

Student Faith Assessment

A Continuing Investigation of Student Faith Maturity
with Resulting Curricular Developments

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Presentation Outline

A Brief History of the New Orleans Study
The Andrews University Project
The NOBTS Faith Assessment Study
A Curricular Paradigm for Growth
Questions and Discussion

A Brief History of the New Orleans Study

The Original Faith Maturity Study

In the fall and spring of the 1997-98 academic year, graduate and undergraduate students at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary participated in a faith maturity survey. The rationale for the study was based on the Seminary's Core Value of "Spiritual Vitality." The goal of the investigation was to provide data for use in the consideration of institutional roles related to student faith development.

The initial study group included 158 incoming graduate and undergraduate students from the New Orleans campus. The survey was expanded to include students from selected Extension Centers. A total of 395 students from 5 campuses participated in the study. Thirty-two percent of the study group subjects were enrolled in undergraduate degree programs, while 68% were enrolled in graduate programs.

The Instrument

The instrument selected for the study was developed by Search Institute of Minneapolis, Minnesota and was first administered in 1989. The rationale for utilizing the Search Institute survey was based on its use in a previous study of 1,233 members in 68 Southern Baptist

churches. The instrument was not modified for this study. In addition to the faith survey, students provided relevant demographic information.

The instrument measures two basic dimensions of faith. The vertical dimension represents a life-transforming relationship to a loving God. The horizontal dimension represents a consistent devotion to serving others.

Four faith types are identified using the two faith dimensions. Undeveloped faith is the result of insufficient scores for both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. A vertical faith orientation notes a sufficient score on the vertical dimension but not the horizontal. A horizontal faith type is the result of a sufficient score on the horizontal dimension but not the vertical. An integrated faith orientation is the result of sufficient scores for both the vertical and horizontal dimensions.

The Data

TABLE 1 Composite Scores - All NOBTS*

Faith Type	Count	Percentage
Undeveloped	26	6.6%
Vertical	313	79.2%
Horizontal	0	0%
Integrated	56	14.2%

*See Tables 5 and 6

TABLE 2 Comparison Scores - NOBTS Location

Campus	Undeveloped	Vertical	Horizontal	Integrated
New Orleans	6.3%	88%	0%	5.7%
Clinton	4.2%	75%	0%	20.8%
Jackson	5.9%	70.6%	0%	23.5%
North Georgia	8.8%	72.3%	0%	19%
Birmingham	3.4%	76.3%	0%	20.3%

TABLE 3 Comparison Scores - NOBTS Degree Program

Faith Type	Undergraduate	Graduate
Undeveloped	4.8%	6.8%
Vertical	78.4%	80%
Horizontal	0%	0%
Integrated	16.8%	13.2%

TABLE 4 Comparison Scores - NOBTS Ministry Area

Min. Area	Undeveloped	Vertical	Horizontal	Integrated
Pastor*	6%	77.6%	0%	16.4%
Music	17.6%	70.6%	0%	11.8%
Education	14.4%	76.7%	0%	8.9%
Missions	3.4%	86.2%	0%	17.2%
Youth	1.4%	69.9%	0%	28.6%
Evangelism	9.1%	81.8%	0%	9.1%

*In the Search Institute Study 67% of Pastors had an Integrated faith type

TABLE 5 Comparison Scores - All NOBTS and SBC Adults 1989

Group	Undeveloped	Vertical	Horizontal	Integrated
NOBTS	6.6%	79.2%	0%	14.2%
All SBC	23%	25%	3%	49%
SBC 20-39	28%	38%	4%	30%

TABLE 6 Comparison Scores - NOBTS Except N.O. and SBC Adults 1989

Group	Undeveloped	Vertical	Horizontal	Integrated
NOBTS	5.8%	73.6%	0%	20.9%
All SBC	23%	25%	3%	49%
SBC 20-39	28%	38%	4%	30%

The Secondary Study of Seminary Effectiveness

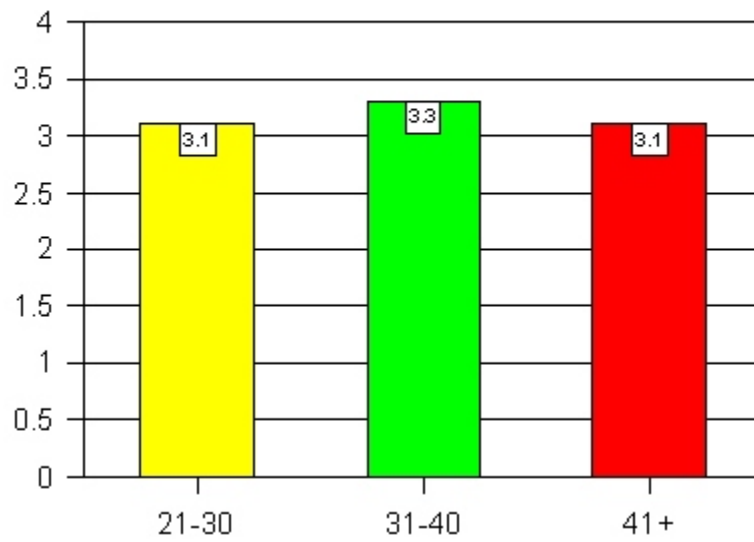
The Instrument

The instrument included demographic information, a comments section, and 22 response items using 4 scale designations. Scale designations included the following; 1. Strongly Disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Agree, 4. Strongly Agree. The responses were blindly grouped into 5 basic categories: Devotional/Worship, Service to Others, Christian Character, Evangelism/Missions, and Personal Call/Gifts.

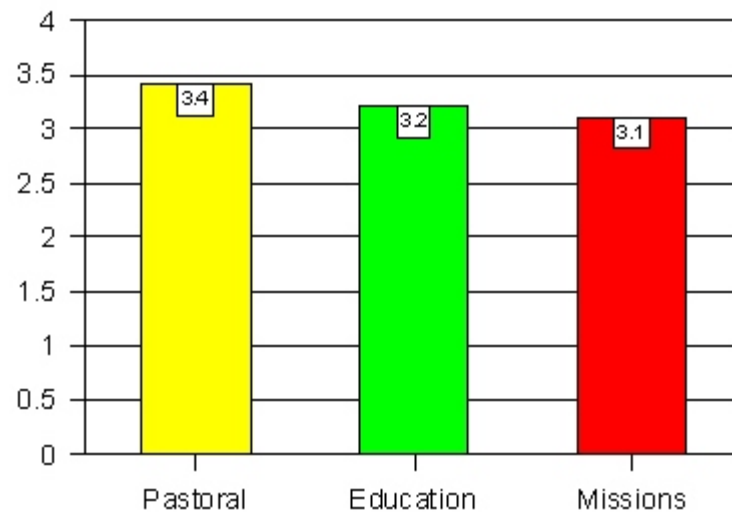
Study Basics

The thirty-five respondents included 9 undergraduate and 26 graduate students from the New Orleans Campus. The 35 participants were graduating seniors. Ninety-five percent of the respondents listed one of three areas as a primary ministry orientation: Pastoral (49%), Education/Youth (23%), Missions (23%). One student identified "Counseling" as a primary ministry area and one student listed "Other" as the ministry area. The following charts represent basic survey results.

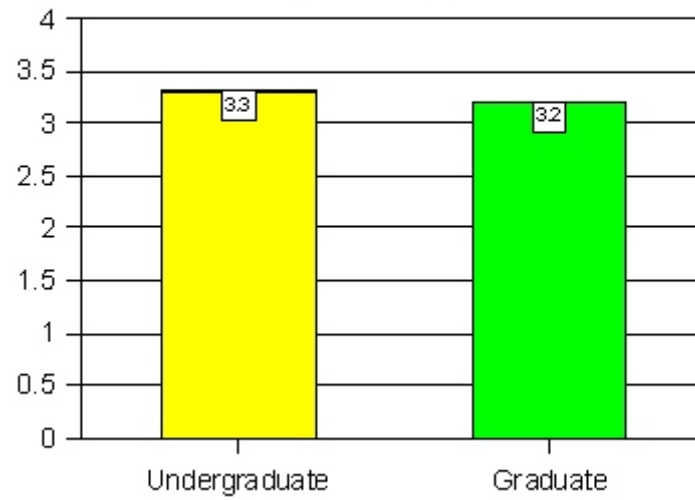
Age Categories



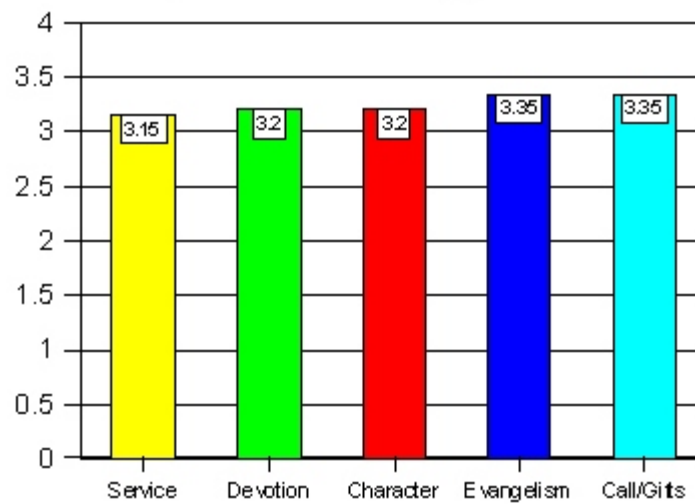
Ministry Area



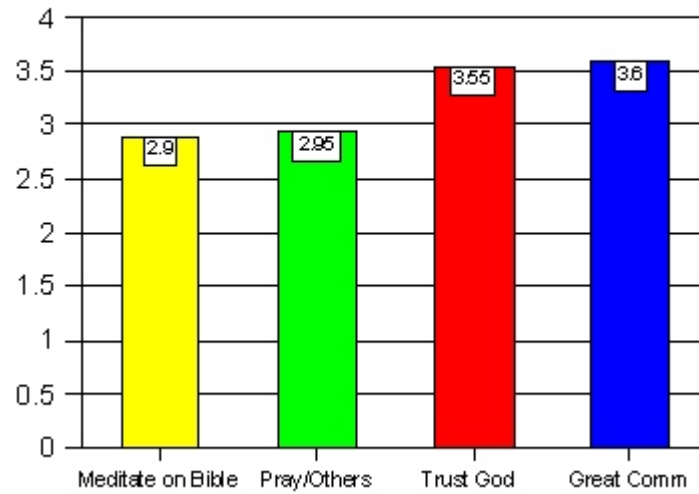
Average Response



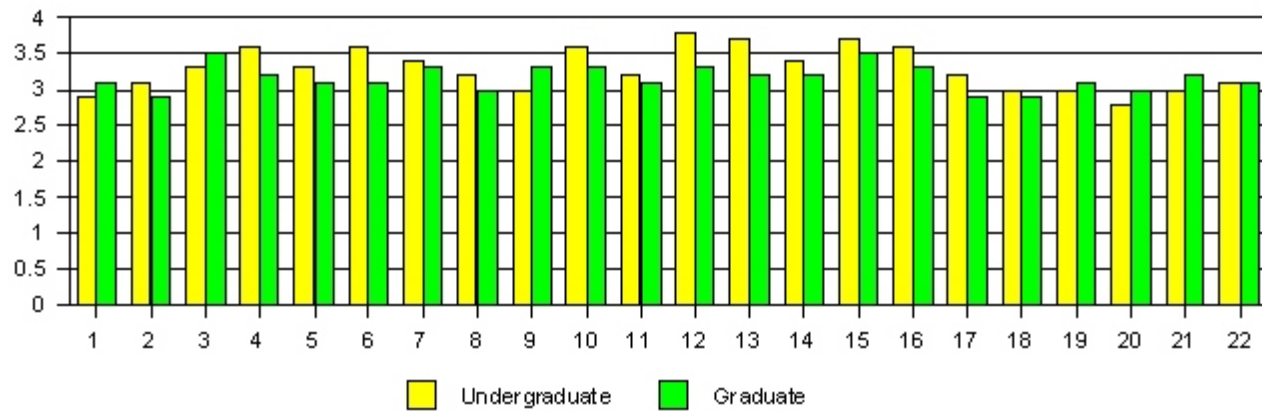
Spiritual Categories



Lowest/Highest



Individual Item Responses



Considerations

In general terms, the statistical variances for the above comparisons are minimal. Note should be made of the fact that no response item scored over 3.5 for both undergraduate and graduate students. Seven items scored over 3.5 for undergraduate students. No item scored over 3.5 for graduate students. Seventy-one percent of respondents posted composite scores under 3.5.

In 15 of the 22 items, scores for undergraduate respondents were higher than graduate respondents. Undergraduate composite scores were also higher in 4 of the 5 spiritual categories. The exception was Evangelism/Missions.

One respondent identified “Counseling” as the primary ministry area. A composite score of 3.7 was noted for that student.

The sample group was a small representation of graduating seniors. Some consideration should be given to the requirement of this survey in the exit process.

Selected Student Comments (Unedited)

“This has been a valuable experience for me; much of this growth is fostered better here than it was at the extension center.”

“...I hope classes will be devoted to more real issues that face people in the field.”

“Seminary has helped me become more professional as a minister... However, I am not more zealous or pious.”

“...the Seminary has helped to define some paths that were blurry”

“The Seminary has helped me grow in many ways, it has helped my self esteem greatly.”

“The undergraduate program has been a blessing to me and my family. I appreciate the school’s approach to ministry and teaching. I would like to see more professors and less graduate students.”

“I am more aware of a real need of an internship program for all students not actively involved in ministry.”

The Andrews University Study

Project Summary

In the fall of 1998 thirty-six students from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary participated in a study of over one thousand seminary and Christian university students from various denominations. The instrument utilized for the study was the *Christian Spiritual Participation Profile* developed by Dr. Jane Thayer of Andrews University. In addition, the *Benson Faith Maturity Typology* was utilized as a comparison instrument.

Instrument Descriptions

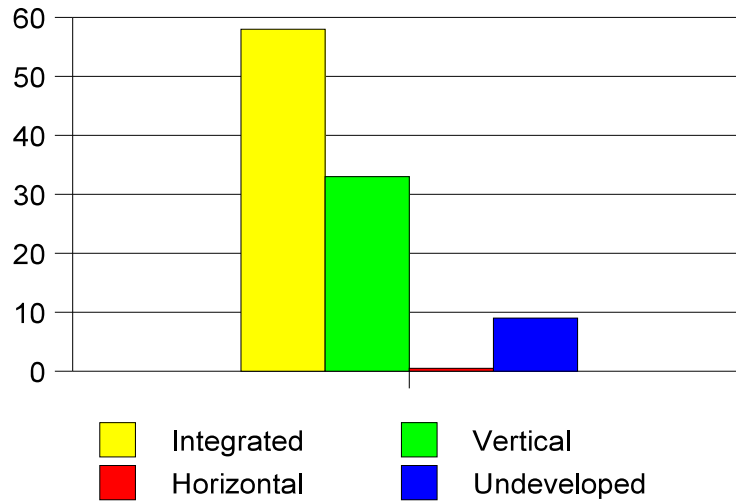
The *Christian Spiritual Participation Profile* provides data related to four spiritual development modes: growing through a relationship with God, growing through a relationship with others, growing through a relationship with the Word, and growing through critical reflection. The profile also charts ten different disciplines: prayer, repentance, worship, Bible reading, meditation, prophetic critiquing, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship. The instrument makes use of a six point Likert scale.

The *Benson Faith Maturity Typology* instrument provides data related to four spiritual faith types: integrated faith, vertical faith, horizontal faith, and undeveloped faith. The vertical faith type is closely related to the *CSPP* mode of growing through a relationship with God. The horizontal faith type is closely related to the *CSPP* mode of growing through a relationship with others. The integrated faith type is the optimum or desired typology. The instrument makes use of a seven point Likert scale.

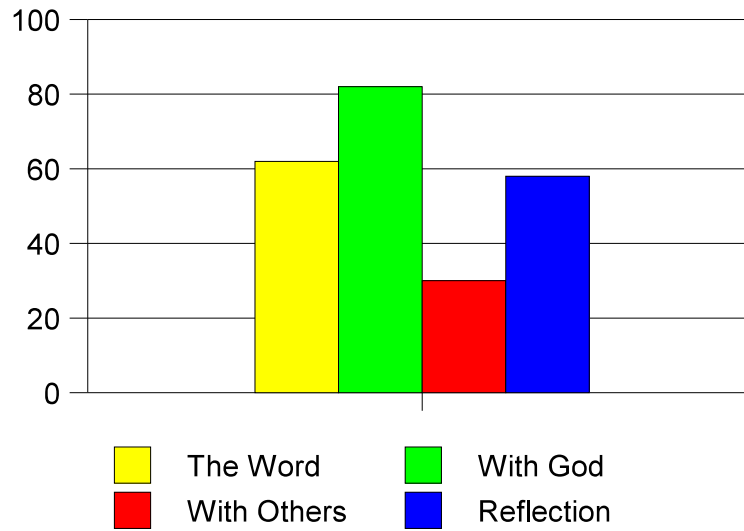
Data Summary

The data from the *Christian Spiritual Participation Profile* indicated that NOBTS students scored somewhat higher than the mean scores of all participants in each of the four spiritual development modes. In addition, NOBTS students scored above the mean in all ten of the discipline categories. Eighty-three percent of NOBTS students showed a growing relationship with God. Sixty-one percent of NOBTS students showed a growing relationship with the Word. Fifty-eight percent of NOBTS students showed growth through critical reflection. Only thirty-one percent of NOBTS students showed a growing relationship with others. The basic statistics are represented in the graphs below.

Benson Results



Thayer CSPP Results



Considerations

Results from the *CSPP* indicate that the Seminary might consider engaging in a dialogue of ways to foster growth in the area of Christian relationships. The format of the new Spiritual Formation courses should serve to address this issue, but additional strategies should also be considered.

Another consideration related to the *CSPP* is the incorporation of elements throughout the Seminary experience that promote a critical reflection of personal faith. Contemplation and meditation have not, in general, been emphasized in evangelical circles. The percentage of students indicating growth in this area is strong but could be improved.

The data from the *Benson Faith Maturity Typology* are somewhat encouraging. Almost sixty-percent of those tested gave evidence of an Integrated faith typology. Benson's original study with Southern Baptists indicated that only thirty-percent of SBC adults between the ages of 20 and 39 proved to have an integrated faith.

One-third of students in the 1998 study showed a Vertical faith orientation. That statistic is in direct correlation with the *CSPP* data related to the spiritual development mode "growing through a relationship with others." As indicated above, the Seminary should seek ways to strengthen growth through relationships.

The results of the *Benson Faith Maturity Typology* are quite interesting when compared with the 1997 study of NOBTS students who completed the same inventory. The current study indicated that a much higher percentage of students exemplified an Integrated faith typology than students in the 1997 appraisal. Several elements of the testing could serve to explain such a variance. Continued, longitudinal studies are needed to determine norms.

Overall, NOBTS students showed a good level of maturity and growth when compared with their peers in similar institutions. Areas of need have been noted and areas of strength can be celebrated.

The NOBTS Faith Assessment Study

The Instrument

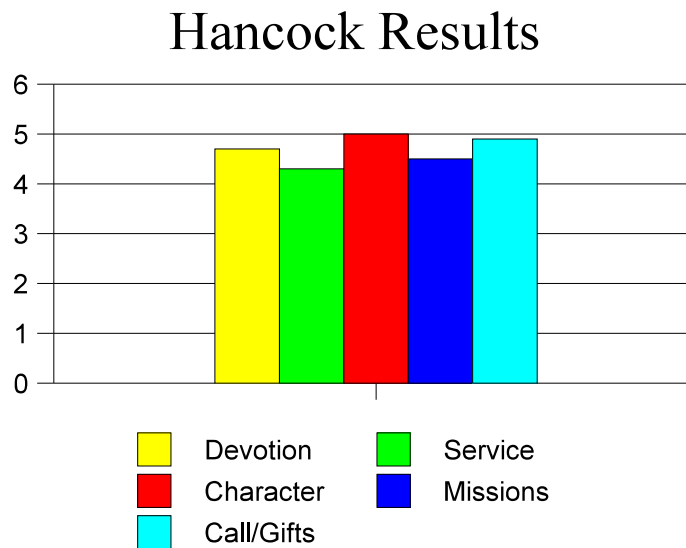
The study instrument was developed by Dr. Hancock. The twenty-two items utilized for the earlier effectiveness study were modified to assess personal spiritual development. The five categories of devotional/worship, service to others, Christian character, evangelism/missions, and personal call/gifts remained the same. The four point Likert scale was modified to a six point scale which provided a greater variety of response.

Study Basics

The study subjects included 110 first-year MDiv students enrolled in Spiritual Formation 1. In addition to the 22 item instrument, a variety of demographic information was also gathered. Demographic items included gender, degree program, and age.

Of the five general categories included in the study, Christian character, personal call/gifts, and devotion scored highest. The lowest recorded scores were in the areas of service and evangelism/missions. The one exception to that observation is the item on “meditation.” The highest scored single components included, “Importance of Living a Godly Life”, “Meaning and Purpose of Life”, “Awareness of God’s Presence”, and “Discernment of Right and Wrong.” The lowest scored items included, “Active in Finding New Ministries”, “Active in Sharing Faith”, “Meditating on God’s Word”, and “Serving Outside Comfort Zones.”

The basic statistics for the five categories are shown below.



Composite Conclusions

A strong consistency of the data exists among the three studies. The Benson, Thayer, and Hancock instruments all indicated that NOBTS students were growing more in their relationship to God than in the expression of their faith with others. The more recent studies also indicated moderate to above moderate levels of maturity. A need exists to strengthen the horizontal or

outward faith orientation of students. In addition, the exercise of Biblical meditation should be addressed as scores on the Hancock instrument indicate.

A Curricular Paradigm for Growth

Core Value

One result of the faith maturity studies is a renewed emphasis of the core value, Spiritual Vitality. President Kelley has chosen Spiritual Vitality as the featured core value for the 1999-2000 academic year. Campus-wide special events have been planned to promote personal spiritual growth among students, faculty, and staff.

Competency Component

The Master of Divinity degree has been structured around a competency-based core curriculum. The faith maturity element is addressed in the Spiritual and Character Formation Competency component.

Mentor Program

The Spiritual and Character Formation Competency component includes two newly developed courses, Spiritual Formation 1 and 2. The semester-length courses have limited enrollment (eight students maximum), are based on a mentor model, and are facilitated by a faculty member. First-year MDiv students are required to enroll in one of the sections offered. The groups are gender inclusive and students remain in the same group throughout the year. Options for textbooks are made available to professors. Only general principles and objectives are prescribed. No structured format is mandated. The groups meet weekly for one hour. The seminary has developed policy related to confidentiality and covenants are developed in each group.

Questions and Discussion