

**CFR 4.5-4.8: University and school administration, faculty, and appropriate stakeholders will continue to develop and disseminate information regarding institutional policies and practices which facilitate the review and improvement of the institution's capacity for institutional research and the systematic utilization of both quantitative and qualitative data for assessing and improving the educational effectiveness.** Although many assessment systems have been developed, we continue to build our communication capacity among the academically sound programs that draw their identity from their distinctive disciplines. There has been progress through the use of electronic and committee structures to promote communication. At the core of electronic communications has been the development of a field-driven database that facilitates search features and insures alignment of all University publications dealing with policies and procedures with new information. This has been possible with a newly developed Information Technology infrastructure that is not just “webification” of existing hard copy content, but through a well thought-out plan for information data entry and management developed by the Vice Chancellor for Information Systems. (Appendix – Supplemental Materials: Academic Management System)

## RESEARCH THEMES

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**Achieving Mission-Focused Learning (MFL).** As noted earlier, a desire to insure that MFL remains a core element was prompted in part by our centennial celebrations that highlighted our rich history of embedding service into the education of health care professionals. Seeing the larger picture of the last 100 years of community engaged scholarship and service left us feeling connected and empowered. Representative of this reflection is a statement made by a senior faculty member during her orientation of a group of junior faculty:

*“You can’t be value neutral and be happy at Loma Linda University. If you are value neutral you will not like it here and you’ll leave. You’ll leave because Loma Linda expects more of you and that’s why you came here, because you want to be part of the more. Loma Linda University requires that you engage in emotional transference with it, and you are here because you want to experience emotional transference with Loma Linda University (Simon, 2006).”*

Examples like this one, led us to dedicate time to contemplating the “process at work in extraordinary moments” (Senge, et al., 2004), to consider the differences that exist between the past and present nature of LLU, and to imagine the possibilities of things to come. This dialogue resulted in the need to better understand the factors that sustained, and could significantly alter, the mission and educational philosophy of LLU that we cherish.

Two research themes were chosen to engage LLU constituents in the examination of issues that define and impact the intentional inclusion of MFL in the education of students at LLU. It is believed that the results of these two research efforts, as presented in the following reflective essays, inform and strengthen our institutional commitment to our *normative culture* and make MFL a continuing reality that will be part of LLU for the next 100 years.

**Theme 1: Understanding LLU’s Normative Culture.** Many in higher education believe that a shared identity and purpose are critical to the continued success of a University. Most American universities began as religious institutions with the mission of integrating faith and learning. However, few have maintained their religious roots. Many speculate that a mix of striving for outside academic validation and the subsequent recruitment of faculty and enrollment of students from religious communities other than the institution’s auspices, have led to identity shifts of these institutions, albeit intentional in some cases and inadvertent in others. As LLU finds itself at an important juncture of substantial institutional growth and change (Appendix – Supplemental Materials: “Organizational Change: From Silos to Community?” Report) the constituents—leadership, faculty, students, and staff—engaged in a discussion about the past, present, and future direction of LLU in light of the shared desire to sustain what is loved about LLU. The goal was to examine our shared understanding of our current *normative culture*, and provide an assessment of its strengths and/or weaknesses, including an examination of the likelihood of an identify shift as LLU intentionally expands its curricular offerings, clinical services, and MFL opportunities locally and around the world. As such, this essay describes the process and results of a six-month qualitative study to explore and better understand the *normative culture* of LLU.

*The Philosophical Drift of Universities with Religious Auspices.* Most universities define

themselves through their mission statements and the creation of stated core values. These attributes serve to articulate the institution's expectations of faculty, staff, and students. It is through this process, and the subsequent engagement of its constituents, that an institution's *normative culture* develops. Unfortunately, very little research has been conducted on the congruence that exists between an institution's shared identity as expressed by its *normative culture* and its defined purpose over time. Equally important in the case of institutions with religious auspices like LLU, is the added impact that the integration of faith into an operationalized philosophy of education has on the sustainability of these institutions over time. It is this latter point that begins our examination. Supporting this study is a brief review of the historical experiences of religious institutions regarding the degree of faith integration and its effect on their philosophy of education and curriculum delivery.

*Historical Context.* In the mid to late 1700s and through the 1800s, most universities and colleges were founded by churches primarily due to a lack of tax-based public funding for state-run institutions. Many of these first colleges became what are currently referred to as the "Ivy League" schools (Goodlad, 2002). The founding administrators and faculty of these colleges were typically appointed religious leaders.<sup>38</sup> These individuals were responsible for implementing the behavioral and communal standards of the sponsoring faith community (Glanzer, 2008). These standards were reflected in required worship services as well as strict admission policies implemented to assure the goodness of fit of students with institutional purposes (Glanzer, 2008). And, although the educational philosophies of these were based on strong religious foundations, over time most became increasingly secular in their orientation (Glanzer, 2008). Uniquely, and in contrast to this trend, some schools sustained their religious heritage and continued to emphasize the importance of administrators, faculty, staff, and students emulating the core values of the sponsoring faith community.

Furthering one's understanding of the historical transition of universities with religious roots, two different categorizations classify these universities based upon the degree to which faith has been integrated into their mission and curricula. The first categorization created by Robert Benne (2001), is called the "typology of schools." Benne's (2001) typology helps to identify the depth of faith-

integration that universities have embedded in their philosophies and mission statements. Moreover, this typology also aids in explaining how these institutions operationalized their identity, including but not limited to their normative cultures. Benne (2001) classifies institutions into four subsets based upon the institution's integration of faith into its overall philosophy and mission statement: (a) orthodox, (b) critical mass, (c) intentionally pluralist, and (d) accidentally pluralist. According to Glanzer (2008), "as the types move from orthodox to accidentally pluralist, they become more secular or permissive" (p. 169). For instance, unlike the "orthodox" group that required strict adherence by all members, institutions defined as belonging to the "critical mass" type did not insist that all of their members adhere to their or other Christian traditions, as long as their members upheld the institution's standards in academics (Benne, 2001). This category includes a number of American Christian institutions that do not require all students and professors to acknowledge adherence to their respective doctrines (Benne, 2001). The "intentionally pluralist" category describes institutions that mention their Christian heritage, but publicly link the university to more general values such as diversity and social justice (Benne, 2001), while the "accidentally pluralistic" group no longer claims linkage to its religious roots.

The second categorization of universities with religious origins was created by Goodlad (2002). Goodlad (2002) noted that one can, at the risk of oversimplification, "place schools that retain Christian links into one of three types in terms of their Christian identification and affiliation" (p.12)—strong, intermediate, and weak—with respect to clarity of school identity and faith integration. Strong Christian identification and affiliation is defined as, "those that require exacting standards of belief and behavior of their members that proclaim their Christian mission loudly" (p. 12). The intermediate type describes identification and affiliation as "support from Christian churches and that facilitate Christian beliefs and practices as part of their policy" (p. 12). Lastly, weak identification and affiliation is simply an institution "founded by Christians, but is now weakly Christian," if at all (p. 12).

Using either Benne's or Goodlad's categorizations can help an institution recognize how its *normative culture* influences and defines its identity and how it might be unconsciously moving from one category to another. Glanzer (2008) in his comparison of Christian higher education in England with the

experiences of American Christian universities found that American universities with strong religious influences expressed a greater desire to continue to integrate faith in their curricula and campus lifestyle. This was stressed through the practice of requiring students to take theology classes, attend communal worship services, and make a firm commitment to adhere to their philosophical doctrines (Glanzer, 2008). According to Glanzer (2008), these elements tend to give Christian-based universities their identity which leads to the establishment of their *normative culture*.

Slippage or secularization, which has affected even the most traditional religious higher education institutions over time, is a complex phenomenon and rarely a uniform process (Davie, 2002). In some instances, slippage, or secularization, is accidental; in other cases, it is somewhat deliberate. Burtchaelle (1998) suggests a repeating pattern that may occur in no particular order but usually involves compulsory worship becoming voluntary; a less restrictive/directive code of student behavior (e.g., dress); non-clerical appointments in leadership; reductions in numbers of students, staff, and faculty from the institution's denominational background; and a movement toward academic theology, or religion as a social phenomenon. In the hope of avoiding this type of movement away from our Seventh-day Adventist Christian roots, the constituents of LLU implemented the following study to better understand its *normative culture*.

*Methods.* Using qualitative data collection methods, 29 structured focus group discussions were conducted between October 2007 and January 2008 (5 University leadership, 14 faculty, 5 staff, and 4 student focus groups). In total, more than 300 individuals participated. A systematic sampling approach was used to assure triangulation of opinions. To this end, current LLU leadership, students, faculty, and staff participated in the study. Attendance was invited, but not required. Participants were not recruited on the basis of their religious affiliation, however participants did self identify during focus group discussions. To optimize attendance, faculty, staff, and student focus groups were held in school pairings matched by location (access/proximity), occurring generally during the lunch hour with food provided for the participants. The leadership focus groups were conducted as part of an annual administrative retreat.

Before discussions began each group was given a written definition of *normative culture* that had been developed by the Educational Effectiveness Committee (EEC) Research Subcommittee. This definition was then outlined by the facilitators to insure that participants understood the concept. As such, *normative culture* was loosely defined for the context of this study as:

*It (normative culture) is based on (often informal) consensus, agreement, and similarities of values; pertinent elements include common objectives, standards/rules/norms (implicit and explicit), and behavior. It is often maintained by self-exclusion, sanctions (informal and formal), visible markers (e.g., Good Samaritan Statue, pledge, core values), reinforcement of common themes/slogans at meetings, (i.e., seven core values, pledge, Motto of "To Make Man Whole"), recruitment of students and faculty/appointment of leaders (i.e., high percent Seventh-day Adventist), and tenure.*

The following focus group questions and probes were noted in the semi-structured outline to assure complete exploration of issues and were explored as the discussions naturally evolved.

- What is LLU's *normative culture*?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses inherent in our *normative culture*?
- Is the LLU concept of *wholeness* connected to our *normative culture*? How well do we individually fulfill the concept of *wholeness*? In what ways do we fall short? What are some examples that truly make us different from other universities?
- Is there a clear connection between our *normative culture* and our Health Message? Historically? At this time?
- How is our *normative culture* linked to our stated commitment to a Christ-centered identity?
- Does it conflict with our stated respect for other world religions among our students on campus, in our international work and in our global mission? Are they congruent?
- How can we avoid the fate of other Christian institutions that have moved away from their religious roots (e.g., Harvard, Emory, Yale, etc.)? Why do you think this happened to them? Is there anything we can learn from their experiences?

*Results.* As a result of the qualitative analyses six major themes emerged:<sup>39</sup>

- *Normative culture* (definition and meaning in the context of LLU)

- *Normative culture* and service as Identity
- *Normative culture* and *Wholeness*
- Future trajectory for LLU/Interventions
- *Normative culture* and its role for LLU as a university with religious auspices
- Communication/isolation as challenges to a shared *normative culture*

*Summary of findings.* Participants across all groups were enthusiastically loyal to LLU and were excited about taking part in discussions about the institution’s *normative culture*. Individuals were happy to share their views and voiced a desire for more such opportunities. Group responses were mostly positive to the questions, with few overtly negative responses. In many cases, facilitators had to probe participants about the existence of negatives in LLU’s *normative culture*. That said, some individuals within the groups seemed to appreciate the opportunity to confidentially voice their concerns about the University, which suggests that the *normative culture* is not without its own pressures for conformity.

Most groups, whether faculty, staff, or students, initially struggled to define LLU’s *normative culture*. Students gave many examples of what they saw as *normative culture* on campus, observing that the University encourages principles, values, and morals and noting that LLU’s *normative culture* is seen as one of *wholeness* and commitment to service. Several observed that this included (or should include) adhering to the religious foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, while still welcoming and accepting those from other faith communities. More often than not students noted that faculty and staff were accepting of individuals who were different from faith communities other than the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and felt that they were generally welcomed and valued as individuals. Also identified were various elements seen as making up the *normative culture* on campus, including but not limited to: (a) devotion, (b) prayer, (c) required worship, (d) living a healthy lifestyle, (e) *wholeness*, and (f) overwhelmingly a shared commitment of service to others. Briefly, this commitment to others—“To Make Man Whole,” and to act in a Christ-like fashion—was a universal value that seemed to be the shared passion driving all respondents’ strong commitment to the University. Service to others as a theme was so strong that regardless of the school of origin, faculty, staff, and students emphasized the centrality of service to others as the personal and professional focus in their lives.

Individuals in some groups believed that there was little shared *normative culture* across the university. Rather, they noted the existence of sub-cultures within each school that stemmed from the “former strong silo orientation.” On this point there was generally a consensus that each school has its own unique way of expressing what LLU’s *normative culture* is and should be. However, many others disagreed with this observation and felt that there was a definite *normative culture* that overarched the existing sub-cultures in each school. In addition, a number of respondents state that they had already begun to observe a seemingly deliberate change toward a more unified identity—an “us as LLU” vs. “us as LLU School X.” It was concluded by some that while a shared *normative culture* had always been somewhat present, the unifying theme was only more recently emergent and therefore was not yet consistent across campus. As a result, individual schools still maintained their own culture for its members. As one staff focus group participant noted, “... I think we are in a state of flux. I think there is a tug of war and [we are] kind of figuring out what is right, what is okay.”

Whether it is maintained centrally or occurs within schools, LLU’s *normative culture* seems to be intricately tied to the concept of *wholeness*. In each group, participants brought up the subject of *wholeness* before facilitators, and all expressed their approval of LLU’s focus on *wholeness*. Faculty, staff, and students alike could define the term in surprisingly similar ways, and the participants in each group expressed a universal desire toward the goal of achieving and encouraging *wholeness*. There were, however, mixed opinions about LLU’s consistency in adopting *wholeness* in all areas. Many saw it as a process of ongoing commitment, but one that often fell short of the ideal, especially when it came to the personal and professional lives of the participants. More specifically, many raised concerns that the demands of servant leadership as a part of LLU’s *normative culture* directly counteracted their efforts toward achieving personal *wholeness*. Most focus group participants were sincerely struggling to be whole in their personal and professional lives. Many stated that they found it very difficult to find a balance between professional, personal, spiritual, and healthy living, as is meant by the extension of LLU’s mission statement “To Make Man Whole.” Each of the constituent members noted the following struggles to achieve wholeness:

*Students* universally noted that while *wholeness* is a crucial part of LLU's *normative culture*, they found it extremely difficult to juggle schoolwork, family responsibilities, spirituality, and healthy living. Many said that they felt discouraged or frustrated because each attempt seemed to end in failure. However, students also noted that faculty were very encouraging and consistently advised them to continue to work toward the goal of *wholeness* regardless of their success rate.

*Staff* likewise expressed their struggle with incorporating *wholeness* into their personal lives. Many agreed that most professional staff and faculty work long hours and forget about balancing the various areas of their lives. Many were concerned that too often, as a University, we preach *wholeness*, but do not actually practice it. Others described it as an ongoing challenge but pointed to the various opportunities the University offers to incorporate *wholeness* into their lives such as (a) memberships to the Drayson Center; (b) programs encouraging weekend time for family; (c) educational credits; and (d) other educational, social, and spiritual events and activities.

*Faculty* as well expressed difficulty in incorporating *wholeness* in their personal and professional lives. Faculty discussed how the long hours spent on campus interferes with their personal lives, though at the same time wanting to honestly encourage and portray *wholeness* to their students. Faculty recognized the apparent contradiction of advocating *wholeness* but not practicing it in their own lives. The resulting frustration they attributed to the required academic rigor overlaid coupled with their desire to "do more" for their students.

Despite these noted challenges, many faculty, staff, and students commended the University for advocating *wholeness* and voiced a continued commitment to mirror this value in their interactions with each other.

Most of the focus group participants were aware of a number of dangers inherent in LLU's *normative culture*. A large number of the concerns focused on the potential to take things for granted. For example, it was noted that while everyone at LLU freely offers prayer and LLU offers a Campus Worship experience with required attendance, this is not necessarily sufficient to make LLU a functioning religious institution. Many (students and faculty) attend worship but are not truly "present," using the time for

other activities such as texting, working, socializing, or even resting. Because of this, the majority of the students felt that Campus Worship was not as effective as it could be. A number of students articulated their disappointment with Campus Worship after witnessing this type of behavior. They hoped that in the future the University will revamp Campus Worship services.<sup>40</sup> However, these same students also took the opportunity to provide meaningful suggestions on how to revamp the process. For example, some suggested that Campus Worship should not be required so that only those who truly want to be there attend. Those in attendance would get more out of the Campus Worship service. In contrast, other students felt strongly that it was probably a "good thing" to require Campus Worship attendance to insure that students had exposure to religious/spiritual experiences. Other suggestions included the belief that there should be a dress code at Campus Worship to help instill a sense of devotion and reverence. Students discussed the importance of keeping the Seventh-day Adventist principles, values, and religion alive and prominent on campus. When pressed on how best to accomplish this, many felt it was necessary to have a specific number of Seventh-day Adventist faculty and students on campus in order to keep the *normative culture* alive. Other students agreed with this idea, but also believed it should be expanded to include committed Christians. Only a few students felt that regardless of the religious beliefs that faculty members professed, the best-qualified individuals should be hired, and hiring should not be primarily based on the fact that someone was a Seventh-day Adventist.

Students also noted that Campus Worship attendance alone, without an explicit connection to religion or spirituality, would fall short of what LLU should offer. Thus numerous participants, many of whom were from faith communities other than the Seventh-day Adventist Church, felt strongly that current leadership should recommit to seeking and expressing Adventist values as part of LLU's core values. This was necessary in order to demonstrate an appreciation for LLU's religious identity over secular service commitments and the pursuit of outside acceptance as a quality academic institution. As one faculty member put it, "we have to reinvent ourselves based on our values." Surprisingly, this belief was reiterated by many students who were somewhat puzzled about the relative lack of exposure to the Adventist culture that non-Adventist students receive. Several suggested (tongue in cheek but somewhat seriously) that there should be a required orientation to LLU's *normative*

*culture*, including Seventh-day Adventist doctrine so that more of a deliberate exposure could take place. Similarly, staff focus group respondents believed strongly that the University should make more of a concerted effort to increase knowledge about the Adventist culture on campus since they perceive LLU's *normative culture* to be based on Seventh-day Adventist religious principles. They feared that too many people on campus are unaware of these principles, and should have the opportunity to learn about Adventism to better understand our *normative culture*, regardless of their own individual religious affiliation. Many noted that we should not be "apologetic" for who we are and that those who join the Loma Linda University community, be they faculty, staff, or student, should be welcomed warmly and given ample opportunity to recognize and appreciate who we are and what this institution stands for. In a similar vein, several staff members noted that many students not from Adventist backgrounds might have found it difficult to "fit in" around campus without such an orientation. Staff were concerned that students coming into the University were not properly educated about Adventism or given the necessary support to become acclimated to our institution and our beliefs. Therefore, many felt that education about Adventism should be provided, not to evangelize but to create a shared understanding that would allow everyone to be more at ease and thus able to engage in open discussion. Students expressed these concerns, stating that other students ostracized them if they did not engage in what is considered appropriate behavior by the Adventist community. On the other hand, it was noted that many non-Christian students view LLU as a safe, respectful place in which to live, work, and study.

A recurring theme that was thought to threaten the cohesion of LLU's *normative culture* is the lack of cross-school interactions and the perceived isolation of students within their schools or even within their respective programs. Many students noted that only when they made extraordinary efforts to develop relationships outside of their schools did they have contact with, or even recognize students from other schools or learn what other schools had to offer. It was felt that this structure of isolation could inadvertently help undermine LLU's religious roots unless it is carefully monitored. The recent move toward a unification of previously isolated schools is seen by many as a step in the right direction. Under the leadership of former president Dr. Behrens, and now Drs. Hart and Carter, LLU is centrally focusing on its core values (e.g., through a more deliberate

Campus Worship curriculum and requiring all degree and University certificate programs to include a religion/ethics cognate). Although this direction is coming from top leadership, many faculty, staff, and students are welcoming and recognizing these efforts as initial steps that should be taken further. For students, but also to a slightly lesser degree for staff and faculty, the desire for more opportunities to engage across schools is an important issue. Many students have a strong desire both to socialize and to share academic and service experiences with students from different schools. They question why there are not more cross-listed core classes that support interdisciplinary engagement.

*Final Reflections:* Almost unanimously, faculty, students, staff and those in leadership voiced their strong commitment to remain anchored to this University's religious foundations and heritage. All felt that sustaining the roots of LLU's *normative culture* as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian University can be done without a loss of perceived academic excellence or "standing" in the face of other institutions of higher education. Challenging the categorization of Benne and Goodlad, in light of Burtchaelle's signs of slippage and secularization, our focus group respondents believe that LLU can maintain its foundational orientation and continue to welcome students, faculty, and staff from other faith communities as long as it remains truly committed to respectful engagement regarding its own core values and principles.

The prospect exists for LLU to even more boldly express its commitment to *wholeness* and service to others as a part of the education of health care professionals and related sciences, while also addressing the desire of campus constituents for increased cross-school engagement and learning. The combination of these factors present opportunities to develop and strengthen the institution's capacity to operationalize MFL. It is evident that the richness of this engagement will further LLU's efforts to move from "silos of excellence" to a "community of shared excellence."

Our research on *normative culture* suggests that LLU's philosophy closely aligns with the views found in the "intentional pluralism" category. Pluralism within many conservative religious groups is considered to be an anathema. Religious pluralism is often thought to be a notion in which all truth is relative, and all views are of equal value. Therefore, pluralism on a distinctly religious campus can be

perceived as one more indicator of slide toward the slippery slope of secularism—one more step away from the institution’s foundational commitment.

Our *normative culture* research indicates that the notion of pluralism, as practiced at LLU, may require the development of a fifth category, unique to LLU, to be added to the four identified by Benne (2001). Further research on this topic will be conducted in the coming years. What we value and identify within the category of intentional pluralism is the focus that goes beyond mere diversity for the sake of tolerance, but truly engages diversity for the purpose of understanding and learning.

We must learn to engage and embrace others, their philosophies, culture, and the various ways of viewing challenges. We do this to eliminate ignorance, half-truths, and stereotypes. Being intentionally pluralistic in the modern sense does not require LLU to abandon its standards, beliefs, and history in order to be accommodating to diverse points of view. Instead, such a stance insures that we will openly encounter others, value them as individuals, and reflect upon their ideas in keeping with the example of Jesus Christ who loved all the world unconditionally while remaining steadfast to his principles of integrity, belief, and selfless service.

**Theme 2: Bible-based Faith.** The second research theme identified during the development of the Institutional Proposal emphasized attention to studying the 17 student learning outcomes (SLOs) developed in 1998. It was felt that this type of study would assist in reaching consensus of meaning and aid in resolving the measurement challenges associated with original SLOs. As such, an exercise was conducted in the Fall of 2005 during the Faculty Colloquium for the purpose of prioritizing which of the SLOs would be the focus of this initial inquiry.<sup>41</sup> Four of the original 17 SLOs were clearly ranked by faculty as having the greatest priority for further study. Following additional dialogue with the Deans Council, Interschool Faculty Advisory Council (IFAC), University Academic Affairs Committee (UAAC), and the General Studies and Transfer Education Subcommittee, the Educational Effectiveness Committee (EEC; charged with the development of the Institutional Proposal) decided to limit the initial analysis of the SLOs to one outcome: Develop a Bible-based faith in God relevant to their personal lives and professional ministry. Priority was given to studying this SLO as dialogue with multiple faculty groups revealed substantial ambiguity and

emotionally charged frustration regarding the intent of the term Bible-based faith. It was found that faculty’s interpretation of the intended meaning of this term varied considerably. The most frequently expressed concern was that the term relayed an undesirable conservative theological orientation that could be translated into an incorrect connotation regarding LLU’s organizational and educational purposes. Equally important, the EEC chose to focus on this outcome, as it was perceived as having the furthest centrality to all aspects of the social and learning environment of LLU. In addition, it was felt that engaging the campus community in a dialogue regarding this SLO would not only offer insight into some extraordinary teachable moments with students, but also provide opportunities for connecting with alumni, as well as support the development of processes where consensus could be challenged by the presence of strong personal beliefs.

Subsequently a six-month intensive focus group dialogue involving all LLU constituent groups (i.e., faculty, staff, students, and leadership) ensued. Procedurally, the process involved the use of campus-wide discussion groups, across the University, to first clarify and then build consensus around the meaning behind the term/s used to describe the intended orientation to the selected SLO. To support this, the discussion was broadened to explore with participants the association and linkage of the term *Bible-based faith* with the University’s core values and unique *normative culture*. The following summarizes the procedures used along with the results of this research effort.

*Methods:* A modified focus group methodology was used that began with a script delivered via a video podcast in which LLU’s Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs explained the importance of the topic and provided instructions for participants. As such, participants also were provided four key questions for group discussion. It was noted that question numbers three and four would require that they participate in a formal vote and the development of a list of alternative wording preferences which could support revising the identified SLO, should that be the final campus consensus. The questions provided to participants were:

1. What do you think is meant by the term *Bible-based faith* in the LLU student learning outcomes?
2. What are examples of ways individuals demonstrate a *Bible-based faith*?

3. Do you think the term “Christ-centered” is an accurate substitute for the term *Bible-based faith*?
4. Are there terms other than “Christ-centered” that you prefer?

All the groups were enthusiastic about their participation in the redesign of a SLO considered to be essential in reflecting the educational philosophy and purposes of LLU. Twenty-four focus groups were held which involved over 300 participants from across campus.

*Results:* Ultimately, the majority of participants felt that the symbolism of the message needed to convey an idea that supported the University’s emphasis on *wholeness*, of “service to mankind in Christ,” and “to do as Christ did.” These sentiments were strongly reflected in the participants’ explanations of how they strive to demonstrate a *Bible-based faith* in their everyday interactions with students. Many noted that this is accomplished by openly sharing about faith and personal responsibility, including short reflections and/or devotions before class, and notably in numerous one-to-one interactions with students—something many students as well as faculty and staff refer to as the “special LLU touch”(i.e., access to and time for students to talk to their professors regarding issues ranging from academics, to personal, and to spiritual). All, and especially faculty participants of faith communities other than Seventh-day Adventist, stated that they valued the ability to share their values and beliefs without feeling odd or pressured to do so. All were in agreement that the overall atmosphere and shared value system at LLU was more driven by a Christ-like service orientation than by religious doctrine.

This is not to say that participants did not grapple with letting go of the “Bible-based” wording, even with its varied interpretations. Nearly all acknowledged the importance of having a strong Bible-based foundation. Many stated that LLU should not make apologies or hold back “who we are,” but recognize that this is the reason most students choose to attend LLU. Participants also felt that many of our students, while coming from different faiths, attend LLU to find a spiritual, safe home that is organized around transformational values that will impact their professional preparation and future careers. Others pointed out that for many of our off-campus programs in countries with non-Christian cultures, it was important to insure that final wording be inclusive enough to embrace these students without compromising our core identity to serve as “Christ-like.” As such, it was noted that “service to others

transcends cultures” and shares what LLU truly represents.

*Final Reflections:* Notably, the majority of the ardent dissenters who argued for retaining the “Bible-based” language were non-Seventh-day Adventist faculty. These individuals felt strongly that there was “nothing wrong” with the term and that it should not concern us if some disliked the phrase, as it clearly represented the institution’s position with respect to doctrine. In summary, participants supported SLO language that emphasized a strong Christian foundation, embraced Christ-like values, and demonstrated commitment to service and the concept of *wholeness*.

## CONCLUDING ESSAY

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In the years to come the learning that has and continues to take place on our campus is likely to be regarded as a notable period of transformational and organizational growth in our history. We now build upon the activities and accomplishments of the capacity review process to address the requirements needed to insure our ability to demonstrate educational effectiveness. Although we consider our institution to be one capable of self-evaluating and intentionally progressive in ways that have led to substantial change, we now realize that this is likely to reveal the need for yet more profound and introspective engagement. This emphasis on learning within the organization reflects our commitment to continuous quality improvement (CQI) and is directly associated with our need to strengthen the University’s culture of evidence within the context of moving towards a “community of shared excellence.” This effort as having three major foci: (a) strengthening our infrastructure to conduct assessment across diverse academic environments, (b) further implementing SLOs that embrace both the shared and diverse academic nature of the programs, and (c) infusing assessment results into our strategic planning, for CQI in support of our mission. The following outlines our plan:

### ***Strengthening the assessment infrastructure across diverse academic environments.***

**Expansion of the understanding of our normative culture.** Building on the learning derived from our organizational research, we recognize the need to learn how to capitalize on the richness of our shared understanding and appreciation for the mission and purposes of LLU. We did not know the depth to which our University community shared in their