

2010

Called for Life

Greg Owen

Ellen Shelton

Brian Pittman

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections>

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Owen, Greg; Shelton, Ellen; and Pittman, Brian (2010) "Called for Life," *Intersections*: Vol. 2010: No. 31, Article 4.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2010/iss31/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Intersections by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

Called for Life

Key findings from the evaluation of college programs to support vocational discernment

Background and methods

Called for Life was a collaborative research project designed to examine the impact of Lilly Endowment funded vocational programs at three Lutheran colleges in the Midwest. Prior to participation in this study, each college had received a Lilly grant to develop on-campus resources to help students discern and commit themselves to a vocational calling.

This study was designed to go beyond the measures built into each college’s self-evaluation and to carry out a more rigorous and cross-institutional assessment of how and in what ways students have been affected by a college-wide focus on vocational discernment. In this article, based on the final research report, we seek to answer the following questions: ¹

- Do students who are exposed to vocation programming gain a broader and deeper understanding of the concept of vocation?
- Do students who are exposed to vocation programming describe being better able to discern their own vocation?
- What aspects of vocation programming are most effective?

Study methods

Findings of the study are based on surveys with three groups of students at the three colleges (see Figure 1). One group was surveyed as freshmen and again as juniors; a second group was surveyed as juniors and again in their first year after graduation; and a third group, who had attended before the Lilly-funded programs were developed, was surveyed during their fifth year

Figure 1 Summary of data collection from students and graduates

	Class of 2009	Class of 2007	Class of 2001
Spring 2006	Web survey N=800 freshmen	Web survey N=787 juniors	---
Spring 2007	---	---	Phone interview N=247 graduates ("pre-Lilly graduates")
Spring 2008	Web survey N=434 juniors	Phone interview N=384 graduates ("Lilly graduates")	---

after graduation.² Freshmen and juniors completed web-based surveys; graduates were contacted by telephone by Wilder Research interviewers.

We present two kinds of findings in this paper. First are comparisons of graduates from the class of 2007, whose four years at college all included exposure to Lilly-funded programming, and graduates from the class of 2001, who completed college before those programs were begun. For simplicity, we refer to these two groups as “Lilly graduates” and “pre-Lilly graduates.” Second we present comparisons showing progression from freshman year to junior year, and sometimes also from junior year to post-graduation, to illustrate how certain kinds of knowledge and behaviors developed over time. These comparisons are based on surveys of students in the classes of 2005 (juniors and graduates) and 2007 (freshmen and juniors).

Vocation program elements referenced in the evaluation

Each college developed a unique program suited to its own history, mission, and student population. However, from conversations with representatives of the three campuses, it became clear that there were common elements in all three of the programs. These common elements were used to understand the types of program activities that affected student outcomes. They are:

- **Academic and personal advising**, which includes conversation with or advice from an instructor, faculty advisor, career or personal advising office, or campus vocation center, that includes specific vocation-related content.
- **Vocation-infused courses**, which are those specifically adapted to include new material on vocation. They may be required or optional.
- **Academic and career activities**, including participation in academic or departmental organizations or clubs, faculty-directed research or independent study, or job shadowing. They are considered a vocational program activity only if the student’s survey response indicates that it included vocational content.
- **Volunteer, service-learning, and community-building** includes a variety of formal service-learning activities such as tutoring, components of certain courses, service-based travel and immersion programs, and service projects of student groups.
- **Vocationally-infused activities** include a variety of non-classroom activities with vocational content. This may include some of the service-learning activities mentioned above, as well as specific leadership development and internship programs, individual assessments given by a campus vocation center, and vocation-related convocation speakers and book discussion groups.
- **Off-campus community experiences** include international or off-campus study as well as some of the experiences that

are also included under service-learning (such as service-immersion trips).

- **Vocational centers/offices and web sites:** Not all of the campuses had formal vocational centers or offices, but all three had web sites related to the Lilly program and its activities.
- **Church and pre-ministry activities** include participation in a church, religious, spiritual, meditation, or prayer group, as well as other more specific pre-ministry seminars, discussion groups, or other activities developed under the vocation grants.

Our study also documented students’ participation in what this report calls “**general co-curricular activities**,” which do not appear to have included a specific vocational component.

Do students who are exposed to vocation programming gain a broader and deeper understanding of the concept of vocation?

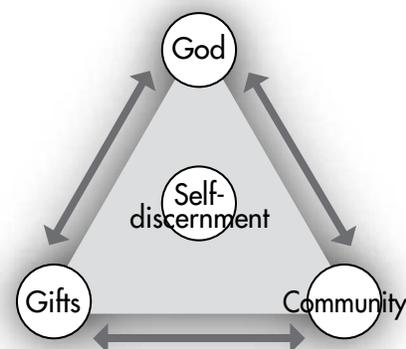
One of the fundamental goals of the Lilly-funded initiatives at each college was to develop new methods by which students could learn about and respond to the idea of a calling or vocation. This section of the report explores the range of ways in which students encountered these concepts, thought about their meaning, and considered how these ideas might fit within their own lives.

Key elements of the concept of vocation

In order to code and analyze growth in students’ thinking about the idea of vocation, researchers and college representatives developed a conceptual model. This allows us to examine open-ended responses to identify what elements students use to define or describe their understanding of the idea. Key elements, illustrated in Figure 2 below, are:

- **God:** Students describe vocation as including the alignment of one’s life with God or faith, serving or glorifying God, or listening to God’s guidance, or they refer to God as the source of calling, purpose or meaning, of gifts and talents.

Figure 2



- **Gifts:** Students indicate that vocation had something to do with identifying, developing, or using one’s own gifts or talents, or that it related to passions, interests or fulfillment, or involved the use of skills, knowledge, or experience.
- **Community:** Students identified vocation as involving service to or helping others (the community in general or specific groups), seeking the common good, or being part of relationships that involve responsibility or obligations.
- **Self-discernment:** Students indicated that vocation was related to the process of discovering a purpose or mission in life or the development of values and beliefs, or linked vocation with a process of reflection or self-examination, or to personal growth (beyond simply pursuing their education or training for a job or career).

We also looked for evidence that students perceived connections among the first three of these elements: for example, evidence that students saw gifts or talents as something endowed by God, or community service as a way of serving God or God’s purposes, or saw their own or others’ gifts and talents as a means for serving the community.

Differences for those who were and were not exposed to vocation programming

Figure 3 shows that among graduates offering a definition of vocation, the Lilly graduates were more than twice as likely to mention “calling” compared to the pre-Lilly graduates (50% vs. 23%). In contrast, the pre-Lilly graduates more than twice as often mentioned job or career as their main understanding of the term (65% vs 29% among the Lilly graduates). Furthermore, almost one-half (45%) of the pre-Lilly graduates described vocation *only* in connection with a job. This is more than ten times the rate (4%) among Lilly graduates.

Other common themes for the Lilly graduates include purpose or meaning, community or service, and the idea of searching or listening for a call (Figure 3).

It should also be noted that only 1 percent of the Lilly graduates indicated they “do not know” what the term vocation means. This compares to 9 percent in the pre-Lilly cohort.

One of the main components in having a deeper understanding of vocation is defining or understanding it as more than a job, employment, or a career. Based on analysis of responses to several different questions, we see that the Lilly graduates are

Figure 3 In their own words: Graduates define vocation

Graduate phone interview	Pre-Lilly Graduates (N=247)		Lilly Graduates (N=384)	
	N	%	N	%
CALLING: Vocation is the same as a calling or related to a calling from a higher power or within yourself	56	23%	192	50%
MEANING: Vocation is your purpose or where you derive meaning including your role or “how” you should live your life	27	11%	124	32%
JOB: Vocation is related to or may include your job, occupation, career, or field of expertise	160	65%	113	29%
COMMUNITY: Vocation relates to service, volunteering, community, or a person’s relationship to the society in general	28	11%	97	25%
SEARCHING: Vocation involves listening or searching for a calling including God’s calling or your purpose	4	2%	48	13%
GIFTS: Vocation involves determining, developing, or using a person’s gifts, skills, or talents	8	3%	45	12%
SELF: Vocation comes from within or includes a responsibility to one’s self	3	1%	41	11%
PASSION: Vocation includes a passion, striving, or determination to pursue something in life	7	3%	37	10%
ONLY JOB: Respondent only mentions job, occupation, career, or field of expertise in their definition of vocation	111	45%	17	4%
DON’T KNOW: Respondent reports not knowing what vocation means	22	9%	2	1%

Note: Coded open-ended responses from a web-based survey. Totals exceed 100% because answers could be coded in multiple categories

significantly more likely than the pre-Lilly cohort to report that vocation relates to more than just a job or career (Figure 4).

In addition, the Lilly graduates are significantly more likely to “strongly disagree” with the statement that vocation “does not apply until a person starts a career” (4.0% to 28%) and the statement that vocation “basically means a job” (18% to 4%).

Figure 4 Evidence that graduates define vocation as more than a job

Graduate phone interview	Pre-Lilly Graduates (N=247)		Lilly Graduates (N=384)	
	N	%	N	%
Strongly disagrees that vocation does not apply to a person until they start a career	68	28%	155	40%
Strongly disagrees that vocation basically means a job	10	4%	71	18%
Defined the term “vocation” only as job (open end)	111	45%	17	4%
Vocation is more than a job	53	21%	172	45%

Progression over time for those who were exposed

Student respondents strongly associate the term “vocation” with a calling, and this association is stronger for juniors than for freshmen. Thirty-six percent of freshman respondents and 43 percent of junior respondents describe vocation this way. This is the most common theme among all current student respondents.

From freshman to junior year there was a substantial decrease in the proportion of respondents who indicated they “don’t know” what the term vocation means, from 30 percent of freshmen to only 17 percent of juniors.

Other themes occurring with relatively high frequency among freshman and junior respondents are purpose or meaning, the idea of belonging to a community or service to the community, God, and a connection to finding, developing, or using gifts or talents (Figure 5).

Experiences related to development of conceptual understanding

More than three-fourths (78%) of Lilly graduates can think of a particular experience that shaped their definition of vocation, compared to 52 percent of pre-Lilly graduates.

Respondents who could think of an experience were asked to describe the experience that helped to shape their definition. Responses that included enough information were categorized according to the time frame during which the experience occurred: before college, during college, or after college. By a margin of almost two to one (58% to 32%), Lilly graduates were

Figure 5 In their own words: Students define vocation

Student web survey	Pre-Lilly Graduates (N=247)		Lilly Graduates (N=384)	
	N	%	N	%
CALLING: Vocation is the same as a calling or related to a calling from a higher power or within yourself	289	36%	521	43%
MEANING: Vocation is your purpose or where you derive meaning including your role or “how” you should live your life	140	18%	314	26%
JOB: Vocation is related to or may include your job, occupation, career, or field of expertise	190	24%	270	22%
DON'T KNOW: Respondent reports not knowing what vocation means	240	30%	212	17%
COMMUNITY: Vocation relates to service, volunteering, community, or a person's relationship to the society in general	80	10%	177	14%
GOD: Relates to God or another higher power	99	12%	152	12%
GIFTS: Vocation involves determining, developing, or using a person's gifts, skills, or talents	78	10%	148	12%
ONLY JOB: Respondent only mentions job, occupation, career, or field of expertise in their definition of vocation	50	6%	48	4%

Note: Coded open-ended responses from a web-based survey. Totals exceed 100% because answers could be coded in multiple categories.

significantly more likely than pre-Lilly graduates to report an experience that took place during college or as part of their overall college experience (Figure 6). In contrast, pre-Lilly graduates were significantly more likely to describe experiences that could be identified as occurring before or after college. These differences, especially in the after-college experiences, may be partly due to the fact that the pre-Lilly graduates were interviewed longer after graduation (five years out, compared to less than one year out).

Among the class of 2007 graduates who could think of a particular experience that shaped their definition of vocation, the most common themes related to college-based experiences include:

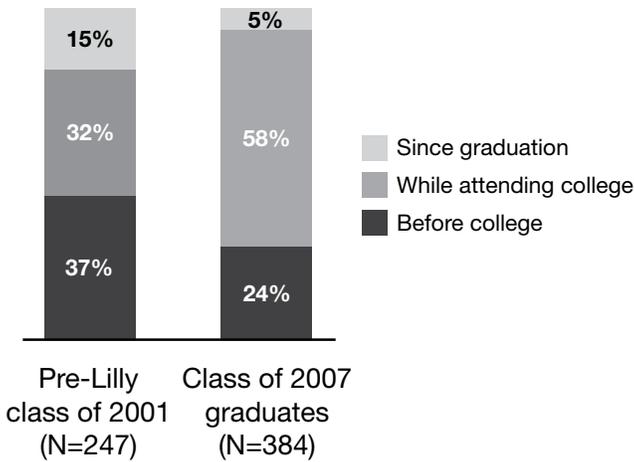
- **Overall college experience (27%).** This includes respondents mentioning “their time at” college, saying that the college stressed vocation, or mentioning other general activities that do not fit in another category. In the pre-Lilly cohort, 15 percent mention their overall college experience.
- **Coursework, classes, major, or study abroad (24%).** This includes respondents mentioning specific or general curriculum-based experiences. These can include their overall

major or department, specific coursework, or an off-campus study experience. In the pre-Lilly cohort, 9 percent mention curriculum-based experiences.

- **Professors, faculty, or administration (8%).** This mostly includes direct interactions with professors or faculty (in and out of classes) but also includes some recognition of hearing the message from the overall administration at the schools. In the pre-Lilly cohort, 3 percent mention professors, faculty, or administration.

A considerable number of the Lilly graduates specifically associate the shaping of their definition of vocation with Lilly programs on campus. This includes 10 percent who mention, without prompting, their school’s vocation program by name. This number was higher at Augustana (15%) and Luther (14%) than Augsburg (4%). However, this difference is reversed in the proportion of Augsburg respondents (14%) specifically mentioning religion classes compared to Luther (3%) and Augustana (2%). This may be due in part to Augsburg’s mandatory vocation-related religion courses which served as a key component of their vocation program.

Figure 6 Timing of experiences that shaped the definition of vocation



Do students who were exposed to vocation programming gain skills to better discern their own vocations?

Differences for those who were and were not exposed to vocation programming

The pre-Lilly graduates were interviewed in their fifth year after graduation, while the Lilly graduates were interviewed in their first year out. This difference must be borne in mind when considering the differences in how the two groups define the concept of vocation and how they describe their own vocation.

Figure 7 Evidence that graduates have, and know, a vocation (defined as more than just a job)

	Pre-Lilly Graduates (N=247)		Lilly Graduates (N=384)	
	N	%	N	%
Graduate phone interview				
Discernment outcome: has a vocation and defines vocation as more than a job or career	110	45%	333	87%
Discernment outcome: knows own vocation and describes it as more than a job, field, or career	58	23%	121	32%

The overall percentage of graduate respondents in the two groups who at least say they have a vocation (whether or not they know what it is) is comparable between the two (Figure 7). However, the Lilly graduates are significantly more likely (87%) than the pre-Lilly cohort (45%) to both indicate that they have a vocation *and* define vocation as more than a job. Additionally, the Lilly graduates (32%) are significantly more likely than the pre-Lilly cohort (23%) to report knowing what their vocation is, while also describing it in terms broader than just a job or profession.

Of graduate respondents who know their vocation—regardless of how they define the concept—almost twice the proportion of Lilly graduates (70% to 37%) report they mainly developed their sense of vocation while they were attending college (Figure 8). The longer post-college time accrued by the pre-Lilly graduates is reflected in the proportion of respondents who report their sense of vocation was mainly developed after college. These proportions are similar if we look only at respondents who define vocation as more than a job.

Figure 8 “Would you say that your sense of your own vocation was mainly developed...” (of those who know their vocation)

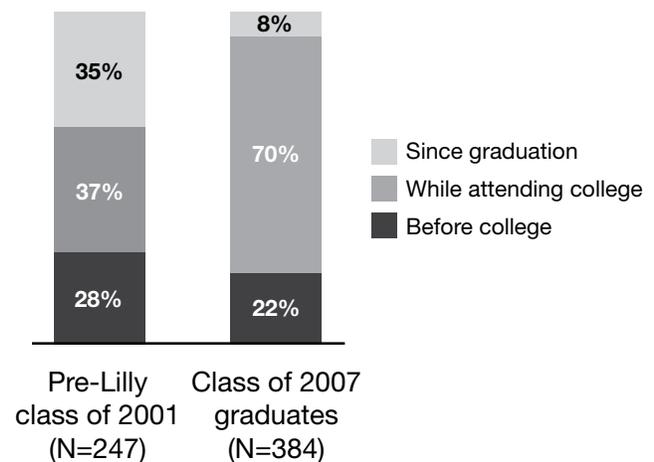
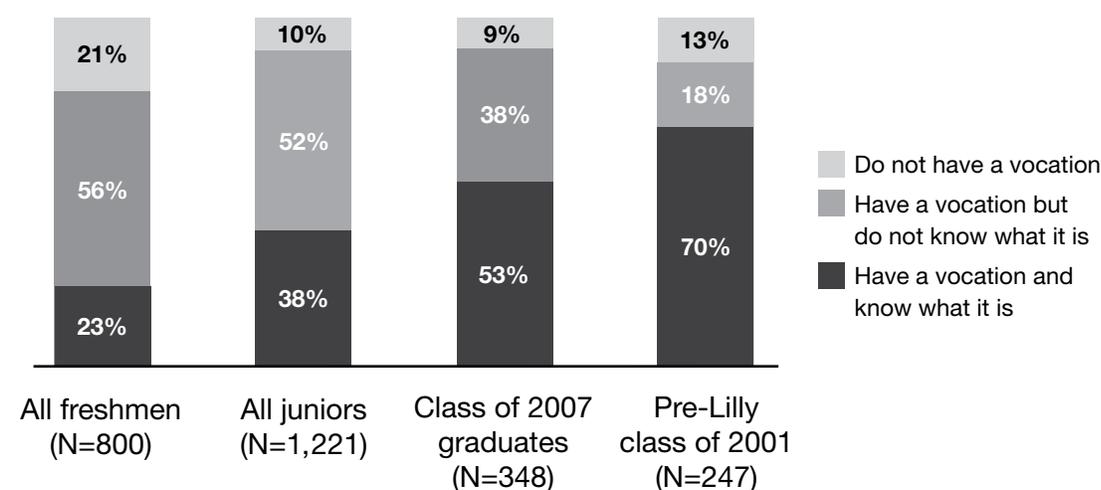


Figure 9 Students' and graduates' discernment of their own vocation



Progression over time for those who were exposed

Overall, the percent of respondents who report they have a vocation and know what it is steadily increases with their stage of education. Starting at freshman year, 23 percent of respondents say they know their vocation. This increases to 38 percent of all junior respondents and 53 percent of the Lilly graduates (Figure 9).

The pre-Lilly cohort has the highest proportion (70%) of respondents who report knowing their vocation. However, this may reflect the fact they were interviewed five years after graduation, compared to less than a year for the Lilly graduates. Furthermore, since the pre-Lilly cohort mainly associate vocation with a job, their “knowing” their vocation means something different than it does for the students and graduates who were exposed to the Lilly programs.

Respondents who report that they “know” their vocation were asked to describe it. Compared to the pre-Lilly cohort, the Lilly graduates are:

- **More likely to include service or community.** Forty-nine percent of the Lilly graduates who know their vocation describe it as including service or connection to the community. This compares to 18 percent of the pre-Lilly cohort.
- **Equally likely to include their job.** Eighty-six percent of the Lilly graduates who know their vocation describe it as including a job, field, or career. This compares to 84 percent of the pre-Lilly cohort.
- **Less likely to *only* describe their job.** Forty percent of the Lilly graduates who know their vocation describe it *only* in terms of a job, field, or career. This compares to 65 percent of the pre-Lilly cohort.

Experiences related to increased ability to discern own vocation

Juniors who had consulted their colleges' vocation program web sites or centers were significantly more likely to also report that

they had increased their skills for discerning their vocations. Three other experiences reported by juniors were also found to predict better ability to discern a vocation:

- Observing someone else who is living out their vocation
- Spending time reflecting on their own vocation
- Voluntarily spending time talking with others about vocation

The *Called for Life* study found that students who reported any of these three experiences were also significantly more likely to have achieved several of the other outcomes of interest. In turn, a variety of specific program activities increased the likelihood that students would report having engaged in any of these exploration and discernment activities, and these are described in the full report.³ These varied from campus to campus, reflecting different student populations and different program strategies of the different colleges. However, across all the colleges, certain common characteristics of effective programming were described by students in their open-ended responses to the surveys. These are described in the next section.

What aspects of vocation programming are most effective?

The quantitative analyses show that the colleges have been successful in reaching students through a variety of program activities. In addition to a host of small, specialized opportunities such as reading groups or targeted service-learning programs, effective approaches also include more general kinds of volunteer and internship programs and off-campus study, formal and informal advising, and the vocation centers or overall program offices that serve as hubs for the effort and help students connect the pieces.

We went back to the students' own open-ended comments in order to better understand what it was about these experiences that

made them effective. Certain key themes stand out, and many of them appear repeatedly across the different kinds of activities.

Pervasive campus culture of vocational exploration

In many answers to specific questions, students told us that the most important influences on them were hard to name because they were not very specific. Rather, these students pointed to the cumulative effect of many separate, related, and mutually reinforcing influences. Both at Augsburg and Augustana, with their designated vocation centers, and at Luther, which did not designate a physical office for the work, the vocation programming clearly has become integrated into the overall campus culture. This is evident from the student comments that describe a variety of ways in which they are exposed to vocation at the colleges, and more importantly, from the ways in which they mention multiple forms of exposure in close conjunction with each other, describing how each reinforces the others.

This infusion is effective in part because it ties together and adds value to separate elements of formal programming:

[While you were at [College], what activity or experience *most* influenced your thinking about your purpose or calling in life?] The classes I was taking. [What class?] All my classes, the ones that focused on my major. [Did one stand out more?] No, all the classes. [Please describe *how* that activity or experience influenced your thinking about your purpose or calling in life.] They showed me that this is what I wanted to do, and show me how I was supposed to do what I wanted. (Did one experience influence more?) Nope.

The evidence is even stronger for effectiveness arising from the combination of formal programming with informal opportunities to further develop questions and ideas and test potential answers in the context of informal activities and relationships, both with adults and also with other students:

[What activity or experience] I think my friendships at Luther College, my church, my classes and the class work had the most influence. [How that influenced] The classes gave me a framework for understanding the larger world, my friends affirmed the strengths that I was good at, and my church helped me see how everything fit together.

This integrated campus-wide ethos seems to be exactly what is captured in the three moderating factors that were found to play such an important role in influencing longer-term outcomes: the infusion of the idea of vocation throughout the campus promotes and supports students talking about vocation, reflecting on vocation, and observing vocation in others, on a regular basis, in their natural habitat.

Within this overall campus culture, four other key ingredients stand out:

- Relationships with adults (professors, advisors, or others) who take an interest in the students
- Opportunities for experiential, hands-on learning and/or service outside the classroom
- Classes that introduce and build on the concept of vocation and its application
- Relationships with other students

Relationships with adults who take an interest

Not surprisingly, the adults who influenced students the most took a sustained interest in them and listened without judging:

[What activity or experience] Professor [name]. Taking his classes. He was my teacher, mentor, tutor, and confidant. [How that influenced] I took almost every class that he taught. He was always there to listen to me with non-judging ears. He was always very helpful and always gave me helpful advices with my problems.

These trusted adults were able to help students understand the importance of vocational discernment, help students recognize as well as explore their gifts and talents, and ask questions that caused the students to look inside themselves more deeply:

[What activity or experience] Faculty and staff. [How that influenced] By their interests and the questions that they'd ask and the challenges that they'd make.

As students become more aware of gifts and talents, professors, advisors, or other adult mentors help them recognize opportunities for applying those gifts:

Talking with my music advisor. If it wasn't for her, I think my whole entire experience would have been different. She was amazing at helping you figure out how those interests could fit into your future career.

Other sources of influence come through the adult's position as a role model for the process of discernment, for the exercise of gifts in service to God and community, or for living a life that provides an example of well-balanced priorities:

A conversation I had with my first advisor about vocation in general and a number of conversations I had with my roommates about vocation. I realized that you do not have to be paid at the top pay bracket to have fulfillment. You can balance work and life to be happier overall.

Outside-of-classroom experiences with service and learning

One set of themes in students' descriptions of service learning, job shadowing, and off-campus study shows the value of these experiences in helping students to expand their horizons and see more broadly outside of their previous perspectives. Interactions with people from different backgrounds help them identify needs for help, how help might be provided, and the real difference that help can make:

[What activity or experience] An internship experience I had where I got to work with lawyers. [How that influenced] It got me to see what they do and how what they do makes an impact in their community. [Repeat: How that influenced] It showed me there's more to being a lawyer than just law. It showed me how the law affects people's lives.

The experience also allows students to find out what it is like to be in a new setting and do a new kind of work, and find out if it feels right:

I provided child care services for a year for the battered women's center and through that experiences and I worked with the children on their level and working with the children I felt I could be a role model for the older ones, and the younger ones I felt I could guide them. It made me realize I could step into a difficult situation and change it. It encouraged me to do difficult things and gave me courage and tools to do it.

A second and also common theme about experiential learning is its value in helping students look more deeply *inside* of themselves. The experiences help them identify and test their own interests, gifts, and abilities. They provide opportunities to become aware of things they might not have been aware of before, and explore and assess their own values. This includes helping students experience the rewards of volunteering, to see that there is more to life than a job, and that a vocation can be lived through non-career experiences:

My volunteer work. I volunteered at a hospital in quite a few different areas (pharmacy, infusion center, and others). It helped me to narrow down what I wanted to do, as far as experience. It also showed me that there is more to life than just a career. You have a job, but you can do things outside of your job. You can volunteer in areas not related to what you do for a job.

Classes that introduce and build on the concept of vocation

When students mentioned particular courses as influential in their development of vocation, they cited several common characteristics regardless of what field the course was in. These

included a variety of ways in which they helped students learn about themselves as well as about the subject matter. One common example was seen in courses that offered opportunities to develop "real life" skills, and to see how those skills can be used in the real world:

The landscape research internship helped me take the knowledge I learned in the classroom and apply it to something real life. [It gave me] something to do with all the knowledge I had.

[What activity or experience] Just hanging out with friends and discussing larger issues. [For instance, what issues?] Politics and religion. [How that influenced] I think, those discussions, made me explore and learn about different views, and so, that experience helped shape my own points of view.

Another channel of influence is through changing what or how students think about the world or opening their eyes to how big the world is:

Taking the courses offered really opened my opinions about life and helped me form my world views. [How that influenced] The classes that I took really helped me to define my values and figure out what career would be the best fit for me. The values that I learned at Augustana are something that I want to implement into my life as well as continue to develop those values.

More concretely, students frequently cited how courses helped them understand how the academic content could be applied in a variety of real world applications. Often, they cited applications that were not only career-focused, but also more personal, and mentioned ways in which a professor had communicated the importance of defining "success" in the field to include service to others in addition to personal or career success. This theme was especially evident in students describing "capstone" courses taken near the end of their major:

My keystone course. [How that influenced] I think because it took business and vocation and tied it together for me, and it got me to think about while I'm in the business world how vocation would apply to my life. I think it made me think more of how I could help myself and help others through business. I have always thought of my life as being self serving, and that class helped me open my mind to think about what I'm passionate about and how to help others.

Interactions with other students

The final component of effective campus-wide vocation programs is a rich mix of student-to-student interactions.

[What activity or experience] I think just based on communicating with peers and seeing their ideas and values helps me understand myself. By understanding others, [that] helps me to understand myself better.

One common theme shows the value of interactions with peers who have different backgrounds, values, insights, and experiences:

[What activity or experience] My relationships with other students. Meeting people from different religions and faith beliefs. I had great relationships with them and learn a lot about different people from all walk's of life. [How that influenced] It made me open up more. I came from a small Catholic town where everybody was the same. This experience really made me stronger and wiser and made me think of others.

Another common theme points to the contributions that are strongest when friends are more similar. This makes it more likely that they can give feedback on how well certain values or ways of living them would or would not be a good fit:

[What activity or experience] It was my interaction with my friends and it was their beliefs and values reflecting on to me. [How that influenced] I think they are a lot like me and they encouraged me in what I wanted to do.

Students also commented on how valuable they find it to share their exploration with peers who are also struggling and seeking. It is helpful to know they are not the only one who is uncertain, and the ability to share the uncertainty makes it less threatening to open up and explore new ideas:

[What activity or experience] My interaction with my close friends. [How that influenced] I feel like we were all seeking what our calling was and we helped each other understand what our weaknesses and strengths were and encouraged each other.

One of the risks of having vocation embedded in every aspect of campus life is that the messages about it may not always be consistent. Friends are also helpful in helping to interpret or re-define the concept of vocation if it is not clear:

[What activity or experience] I was talking to my roommate who I lived with for 4 years and we were talking about vocation. I asked him what he was meant to do and he said he was put on this earth to be an English teacher. He is doing that now and enjoying it. That clarified for me what vocation is about; what you're meant to do and what you have the talent for.

What the study shows

- Vocation programs can significantly increase students' understanding of the concept of vocation and can significantly increase students' skills for discerning their vocations.

Several lessons from this study merit further discussion. First, students do not have to come from a religious background or espouse a conventional belief in God to engage in meaningful conversations and reflections related to vocation. The open-ended comments of survey respondents show that self-discernment is often at work, where students examine talents and abilities, consider opportunities for action, become aware of needs in the wider world and weigh these things in the context of values and beliefs. While these values and beliefs are often informed by religious upbringing, spiritual training, or other religious experiences, they may also be embedded in moral commitments and basic values that are not associated with religion but learned throughout childhood and young adulthood as part of basic socialization and the observation of others. Practically, this means that colleges can effectively engage young people in the consideration of how their talents can be applied to the needs of the world without reference to God or any specific religious belief system. This is generally very good news for those involved in helping young people to consider their future because it means that the circle can be large enough for everyone to be included.

Second, multiple communication strategies are necessary to effectively reach a diverse student body. Our results indicate that virtually all strategies have some potential for hitting the mark when multiple strategies are in place, and that these strategies can include advising, classroom instruction, co-curricular activities, off-campus experiences, opportunities for experiential learning, service projects, job shadowing, retreats, religious instruction and a variety of other potential connection points.

- A variety of different program activities and resources contribute to these outcomes. There is no single most effective approach. However, a combination of varied elements appears to be most promising, and certain characteristics stand out as common elements in college experiences that students describe as most effective. These are:
 - Relationships with adults (professors, advisors, or others) who take an interest in the students
 - Opportunities for experiential, hands-on learning and/or service outside the classroom
 - Classes that introduce and build on the concept of vocation and its application
 - Relationships with other students

- Survey tools can be effectively used to identify the vocational activities with which students engaged during their college careers, as well as a number of different kinds of vocational outcomes.

Endnotes

1. The full *Called for Life* report and summary are available on the Wilder Research web site (www.wilderresearch.org).

2. **Class of 2009:** The 800 students completing a web survey as freshmen represents a response rate of 53 percent (47% at Augsburg, 46% at Augustana, and 65% at Luther). 663 of the 800 respondents were still enrolled two years later. Thus the 434 completing the follow-up survey represents a response rate of 54 percent of the original panel of 800, 65 percent of those eligible for follow-up, and 29% of the original class of freshmen.

Class of 2007: The 787 students completing the baseline junior web survey represents 54 percent of the total class at the three schools (53% at Augsburg, 49% at Augustana, and 62% at Luther). 384 graduates completed a follow-up telephone interview for a response rate of 48 percent of the baseline sample, 58 percent of those eligible for follow-up, and 27% of the original class of juniors.

Class of 2001: We randomly selected 619 pre-Lilly graduates for the telephone interviews, of whom 247 completed the interview, for a 40% response rate. The response rate was affected by an inability to obtain up-to-date and accurate contact information for 192 graduates in the sample.

Note: Incentives for participation included a modest gift card (\leq \$5) to campus food service for the student web surveys and a (\$10-15) gift card to amazon.com for the telephone interviews with graduates.

3. Available on the Wilder Research web site (see note 1).