact on the majority of students becoming *biblically rooted*, with 63% of students reporting a stronger spiritual identity and 60% of students reporting a greater understanding of the Christian faith as a result of IFL. The fact that not all students experienced equal benefits may support the recent research of Mun and Bernejo, who propose a "synergetic effect" between spirituality and response to IFL (2023, p. 51). In a study of undergraduate students (n=156) reported levels of change resulting from IFL, students who reported higher levels of spirituality also reported more change due to IFL. It could be that students who are more open to IFL also experience the most change due to IFL and that those who are less open experience much less; this could be a possible factor for the 30% of students who reported few benefits from IFL in this survey. Although more research is needed to understand these phenomena, "faculty and administrators concerned with cultivating the integration of faith and learning may want to consider these factors as they develop the teaching culture at their institutions. They must also be attuned to differences among students, with particular attention to prior experiences and where they are currently in their spiritual development" (Mun & Bernejo, 2023, p. 52). Considering ways to meet the unique needs of all students while simultaneously prioritizing IFL and supporting missional objectives will require further research and the development of creative solutions. There are plans to continue using this survey to gauge students' perspectives yearly as a foundation for this responsiveness to students.

Types and Examples of Effective IFL

The data showed that students generally valued all nine types of IFL included in the study, with approximately 62% to 82% of students supporting the importance of every type of IFL listed. Overall, it appears that graduate students value IFL in their classes and find IFL to be effective in increasing their knowledge of the Bible and their spiritual development. Because the range of responses was fairly narrow, and no forms of IFL were deemed unimportant, it appears that the use of multiple approaches resonates with graduate students. Although students reported increasing their knowledge of the Christian faith and value professors' efforts to create intentional connections between academic content and the Christian faith, they also clearly value the

applied and relational aspects of IFL. It appears that, for graduate students, IFL is more than knowing what the Bible says, though that is a necessary starting point; it is also knowing how to interpret and apply the depth and authenticity of Christian distinctiveness within the challenging intersections of modern life. Christian institutions of higher education need to prepare faculty to initiate and embrace discussions about how principles of Christianity are applied to personal and professional challenges rather than shy away from them.

Reflecting on the convergence of the quantitative and qualitative data, the focus is on approaches and examples of IFL that highlight the role of the relationship between the professor and student. The highest number of students emphasized the statement, "my professors model Christian values and attitudes." Combined with the narrative examples, these responses display the importance of students seeing the professor's personal spiritual commitment and experiences in knowing this about them and finding a connection. They seem to want their professors to be Christians, to express that clearly in the context of a relationship with them, and to allow them into their lives to watch how they navigate spiritual, professional, and personal matters. The relational nature of IFL was also evident in the multiple comments about prayer. Students valued being prayed for and with by their professors. They want to share their concerns and relate to the professor through prayer and convey a desire to 'know and be known' by their professors. That appears to give faculty entree to spiritual influence.

Students valued this interpersonal, relational approach to IFL more than a more formal assignment that required a connection of Biblical or religious principles to discipline-specific content. Of the examples of IFL, graduate students placed the least value on "learning experiences outside the classroom which allow me to see the Christian faith in action, such as interviews, fieldwork, observation, or service learning." Though this is a more structured, measurable, and arguably, "academic" form of IFL, it scored much lower in overall value to graduate students. Though the interpersonal/relational approach to IFL is less regulated and consistent, it might be more influential and personally transformative for graduate students than a more formal, direct-instruction course on religious material. This finding is reminiscent of Esther Meeks' work on epistemology and relationship, articulated in *Loving to Know* (2011). Meeks points out that a biblical epistemology highlights that "knowledge is interpersonal" and that we learn through relationships. When students feel they know their professors personally and are known by their professors in a personal way through prayer, sharing burdens and joys, and personal connection in daily life, they are open to faith integration. As we consider this, we are moved to think of IFL as discipleship between individuals more than infusing a curriculum with Biblical touchpoints.

Given that graduate students emphasized the importance of their relationship with individual faculty, expressed in sharing prayer needs, praying together, and providing spiritual support, we recommend that deans and program directors for graduate programs place a high value on making course size and workload manageable to ensure faculty capacity for student relationships. While this is also important with undergraduate students, the undergraduate programs have other mechanisms for gaining Biblical knowledge and spiritual direction (such as general education religion courses, chapel, campus life activities, Bible studies, and peer discipleship programs). Graduate students experience IFL almost exclusively through the individual faculty member's efforts; therefore, it is imperative that graduate faculty have the willingness, and the time, to build student relationships.

The second theme reflected on was the students' value for respect, acknowledgement, and expression of diverse ideas, which was rated as the second most important IFL approach**.** Considering why this practice of recognizing, discussing, and respectfully engaging diverse viewpoints in light of Christian distinctiveness is highly valued by graduate students and closely associated with IFL, it may be that graduate students are at a particularly pivotal time in their identity formation. Among other things, they are in a very focused season of developing their professional and spiritual identities and are keenly aware of the complex world they are entering. They appear to want faculty to show them how they maneuver with a Christian identity in a complex world; they want faculty to actively model how to hold Biblical Christian identity alongside professional and social identities. In reflexive conversations on the data, the authors were drawn to Jesus' instruction to his 'students' in the teaching on the mount (Matt 5:43-48, NLT):

> You have heard the law that says, "Love your neighbor" and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Graduate students are interested in how faculty go beyond loving those with similar identities and beliefs; they want to see how they navigate the complexities of pluralism. How do they love intellectual 'enemies' and partner with people with divergent identities? Further research may be valuable in assessing whether faculty feel adequately equipped to converse in the classroom around various types of diversity (religious, sexual/ gender, economic, racial/ethnic diversity, ideological, and socio/political). Graduate students want to have difficult conversations about challenging and charged topics and see if the Christian faith can meet the challenge. Faculty need to be equipped to converse in class and with individual students about contemporary issues related to diversity and pluralism. Although some faculty might prefer to 'outsource' those conversations to more confident colleagues, preparing all faculty to navigate these conversations could be beneficial. Further research and, likely, further faculty development should be focused on this.

These two themes revolve around the importance of relationships. Students want to see how the faculty at a Christian university relate to them and 'love' them through personal prayer and an invitation to view their spiritual lives. Second, they want to see how instructors foster and facilitate positive relationships with "others" who are not of the same religious, ethical, or cultural cloth. Reflecting on the importance of faculty relationships with students and the importance of their relationship with the broader pluralistic community, there is a need to understand the process and nuances of IFL. Certainly, it is more than just adding a Bible verse to the lecture slides or having an opening prayer. Although there are many ways to approach IFL, truly transformative IFL moves beyond just knowing. IFL is also about relationships, which can transform faculty and students' identities. This type of IFL graduate students, faculty, and Christian higher education institutions all long for.

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