DSL Action Research Project Prospectus

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**Assignment 2: Background and Sociological Theory and Faith-Based Analysis**

• Research and write the Background of the Problem section.

• Choose and apply a sociological theory and at least one action research theorist to

understanding the problem.

• Analyze the problem using NT Wright's "7 universal human longings."

• Relate these longings to the problem in a faith-based context.

**Thesis statement:** While the college years are designed for personal growth and career preparation, there is a negative trend among Christian students where they are walking away from their faith by the time they graduate college. Reasons include, but are not limited to stress, lack of guidance, and being unequipped for adulthood.

• **Research and write the Background of the Problem section.**

## The problem itself is simple (i.e., 80% of college students have walked away from their faith). The reasons however, are numerous and extremely complex; and have come together like the perfect storm. Examples include: not knowing spiritual gifts or vocational calling, not being more firmly rooted in the word, or not being connected with a church or Christian group at college. A deeper dive reveals that few churches offer career ministries, teach vocational calling, or equip students to disciple and to know their spiritual gifts.

## Additionally, the Christian business community is extremely disjointed where Christian owners operate as a secular facing business and do not take the opportunity to offer faith at work practices. Workers who are Christian do not share their faith at work. Nor do they know about faith at work practices and therefore are not equipped to disciple at work.

How this came to be is just as complex with numerous factors also coming together like the perfect storm. Churches & christian schools do not teach biblical vocation, spiritual gifts, or Business As Mission (BAM) principles. As a result, students often choose the wrong major or start undeclared. This leads to numerous major changes and added stress that contributes to drop out rates, added years in college, and spiritual drift.

Students are not taught how to disciple, nor do they know their spiritual gifts, which sends them off to college ill equipped to lead unbelievers to Christ, may impact who they develop friendships with, and what clubs they join. This can lead to spiritual drift and lead to walking away from one’s faith altogether.

American parents tend to “separate” from their children on their 18th birthday or by the time they leave for college. As a single parent of three boys who went to college I experienced this first-hand. While the boys did graduate and are productive adults, they did not attend church and they did not join a Christian fellowship. Hindsight, I wish their church youth group would have played a more integral role in leading them to a Christian fellowship.

In the 1980’s public schools began to drop vocation programs like wood shop from their programs. In recent years, 2018 at my son’s high school, did the district begin to focus on career pathways. Unfortunately, they are using programs built on traditional research and assessments based on psychology (e.g., Myers Briggs) instead of using action research and biblical approaches. These programs are something, but the disproportionate ratio of students to instructors makes 1:1 assistance impossible. All students are exposed to the course offering, which was Kinesiology and Sports Medicine in 2018. The result was hundreds of kids planning to go into that field.

For those not in school (i.e., drop outs) or experiencing situations like homelessness and foster care, their predicament can be even more dismal. **“**Youth Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) struggle to navigate school to work transitions and experience difficulties accessing jobs. These youth are disconnected from school, have limited work experience [2], and experience a loss of economic, social, and human capital. NEET status is associated with lower education, parental unemployment, low socioeconomic status, low self-confidence, more precarious housing, and young parenthood” (Quinlan-Davidson, M., (2024). p2).

As a result of any combination of these factors, thousands of Christian students going to college without will experience increased stress levels during college. These students are more prone to experience numerous major changes, feeling unfulfilled, experiencing “drift” (i.e., dissatisfaction, burnout, deconversion), and leaving college, graduated or dropped out, with no sense of direction.

The impact on students was first revealed when David Kinnaman published his 2011 book *You Lost Me*, the Barna Group’s research found that 59% of Christians in their 20’s had walked away from faith. In 2019, research showed a negative trend with an increase to 64%.

This declining trend echoes the trend occurring within the Christian church that “the share of practicing Christians has nearly dropped in half since 2000” (Barna, 2020, p.2).

It is my humble opinion that something must be done to reverse this trend among college students. They are the next generation we need to help by bringing them back to God. We also need to equip them to be the future leaders of the Kingdom.

**Choose and apply a sociological theory and at least one action research theorist to**

**understand the problem.**

Social Constructionism is a theory where societal beliefs shape perception of problems. In this case, the Christian community’s belief that overlooks the loss of faith among college students shapes the perception that there is NO problem.

Dr. Reichard’s explanation of What “is” vs What “ought” to be and that Social Constructionism is within the What “is” in society realm leads me to believe as support for the sociological theory that can explain the problem. Or lack of a problem because I do not see churches making moves to start career ministries to equip their youth prior to going to college.

Peter Berger believed that society learns their ways of doing things from society's members, who portray or follow the set ways internalized by society. For instance, Americans start school at age 3-4 and graduate high school after completing the 12th grade after which students either go to college or get a job.

The problem is that while this is the pathway to adulthood, the Christian community (Christians, churches, and Christian business owners) has not created support to ensure that students are going to college wearing the armor of God.

**Analyze the problem using NT Wright's "7 universal human longings."**

Justice. People definitely hold on to when they’ve been wronged. I was too scared of failure to try out for the high school softball team and often wonder if my life would have been different had I tried out. My ex husband leaving just after I had our third child impacted my career and I wonder where I would have been today if he hadn’t left. Not living with Jesus at the helm impacts today and our future. Students need help to discover their calling in high school so they can make better decisions about their future.

Love. Going to college is often a lonely time. Preparing Christian students for college through equipping them in various ways and connecting them to their chosen college ahead of time can help them in many ways. One of my work partner organizations is working to help connect students to churches and fellowship organizations on college campuses nationwide. Imagine if every student had a friend/contact before they landed on campus. They’d feel safe and loved. They would experience less stress, which could result in a better experience.

Spirituality. It would be great if all colleges were Christian, but the majority of secular colleges have Christian organizations like CRU and InterVarsity. They also have Christian staff and professors. Local churches should also be connected to college campuses to invite students to visit which can lead to more connections, better experience, and a reduction of lost faith.

Beauty. Is truly in the eye of the beholder. Society has put a distorted definition on beauty to the extent of fake eyelashes that are distracting and fake nails that are an art form. However, I choose to look at the beauty God has given us in flowers and simple hospitality treats that bring joy to those around us. Everyone gets distracted by shiny things and it takes discipline and being rooted in God’s word to avoid the distraction. Society is caught up in stuff and status that they do not see the benefit of biblical vocation and Business as Mission (BAM); and how collectively these along with my training program will help alleviate the problems associated with and resulting from lost faith in college students.

Freedom. When we discover our calling it gives us freedom to know that we are doing what God designed us to do. Not knowing is stressful because we worry and are unable to find peace. In the same way, when we trust God knowing he will provide for us it gives us freedom from worry.

Truth. Christians know the truth about life on earth and heaven. Trusting that allows us to experience God’s goodness daily. Public schools teach their narrative of truth. When it comes to vocation, the districts choose a path for students to follow. Unfortunately, the massive number of students they need to work with makes it impossible to run effective programs that will catch everyone. In the same way, the Christian community knows the bible is the foundation for life, yet churches don’t teach the biblical principles of work, nor do they make it a priority to equip people to disciple.

Power. NT Wright mentions the “Christian community was basically all about God’s taking charge and running the world in a whole new way”. (Wright, . p132) I have wondered about this. Why doesn’t the Christian community do more for the community and the world? Why are mission trips mostly oversees? Why aren’t there more Christian politicians? Why does my church NOT have a directory of businesses so people can support them? Why did BAM go overseas and not replicate in the USA? To see churches struggle and be influenced by the congregation instead of God led shows where the power is.

**Relate these longings to the problem in a faith-based context.**

“There is a lack of knowledge of how to (re)engage upcoming youth in general education and employment support services” (Quinlan-Davidson, M., et al. (2024). p2). It is important that we address the gap in services to minimize the amount of brokenness that results when students enter adulthood without direction. Providing support through a Christian based training program prior to college could significantly reduce the amount of mental stress experienced during the college years, and the years beyond.

It has been shown that “young people who already consider applicability on the labor market when choosing an education have a significantly better quality of life than young adults who cannot find employment on the labor market due to an inappropriate choice of school” (Arpova, A. (2023). p76). If the outcome was positive for the general population, imagine how good the results could be using a biblically based intervention in the Christian community.

Providing a Christian vocational training program encourages a “stronger commitment to professional roles, empowers employees to actively shape their careers, gain control, and ultimately attain higher levels of subjective career success. Understanding these factors is crucial for organizations that maintain a motivated and content workforce while educating professionals on long-term career commitment. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of commitment, perseverance, and adaptability in achieving career success, especially for boundaryless and versatile careerists who rely on self-efficacy and resilience” (Bhawna, P., et al. (2024). p61).

**“**The perspectives, principles, and critical factors in strategic management have assisted in formulating the strategy to strengthen youth ministry involvement in community development. The Msebi, M. & Beukes, J.W. (2024) study determined gaps and recommended further empirical studies on youth ministry and community development among local churches” (p8).

The Action Research model is encouraging when planning a study of students to reverse the trend of lost faith in the Christian community. The hope is that the Christian training program will reverse the trend as we equip students before they leave for college.

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