CROSSING THE SECULAR DIVIDE: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTS

OF REGIONAL ACCREDITATION ON BIBLE COLLEGES

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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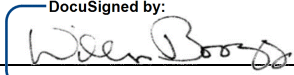
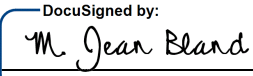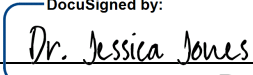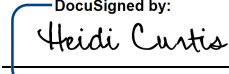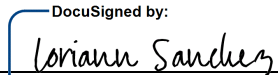Northwest Nazarene University

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT

DISSERTATION

This dissertation of Tina Royer, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership with a major in Educational Leadership and titled "Crossing the Secular Divide: A Qualitative Inquiry Into the Effects of Regional Accreditation on Bible Colleges," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate the pages that follow to my husband—thank you for the hours of silence to write. And to my children who ate cereal for dinner more times than I can count so that I could finish one more assignment. The good news is that this is it, the last assignment. The bad news is that I've gotten used to not making dinners.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined eight Bible colleges which have membership with regional accrediting bodies. This study explored the reasons Bible colleges seek regional accreditation as well as the impacts of regional accreditation on the participating colleges. Using change theory combined with a spiritual leadership framework to examine the data, the results of this study demonstrated that top-level leadership at regionally accredited Bible colleges view regional accreditation as a valuable tool to enact meaningful change on their campuses. Analysis of the results provides insights into the effects of regional accreditation on Bible colleges. Recommendations are detailed which encourage Bible colleges to consider maintaining dual accreditation with a religious accrediting body.

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Chapter I

Introduction

      Bible colleges have been a part of American higher education, in some form or another, for well over a century (Hammond, 2019). For much of that time, it was common for them to operate as extensions of local churches with the purpose of educating their members on issues such as theology and doctrine (Carter, 2014; Mittwede, 2013; Rine et al., 2021). In many ways, then, Bible colleges have historically served the function of helping to disciple converts in such a way that fosters religious organizational distinctiveness (Mittwede, 2013; Rine et al., 2021). In recent generations, the landscape of higher education shifted (Barton, 2019; Carter, 2014; Henck, 2011; Reynolds & Wallace, 2016). So, too, has the landscape of Christian higher education shifted. Christian higher education is distinct from secular higher education in that it has a focus on spiritual formation (Martin, 2018). Much of the work of Christian higher education institutions could be considered pre-modern in the sense that they reject both modern and postmodern values (Edlin, 2009; Schreiner, 2018; Toms, 2018). Bible colleges, then, are pre-modern (or possibly modern) institutions which are operating in a postmodern academic landscape.

      Postmodern values as they relate to higher education include, but are not limited to, the commercialization of education, deconstruction, and relativism (Collins & Clanton, 2018; Darroux, 2013; Denig, 2012; Edlin, 2009; McCowan, 2017). As such, in recent generations, Christian higher education institutions have had to decide how to adapt to this changing landscape, which has required them to make decisions which challenge their very identities (Graham, et al., 2017; Holliker, 1992; Holmes, 2002; Lim, 2014). Among these decisions, one stands out for its importance for long-term survival: accreditation. Christian institutions of higher

learning, including Bible colleges, have had to decide whether to continue operating without recognized accreditations or to seek accreditation, and, if they seek accreditation, they must choose which type of accreditation to pursue (Barton, 2019; Guenther, 2019; Henck, 2011). Christian higher education in the United States is in a period of significant change as it seeks to remain relevant in this postmodern world (Toms, 2018). Accredited Christian higher education institutions are dually accountable—to higher education accreditation agencies and to faith communities. This means that accredited Christian colleges and universities "walk a tightrope between these two entities, their expectations, and their values" (Henck, 2011, p.199).

It is important for schools to consider accreditation because in today's higher education landscape, accreditation is often required for students to have their credits accepted at transfer institutions and because there is no possibility for schools to access government funding via financial aid without accreditation. As such, accreditation is an avenue which may be necessary to consider when schools are looking to remain financially solvent (Denig, 2012; Schreiner, 2018; Simone, 2014; Toms, 2018). Additionally, accreditation serves as a mechanism for accountability for institutions which pursue and maintain it. This accountability, to neutral persons outside of ones' own institutional silo, provides a potential catalyst for meaningful, positive change. However, accreditation as a function of relatively few organizations, all of which operate under U.S. Federal oversight, is not without its critics.

According to the National Association of Scholars (2021), a non-profit whose stated goal is to reform higher education in the U.S., "regional accreditors' 'gatekeeper' role undermines [regional accreditors'] ability to provide accurate assessments of the quality of colleges and universities" because suspending or withdrawing accreditation from schools "could mean the quick bankruptcy of a college or university—virtually all of which derive large portions of their

revenues from federal funding" (p. 53). In addition, because there are such high stakes, it is possible for accreditors to "shrink from their duty to evaluate rigorously the quality of colleges' and universities' academic programs" and, instead, to "impose an ideological agenda in the guise of education criteria" (National Association of Scholars, 2021, p.53). The purpose of this study was not to evaluate the overall efficacy and potential for perceived bias in the higher education accreditation world. Because of the relative power accrediting bodies wield over member institutions, however, it is essential to understand there is current pressure, even from lawmakers, to restructure and overhaul accreditation as it is currently practiced in the United States (Lee, 2019). This does not mean accreditation is not a valuable mechanism for accountability. It is.

In the U.S., recognized accrediting bodies fall under the authority of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CHEA is the agency which recognizes and guides federally approved accreditation agencies, promoting and advocating on the membership's behalf (Eaton, 2020). CHEA acts in concert with the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE), which is the regional accreditation agency for over 200 higher education institutions, and a number of international institutions. CIHE is the recognized accrediting body for degree-granting higher education institutions in the U.S.. Among the mandated functions of CIHE, pursuant to the U.S. Secretary of Education, are to grant accreditation and to grant approval for substantive changes in academic programs, which include the addition of new programs and the modality in which those programs are offered (Boozang, 2016). When a higher education institution in the U.S. seeks recognized accreditation, then that school is voluntarily submitting its processes and inner-workings to the federal government via CIHE as a proxy. This, in and of itself, is not necessarily troubling. However, it is essential to understand in the context of this particular study.

Not all Bible colleges seek accreditation, but if they do decide to pursue accreditation, they have many options to choose from, including regional accreditation, and national religious or vocational accreditation (Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Henck, 2011; Holliker, 1992; Holmes, 2002; McKinney, 2004). There are six regional accrediting bodies in the United States. As their name implies, each covers a specific region of the country and is tasked with accrediting educational institutions in their respective regions. These accrediting bodies certify that the educational institutions they accredit meet standards of quality and rigor (Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Holliker, 1992; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In addition to the regional accrediting bodies, there are countless specialty accrediting bodies. Niche schools, ones with very narrow missions, often choose to seek accreditation with one of these accrediting bodies rather than with regional accrediting bodies since they are better-suited to understand the nuances and minute distinctions specific to such schools (Carter, 2014; McKinney, 2004; Henck, 2011; Holmes, 2002).

For Bible colleges, there are options besides regional accreditation. They can choose vocational school accrediting bodies, which make sense because, in many ways, Bible colleges educate students to enter a spiritual vocation (Dahlvig, 2018; De Muynck et al., 2017; Guenther, 2019; Meadowcroft, 2007; McKinney, 2004; Roels, 2017). If a Bible college decides vocational accreditation is not a preferred path to pursue, however, there are multiple Christian higher education accrediting bodies, most of which welcome Bible colleges (Henck, 2011). It stands to reason, then, that the majority of Bible colleges seek religious or vocational accreditation. As of this writing, the largest Christian higher education accrediting body, The Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) has over 50 Bible colleges among its membership (ABHE, 2021). In stark contrast, the researcher confirmed through personal communication with representatives of each regional accrediting body that among all six regional accrediting bodies, there are no more

than fifteen Bible colleges in the United States with regional accreditation. Holliker's 1992 study identified 26 dually accredited Bible colleges. In the thirty years since that writing, the number has dwindled by almost half.

Christian higher education, including Bible colleges, has several distinct traits which distinguishes it from higher education as a whole. There is a focus on theological education, and there is opportunity for ministerial training, but most of the distinctions can be summed up with one overarching difference: "the dominant mission of Christian higher education is to integrate faith and learning" (Schreiner, 2018, p.43). The integration of faith as a primary mission is dissimilar to mission statements of secular higher education institutions (Collins & Clanton, 2018; Denig, 2012; McCowan, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

As far back as the early 1990s, accreditation was gradually becoming the standard in higher education, including Christian higher education (Donahoo & Lee, 2008). As accreditation has become increasingly valued, previously unaccredited higher education institutions have been faced with the risk of losing students if they do not seek accreditation themselves (Guenther, 2019; Henck, 2011). An additional reason many Bible colleges are seeking accreditation is that they live in a world where schools without recognized accreditation do not have access to Title IV funding, which is federal money directed to schools via federal financial aid (Cumming & Miller, 2019; Simone, 2014).

Many Bible colleges are grappling with the desire to preserve their historic missions and values—their identities—while attracting prospective students and paying their bills (Guenther, 2019), and this is not a new phenomenon (Holliker, 1992; Holmes, 2002). While most Bible colleges do not seek regional accreditation, there are a handful that have. This study sought to

understand whether Bible colleges which undergo regional accreditation are required to modify their identities, including their mission statements, in such a way that may require them to rethink their culture and identity (Reynolds & Wallace, 2016).

Regional accreditation intrinsically changes the ways in which higher education institutions operate (Baker & Sax, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The process of regional accreditation includes an initial site visit followed by follow-up visits as well as self-studies written by the college with the purpose of ensuring the institution is actually living-out what it says on paper (Cumming & Miller, 2019). Once the college has been granted advancement to candidacy, which indicates the accrediting body is willing to consider the school for acceptance, the rigorous, ongoing work of developing or revising a working mission statement, creating learning outcomes for each course and department, and initiating an ongoing assessment cycle and workable procedures and processes begins in earnest (Cumming & Miller, 2019). This sort of ongoing, often drastic, change necessarily leads to transformation of schools—in the short-term and the long-term (La Manna, 2019; Simmons, 2018). When institutions undergo the rigors of the accreditation process, it is common for them to change substantially—often in ways that cause them to shift focus entirely (Henck, 2011; Donahoo & Lee, 2008). In some cases, schools not only welcome the change, but the accrediting body's stamp of approval brings with it increased enrollment, and, by extension, increased revenue (Hammond, 2019; Henck, 2011; Donahoo & Lee, 2008; WASC, 2020). However, the requirements of regional accreditation may have potential to alienate the various other stakeholders to which Bible colleges must answer, including the Bible college's sponsoring faith community (Christian College Coalition, 1997; Daniels & Gustafson, 2016).

Typically, a religious school's identity is proclaimed through its mission statement and other publicly available archival documents, and this identity is an expression of the way in which the school seeks to live out its sponsoring faith-community's doctrinal beliefs and its religious and cultural expectations (Barton, 2019; Bramer, 2010; Delucchi, 1997; Firmin & Gilson, 2010; Reynolds & Wallace, 2016; Sanders, 2010; Wilson, 1996). Students who choose to attend Bible colleges instead of secular institutions could be assumed to be more conservative, and likely more aligned with their faith-community than with the culture at-large (Belcher, 2004; Daniels & Gustafson, 2016; Henck, 2011). When Bible colleges seek to meet the mandates of the accrediting body, the changes required by regional accreditation may shift focus of their mission statements or their overall identities in such a way that risks alienating the faith community to which they belong (Christian College Coalition, 1997; Daniels & Gustafson, 2016; Henck, 2011; Holliker, 1992; Holmes, 2002). Bible colleges have been a part of the American educational landscape for generations. When Bible colleges pursue and achieve regional accreditation, there are, necessarily, significant changes required by the accrediting body. The core of the issue is this: These changes, while certainly not intended to harm the Bible college's core identity, must be undertaken in such a way that honors the college's past as well as embraces their future.

As of 2021 there is a gap in the literature as it relates to Bible colleges and the effects of regional accreditation on their identities, including their mission statements. There is no recent literature available specifically on the effects of regional accreditation on Bible college identities. This qualitative study was designed to determine what variables influence Bible colleges to seek regional as opposed to other types of accreditations and to examine what effects, if any, regional accreditation has on Bible colleges' identities.

Information regarding the effects of regional accreditation on the identities of Bible colleges that seek, and are granted, regional accreditation will help Bible colleges which might consider pursuing such accreditation make informed decisions. In addition, understanding the reasons Bible colleges seek regional rather than other types of accreditations will be useful to Bible colleges as well as accrediting bodies, including accreditation teams, as they consider the future of Bible colleges in their respective agencies (Cumming & Miller, 2019).

Background

Research demonstrates that when institutions of higher education undergo accreditation, they change drastically (Andreani et al., 2020; Cumming & Miller, 2019; Department of Education, 2018). One portion of a school's identity which may experience change as the school undergoes accreditation is the mission statement (La Manna, 2019). This is important because the mission statement guides the day-to-day practices and values of a school, and is, therefore, integral to the school's identity (Anderson, 2012; Holomshek, 2019). Of note, stakeholders, even at the same school, often view or understand the school's mission statement and historic values in ways which conflict with the intention of the document (Barton, 2019; Graham et al., 2017; Rizzi, 2019; Smith & Davies, 2016). Mission statements tend to be the institution's loftiest goal, and, by nature, that goal is often unmeasurable and unmeetable. As a result, since mission statements are often already not lived-out effectively by campus stakeholder groups, when the mission statements are changed, a school undergoes sweeping change which has potential to lead to resistance and frustration (Graham et al., 2017; Lewis, 2016; Whitfield et al., 2020).

The same is true of Christian higher education institutions (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016). Bible colleges, a subset of Christian higher education, are no exception. As a result of the accrediting body's requirement to develop practices which are based upon evidence and data

rather than mere anecdotal support (Baker & Sax, 2012; Carey, 2007; Eaton, 2020), Bible colleges, like any other accredited institution, must create, maintain, and nurture cultures of evidence—document trails and data which are used to substantiate their assertions—if they wish to achieve and retain regional accreditation (Rine & Guthrie, 2016). This does not mean that schools are forced to change their identities when they pursue regional accreditation; they have the option to modify their mission statements in such a way that honors their identity, and they also have the option to withdraw their bid for accreditation should they feel their identities are threatened.

Bible colleges are not alone in the requirement to change in order to receive accreditation, yet when Bible colleges choose to pursue regional accreditation rather than Christian or vocational accreditation, they are submitting themselves to rigorous scrutiny from agencies whose purpose and expertise are secular by nature (Reynolds & Wallace, 2016). This change, of course, is not necessarily bad. In fact, when enacted in concert with the sponsoring faith-community's belief systems, there is potential for positive change. At issue is whether or not Bible colleges are able to maintain their Bible college distinctives while pursuing secular accreditation. Christian higher education accrediting bodies value academic excellence and strong student engagement, but they become distinct from their secular counterparts when they maintain identities (and mission statements) which place value upon academic excellence and strong student engagement *alongside* identities (and mission statements) which encourage students and staff to impact the world for the sake of the kingdom of God (Schreiner, 2018).

This apparent dissonance between the spiritual nature of the Bible college and the secular nature of the regional accrediting body makes the challenges of Bible colleges which pursue regional accreditation unique (Roels, 2017; Weeks et al., 2017). On the surface, then, it makes

sense for Bible colleges to seek accreditation with accrediting agencies whose values and

purposes more closely align with their own. While it may not be the norm, the fact remains that a

segment of Bible colleges is currently regionally accredited.

Research Questions

Placing value on historic institutional identity is not unique to Bible colleges. Even so,

Bible colleges which pursue regional accreditation must grapple with postmodern issues as they

modify their processes and procedures, possibly including their mission statements. As a whole,

higher education has incorporated the use of mission statements as an expression of institutional

identity in normal, day-to-day operations. (Alleman et al., 2016; Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Farrar-

Myers & Dunn, 2010; Graham et al., 2017). While the identity of a school is not always easy to

define, the official mission statement of a school directly impacts the way a school operates

(Holomshek, 2019). Analyzing the effects—both latent and overt—of regional accreditation on

the historical identities of Bible colleges has potential to provide unique insight into whether, and

if so, how, regional accreditation changes the core identities, as expressed in their mission

statements, of Bible colleges which pursue and are granted such accreditation.

This study sought to discover answers to the following queries:

RQ1: Why do Bible colleges seek regional accreditation as opposed to seeking

accreditation through vocational or religious accrediting bodies?

RQ2: What are the effects of regional accreditation on these Bible colleges as it relates to

their institutional identities?

Description of Terms

This is not a theological dissertation. However, since the topic of this study dealt with

Bible colleges, which are theological institutions, it is necessary to define a few religious terms

alongside numerous terms which are unique to higher education, to Christian higher education, and to Bible colleges. The following terms are used throughout this paper:

Accreditation. A voluntary process by which colleges or universities submit themselves to oversight from accrediting agencies via peer review process (Department of Education, 2018). The goal of such oversight is not to produce absolute uniformity; rather, it is to ensure quality of instructors, curriculum, and support services (Department of Education, 2018). Accreditation is not a one-time endeavor, but is, instead, an ongoing process of continuous quality improvement in regards to processes and procedures which begins with the initial site visit by the accrediting team and continues through regular review cycles (Andreanni et al., 2020; Baker & Sax, 2012; Barrett et al., 2019; Brittingham, 2009; Department of Education, 2018; Jones & RiCharde, 2005).

CHEA. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation is the agency which recognizes and guides sixty accreditation agencies, promoting and advocating on the membership's behalf (Eaton, 2020).

Discipleship. The process by which converts or believers of a particular faith are continually educated in the doctrines and beliefs of that faith (Roels, 2017; Bangura, 2017). One way of looking at discipleship is a sort of passing of the baton from one believer to another and from one level of knowledge to another (Roels, 2017). Another way of approaching the concept of discipleship is as a pilgrimage that leads to a focused spiritual goal (Lewis, 2008). With either approach, there are two constants: that discipleship often requires commitment which may incur opposition from societal pressure (Roels, 2017), and that one of the end-goals of institutional discipleship is orthodoxy among believers of a faith tradition (Lewis, 2008).

Distinctive. A commonality among a group which serves to distinguish that group from other similar groups. This commonality can be based on shared experiences, attributes, or beliefs (Collins & Clanton, 2018**;** McMullen, 2009; Pelz & Smidt, 2015).

Liberal arts education. An undergraduate educational experience which encompasses a broad survey of the humanities, the arts, social sciences, and multicultural education, in addition to requisite courses in mathematics, science, and technology as essential components **(**Goodwin, 2019**).** Historically, the purpose of liberal arts education has been to prepare students for responsible citizenship and provide them with knowledge of the liberating arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric (Guthrie & Callahan, 2016; Simmons, 2018; Wells, 2016).

Mission statement. In higher education institutions, the mission statement is a succinct statement of identity, based on the shared goals of all stakeholder groups represented at the school. This statement is informed by the core values which members of the stakeholder groups agree upon (Dahlvig, 2018; Graham et al., 2017; Jones & RiCharde, 2005). The role of the mission statement is to shape the work of the institution through shared missions and values (Alleman et al., 2016; Velcoff & Ferrari, 2006; Kreber & Mhina, 2007; Lopez, 2001; Woodrow, 2006).

Secularism. There are two ways of understanding secularism: as apathy toward religion or as oppositional toward religion (Latz, 2018).With either approach, key features include being *godless* in the sense of purposely being alienated from religion (Latz, 2018). Secularism is not officially recognized as a religion; however, multiple studies indicate that secularism is, in many ways, similar to other religions, so much so that it may qualify as a religion unto itself (Goshadze, 2019; Hollman, 2020; The Religious Studies Project, 2019).

Spiritual formation. In an individual, spiritual formation is the deliberate cultivation of spiritual sensitivities enabled by practicing spiritual disciplines such as prayer and study (Bramer, 2010). In Christian higher education, it is a term that describes the attempt on the part of schools to discover and implement practices that will help students develop Christ-like attributes (Lefevere, 2019; Mittwede, 2013). It is possible for individuals and schools to facilitate spiritual formation without structured practices in place. When Christian higher education institutions require courses which focus on spiritual formation, however, those institutions are attempting to ensure that spiritual disciplines, which are expected to assist in developing spiritual formation, should be experiential and engage the mind and the heart while integrated into their curriculum (Roels, 2017).

Vocation. While a vocation is simply an occupation to which someone feels drawn or has been trained for, in the context of Christianity, it can include paid and non-paid actions or positions with the express purpose of furthering the gospel of Christ, otherwise known as a calling (Coz, 2019). This is distinct from an occupation in which the primary purpose is to earn money. In the Christian sense of the word, a vocation's (i.e., calling's) primary goal is to propagate the gospel, and it may or may not include remuneration (Coz, 2019; Dahlvig, 2018; De Muynck et al., 2017; Guenther, 2019; 2004; Roels, 2017).

Vocational school. A higher education institution whose primary focus is on equipping students with a marketable skillset which will lead directly to a career path (Bramer, 2010; De Muynck et al., 2017; House, 2018; Hulme, et al., 2016; McKinney, 2004).

Significance of the Study

Research studies are intended, among other purposes, to fill a gap in existing literature about a particular topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As of this writing, there is no current literature

available regarding the effects of regional accreditation on Bible colleges. Religious colleges and universities are educational enterprises, but they do not usually have liberal arts educational goals as their primary pursuit (Brantley, 2020; Carter, 2014). Rather, they promote spiritual goals foremost (Lim, 2014). As such, the ways their identities, including their mission statements, are written and lived-out are often vastly different than that of secular universities (Alleman et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Weeks et al., 2017). Specifically, religious institutions of higher education typically identify aspects of spiritual identity in their mission statements (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009; Daniels & Gustafson, 2016; Firmin & Gilson, 2010) which the entire institution, from high-level administration to faculty to support staff must concern themselves with transmitting and living-out (Barton, 2019; Dosen, 2012; Glanzer et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2017; House, 2018).

There are several secular accrediting organizations which operate under the oversight of non-governmental entities (Brittingham, 2009), and there are several religious accrediting agencies as well (BPPE, 2020; Guenther, 2019; Henck, 2011; Wenzel, 2016). Christian higher education is unique in that it seeks to integrate faith into all courses, including general education courses (Carter, 2014; Collins & Clanton, 2018; Muntz & Crabtree, 2006; Wells, 2016), which is one reason these educational institutions may choose to pursue religious accreditation. Further, Bible colleges, with their own sets of distinctives (Henck, 2011; Ferris & Enlow, 1997), which are even more narrowly focused than typical Christian higher education institutions (Guenther, 2019; Parker & Pettegrew, 2009), seem to be an even less-likely fit for regional accrediting bodies, which historically accredit secular liberal arts schools, including community colleges and graduate institutions. In fact, Parker and Pettegrew (2009) make it clear that "Bible colleges have always had a bent toward training students for practical Christian ministry" (p. 37). This seeming

disparity between the mission of Bible colleges and the focus of regional accreditation, then, makes it rare for Bible colleges to seek regional accreditation. Yet some do. There has not been recent study on the reasons Bible colleges pursue regional accreditation, nor are there current studies on the effects of being granted regional accreditation on Bible college identities, including their mission statements.

There have been studies on accreditation and Christian higher education (Farrar-Myers & Dunn, 2010; McGuire, 2009; Parker & Pettegrew, 2009; Wells, 2016), and there have also been studies on Christian higher education mission statements (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009; Firmin & Gilson, 2010; Graham et al., 2017; Tevis, 2013; Velcoff & Ferrari, 2006; Weeks et al., 2017). Holliker (1992) examined the effects of regional accreditation on Bible colleges, but that work is over thirty years old. However, there have not been studies on the effects of regional accreditation on Bible colleges, including the effects on the identity, as defined by the mission statements of Bible colleges. In fact, Woodward (2020) excluded Bible colleges from his study of Christian higher education institutions because Bible colleges subscribe to unique mission statements which guide their approach to education, and those missions are categorically different from other Christian higher education institutions and are different from secular schools as well (Alleman et al., 2016; Fergusson, 2022). Note the distinction—Christian higher education in general is different than secular education (Alleman et al., 2016; Woodward, 2020), but Bible colleges are even more different. At the heart of the difference is that Christian higher education institutions *integrate* faith into their curriculum whereas Bible colleges *focus* on spiritual endeavors, including theology and ministry preparation (Lim, 2014; Muntz & Crabtree, 2006). This is a subtle yet crucial distinction.

Christian liberal arts colleges have academic curricula which is overlaid with faith-based curricula. In contrast, Bible colleges have spiritual curriculum as their primary curriculum, and they include general education courses to augment spiritual formation (De Muynck et al., 2017; Donahoo & Lee, 2008; House, 2018; Wells, 2016).

Of course, these are not the only differences. In fact, one additional major difference between Bible colleges and other higher education institutions, whether religious or secular, is, as Muntz and Crabtree (2006) note, Christian higher education institutions "are open to students from other faith traditions and often to non-Christians interested in studying in a faith-centered environment" (p. 20). That is, Christian higher education in general is likely to have similar majors and student population as one would find at a secular school (Woodward, 2020). This is not to indicate that no Bible colleges have students who are not part of their faith community; some do, but most do not. This is also not to indicate that no Bible colleges offer non-theological degrees; some do, but most do not. Rather, the point is that the type of student Bible colleges tend to attract, because of their narrow focus on preparing students to enter ministry, is different from students who might choose Christian liberal arts schools. If Christian higher education students are perceived to be conservative and aligned with Christian values, then Bible college students are even more so.

It seems to defy logic, then, for Bible colleges, whose mission tends to be vocational (Dahlvig, 2018; De Muynck et al., 2017; Guenther, 2019; House, 2018; McKinney, 2004; Meadowcroft, 2007; Roels, 2017) and spiritual (Hammond, 2019; House, 2018; Wells, 2016) to seek regional accreditation. Yet there are some Bible colleges which have chosen this route. The review of the literature and examination of the six regional accrediting bodies' member institution directories indicate that Bible colleges achieving regional accreditation is a relatively

rare phenomenon (*Directory*, n.d.; *Directory of institutions*, n.d.; *Institutions,* n.d.; *Institutions |*
WASC senior college and university commission. (n.d.).; *Roster of institutions*, n.d.). Holliker
(1992) and Holmes (2002) confirm the relative rarity of regionally accredited Bible colleges over
the past three decades. Given that there are ample opportunities for either vocational or religious
accreditation, it stands to reason most Bible colleges choose one of these two routes.

 In this study, the author sought to identify the effects of regional accrediting bodies in
their role as conduits for valuable change for Bible colleges. Or the author sought perhaps to
determine if the accrediting bodies request changes that would effectively modify the identities,
which may sometimes include making changes to mission statements, of said institutions in such
a way that renders them an entirely different institution than they began. It is important to note
that change, just because it is significant, is not necessarily negative. If regional accrediting
bodies approach the candidacy of Bible colleges in a manner that honors the historical mission
and values of such schools, it is possible they may find paths to allow for the schools' desire to
maintain fidelity to their faith traditions and communities (Natow, 2015; Neal, 2008). But if
regional accrediting bodies approach Bible colleges with the expectation they will modify their
curriculum and other requirements in such a way that causes them to become secularized or to
transform to liberal arts institutions, it is possible the changes may, in fact, compel vast
modifications to their core identities, including mission and values (Bardo, 2009; Le Cornu,
2003; Pennington, 2020; Rizzi, 2019; Smith & Davies, 2016; Van Oudtshoorn, 2013).

 At the time of this writing, the author is unable to locate recent studies which seek to
understand what motivates Bible colleges to seek regional rather than other, perhaps more apt,
types of accreditation and what the effects of such accreditation are on Bible college's identities.
Holliker (1992) studied the effects of accreditation on Bible colleges; however, this work did not

focus on Bible college identity specifically. Tevis (2013) noted that it would be valuable to study the mission statements of Christian higher education institutes "from multiple sites in multiple states" (p. 121). There is literature which examines the effects of accreditation on Christian higher education mission statements, but it is not recent (Donahoo & Lee, 2008), and there is no literature specific to regional accreditation and Bible colleges.

Since a research gap is acknowledged when a problem or a question that has not yet been adequately addressed in current literature is identified (Kopaneva, 2013; Slater, 2018), it is clear there is a research gap related to each research question this study explored. While there is much known about Bible colleges, Bible college mission statements, and regional accreditation, there is not recent research that approaches all three facets in the same study.

Overview of Research Methods

One hallmark of qualitative research is the use of triangulation, which is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy which also enhances data credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The research method for this study was qualitative, utilizing a survey, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis as the sources of data to allow for triangulation. Triangulation occurs when a researcher seeks corroborating evidence from multiple individuals and multiple forms of data as they seek to identify themes and descriptions in their research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative methodology will allow for voices to emerge which may not be easily quantifiable (Suri, 2011; Watkins, 2012). Typically, the qualitative researcher is expected to use at least two sources of evidence in order to seek convergence and corroboration using different data sources (Yin, 2009).

Utilization of multiple sources limits the bias on the part of the researcher (O'Leary, 2014). However, bias can also exist on the part of the creator of the documents (O'Leary, 2014).

As such, it is important to consider the context of each document, including its original intended audience, and whether the document was solicited or edited (Bowen, 2009).

 For this study, the current presidents of all regionally accredited Bible colleges were contacted via email and asked to complete a survey which was deployed using Qualtrics. Participants were then engaged in a follow-up telephone semi-structured interview. In addition, the researcher accessed publicly available current mission statements from the colleges' websites and analyzed the information from the surveys and interviews with the mission statements in mind. The variety of approaches to gathering data was undertaken to ensure rigor and validity as well as to triangulate data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt et al., 2007).

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

With regional accreditation comes the expectation of rather rigorous, consistent change (Farrar-Myers & Dunn, 2010; McGuire, 2009; Parker & Pettegrew, 2009; Wells, 2016). It makes sense, then, to approach a study of Bible colleges which undergo regional accreditation with change theory as the primary framework through which to interpret the data. Change, on the surface, appears to be one act—shifting from one thing to another. In fact, change is really several smaller movements or actions which, when combined, produce transformation (Lewin, 1997; Seyfried & Ansmann, 2018). Specifically, Lewin (1997) noted that in general, each series of *unfreezing* from prior norms to *changing* to eventual *refreezing* are essential stages of change. This study also lent itself to the roles which top-level leaders play in enacting this change, specifically since as it relates to spiritual leadership (Phipps, 2011; Martin, 2018; Seyfried & Ansmann, 2018). These two frameworks, overlaid, serve to provide a full picture of the changes Bible colleges experience as a result of regional accreditation.

Change theory was initially introduced in 1951 when Kurt Lewin presented his concept of change as a series of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing (1997). And Phipps' (2011) spiritual leadership framework, which is a more recent theory, offers a lens through which to view the ways change is brought about in organizations in which constituents honor spiritual leadership. This overlay of established and recent theory is a particularly apt means by which to evaluate Bible colleges as they approach institutional change brought about by regional accreditation.

Theoretical Framework

Change management is a field of study which examines the ways in which change occurs in different settings. Lewin's (1997) work, which was originally applied to health care settings, is the foundational theory of change management and empowers organizational leaders to respond to change resistance (Lewin, 1997; Tombiri, 2019). Lewin's 3-phase change theory served as the theoretical framework for Tombiri's (2019) study which examined the methods small business leaders use to help employees become less resistant to change. The findings from this study suggested a leader's use of communication, support, and evaluation help followers become open to change. Tombiri (2019) noted that when organizations change, they must expect resistance, and therefore the leader's goal must be to shape followers' values and practices in such a way that they will be willing to move from the status quo.

Lewin's change theory has been accused of over-simplifying the change process, a charge which Cummings et al. (2016) declare has been successfully defended. Other concerns about Lewin's (1997) 3-stage change theory surround the posthumous publication of his work (Coghlan, 2021; Cummings et al., 2016). Cummings et al. (2016) allege that Lewin's (1997) theory as we know it today actually emerged after his death. However, Coghlan (2021) addresses this understanding and explained, "many of the misunderstandings and misinterpretations" surrounding Lewin's theory "arose because Lewin died shortly before the publications in which he presented it appeared" (p. 14). Lewin's (1997) theory was originally published in 1951; in the nearly seven years since its initial publication, it has remained a pillar in change theory. As such, its use in this study was warranted and beneficial.

Lewin's (1997) theory has three primary components—equilibrium, driving forces, and restraining forces. Equilibrium—or status quo— in change theory refers to the state of being in which there is a balance between the driving forces and restraining forces in any given situation (see Figure 1). As such, no change occurs. In the context of change theory, a driving force is an impetus or motivation for change which shifts the equilibrium. On the opposite side of the spectrum are restraining forces. These forces hinder change by opposing the driving force.

Figure 1 *Status quo/equilibrium in Lewin's (1997) 3-stage change theory*
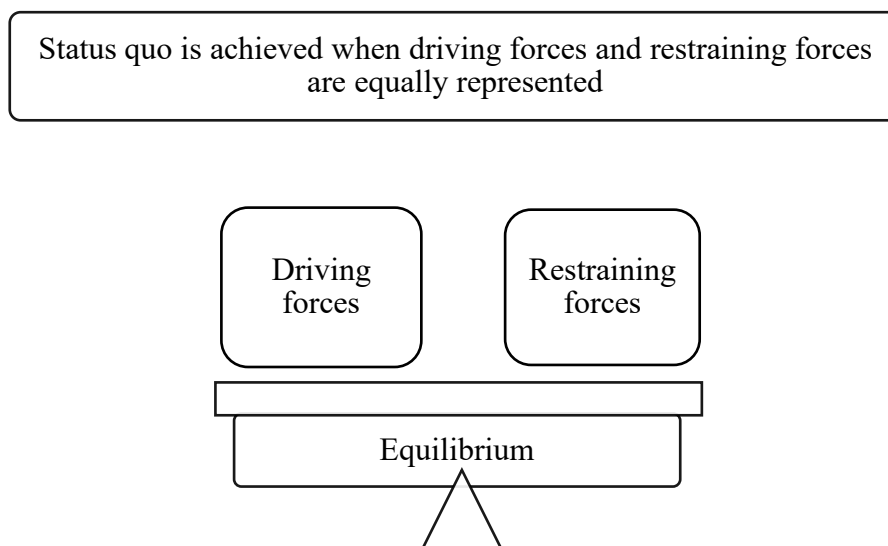
When there is stronger driving force than restraining force, the process of change begins with what Lewin calls *unfreezing* (see Figure 2). This first stage of change involves making preparations for change, and in the context of organizations, in preparing the organization for change. Further, the unfreezing process is an opportunity to create new structures and processes which will support the forthcoming changes (Tombiri, 2019). Following unfreezing, change occurs. Finally, the process of refreezing begins (see Figure 3). When refreezing is complete, the change has become the status quo. In the case of organizations, this theory continually occurs

throughout the lifespan of the organization with the driving forces and restraining forces

continually pushing against one another.

Figure 2 *Unfreezing in Lewin's (1997) 3-stage change theory*

Unfreezing occurs when driving forces become stronger than restraining forces

Driving forces

Restraining forces

Equilibrium
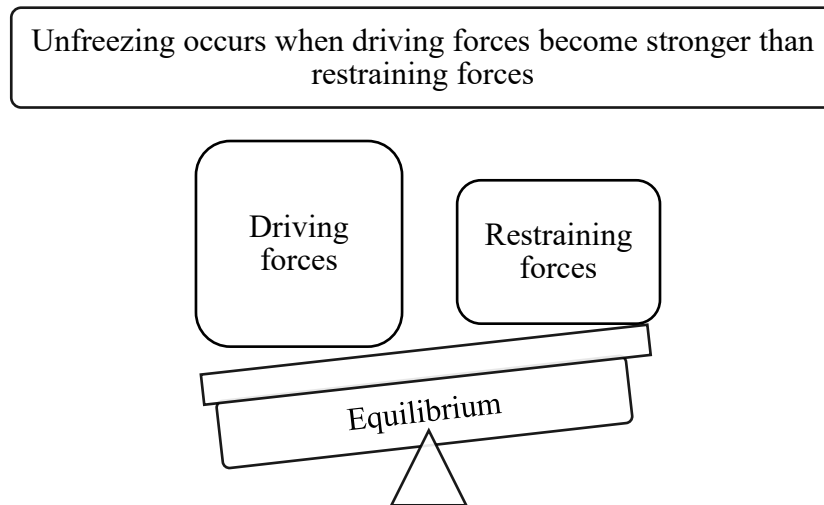
Figure 3 F*reezing in Lewin's (1997) 3-stage change theory*

Refreezing occurs when driving forces become stronger than restraining forces

Driving forces

Restraining forces

Equilibrium
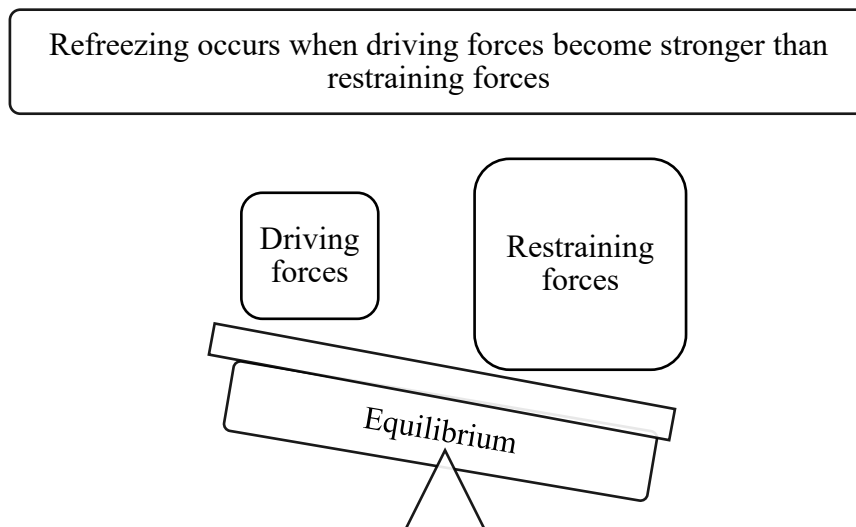
In the case of religious organizations, there is a spiritual element at work as well.

Spiritual leadership as a discipline attempts explain the ways leaders' values, attitudes and

behaviors produce a spiritual milieu which affects their followers in positive ways (Anderson &

Sun, 2017). Much work has been done which offers evidence that there is a connection between a leader's spirituality and the ways that leader interacts with and engages followers (Roof, 2015).

Phipps (2012) framework advocates for a strong association between spirituality and leadership, Bryan (2022) utilized Phipps' (2012) framework in a study which examined the ways in which spirituality framed understanding and decision-making in the lived experiences of public school principals. The findings form Bryan's (2022) study indicate that even though people may not directly attribute leadership decisions to their religious or spiritual beliefs, their spirituality is integrated into the ways they lead. This, according to Bryan (2022), is because a leaders' faith or spirituality influence their decisions and actions. Further, a leader's decisions often represent or reflect their core beliefs and values (2022).

Phipps' (2011) work also focuses on the ways in which a leader's personal spiritual beliefs impact collective decisions. Her work provides a framework for the ways in which the beliefs of one can affect many. This distinction between personal and collective spirituality is important in understanding the ways in which top-level leaders of organization use their spiritual beliefs to frame and filter information to create a means for others to interpret events. Phipps' (2011) work offers a means for understanding the ways in which change events occur in organizations where expressions of spirituality are honored. Phipps (2011) specifically noted that spirituality is not just a personal belief, nor is merely it a collectively-held belief within an organization—though it can be both of these; rather, Phipps (2011) framework provides a means to examine the personal spiritual beliefs of top-level leaders in order to understand how they affect leadership styles, and, by extension, the ways in which organization experience change.

Phipps (2011) sets forth six propositions:

- Proposition 1: "The personal spiritual beliefs of a leader act as a schema during strategic decision making by filtering out information and framing information for the leader" (p. 182);

- Proposition 2: "The leader's stage of constructive development will mediate the effect of the leader's beliefs on strategic decision making" (p. 183);

- Proposition 3: "What a leader believes about his or her spiritual beliefs (meta-belief) will mediate the effect of the leader's beliefs on strategic decision making" (p. 184);

- Proposition 4: "Components of the omnibus (national and organizational culture, industry and occupation, organizational structure, time) and discrete (situational) context combine to moderate the effect of the leader's spiritual beliefs on the information considered and used by the leader in strategic decision making" (p. 184);

- Proposition 5: "The leadership style in use by the leader will moderate the effect of the leader's spiritual beliefs on the information considered and used by the leader in strategic decision making" (p. 185);

- Proposition 6: "The information considered by the strategic leader and the way that information is used in strategic decision making will be influenced by the leader's personal spiritual beliefs. That influence will be mediated by the meta-belief and constructive development of the leader and moderated by the organizational context and leadership style in use (p. 185).

Because leaders' spiritual beliefs impact their leadership styles, and because leadership styles affect decision-making and organizational direction, this framework attempts to develop an understanding of how a top-level leader's personal spiritual beliefs influence decision-making in organizations (see Figure 4). Phipps (2011) explained that some expressions of spirituality are espoused, meaning they are publicly proclaimed. Such is the case with Bible colleges.

Figure 4 *Phipps' spiritual leadership framework*
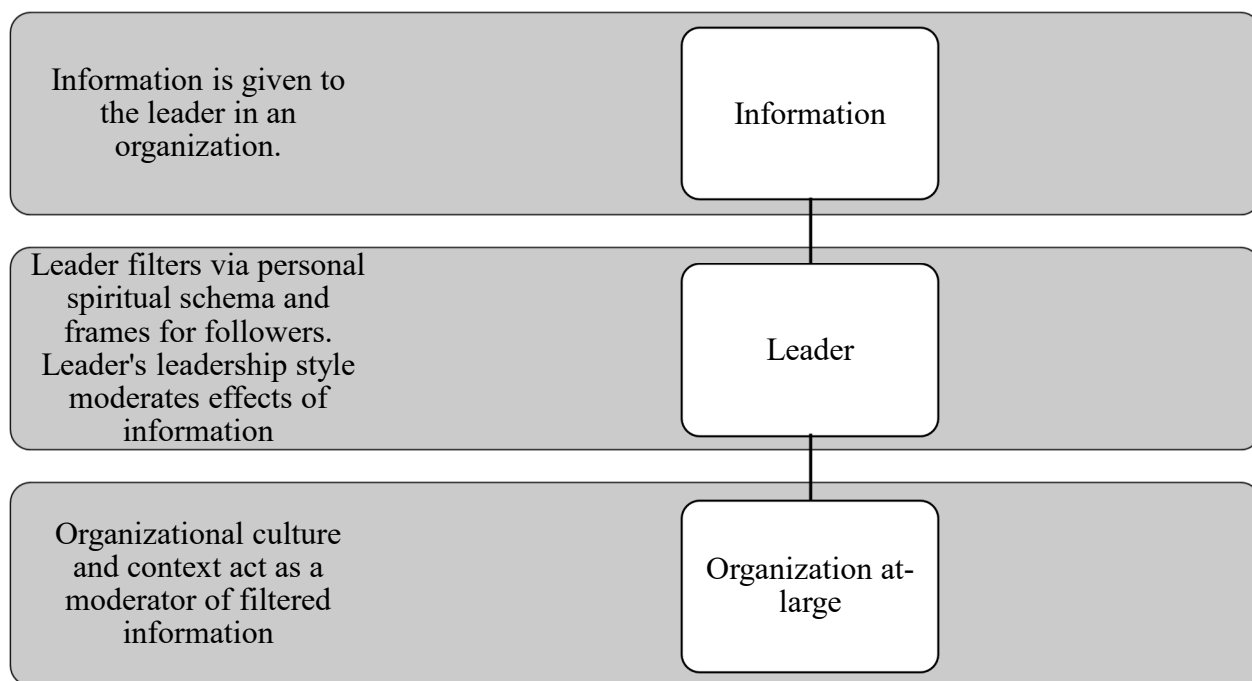
Lewin's (1997) change theory united with Phipps' (2011) spiritual leadership framework combine to provide the researcher with the tools necessary to interpret the ways Bible colleges experience the changes brought upon by regional accreditation. Change theory alone is not adequate to fully engage the ways Bible colleges respond to the demands of regional accreditation. Because Bible colleges experience change with a spiritual angle often at the forefront (Lawrence, 2007), change theory alone does not allow for a full picture of the data. Likewise, approaching this study via spiritual leadership framework alone precluded full understanding of the process of the change. Layering change theory and spiritual leadership

frameworks offered a full understanding of the ways Bible colleges experience change as they undergo regional accreditation (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 *Overlay of Phipps' spiritual leadership framework and Lewin's change theory*

Information filtered though leaders' personal spiritual schema and moderated by leadership style and organizational culture and context

Leader determines which information to share and how to frame it thus affecting the balance of forces

Driving Forces

Restraining Forces
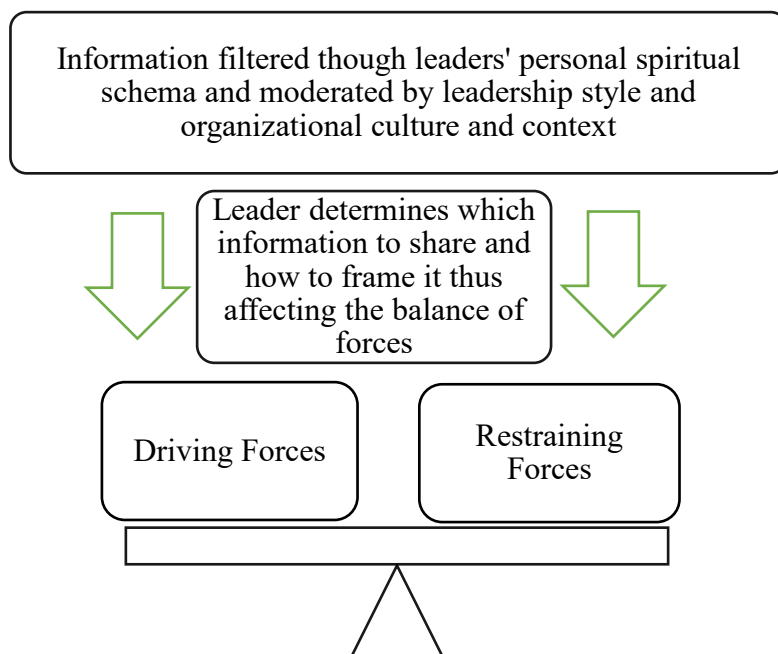
Whenever change is analyzed, especially within organizational structures, it is necessary to consider several factors. Not least among those factors is where or from whom the impetus for change originates. Equally important to take into consideration is who or what entity is responsible for enacting the change and ensuring it is done properly (see Table 1). Foremost to consider is the initiator of change, and the second aspect to consider is whether or not the approach to change is voluntary (Seyfried & Ansmann, 2018). These considerations were important in this study since the initiator of change affects the approach to change and, by extension, the effects of the change on the institution (Seyfried & Ansmann, 2018).

Table 1

Schema for Bible college change initiators and approaches

	Initiator	Initiator
	Accrediting body	Campus change leader
Voluntary approach to change	• Stakeholder resistance with eventual compliance • New and existing college structures steer change • Stakeholder perception of potentially adverse forces directing high-level leaders	• Stakeholder buy-in • Existing college structures steer change • Stakeholder perception of God directing high-level leaders
Compulsory approach to change	• Top-down navigation • External documents guide change • New college structures may be formed to exact change • Stakeholder perception of potentially adverse forces directing high-level leaders	• Top-down navigation • Internal documents/agreements guide change • New college structures may be formed to exact change • Stakeholder perception of potentially adverse forces directing high-level leaders

In the case of Bible colleges which pursue regional accreditation, the college presidents are often the change-leaders (Hackett, 2019), but the impetus is the accrediting body's recommendations (Pennington, 2020). The initiator of change is not always the accrediting body, and at the core of the change, it must be acknowledged that even changes requested by the accrediting bodies are ones the colleges have sought in the sense they made the choice to pursue regional accreditation (Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Farrar-Myers & Dunn, 2010; McGuire, 2009;

Parker & Pettegrew, 2009; Wells, 2016). That is, in many cases, schools are able to approach

accrediting body mandates (including the smaller changes required within the context of larger,

institution-wide changes) as voluntary since the school initially willingly sought regional

accreditation (Seyfried & Ansmann, 2018). This is appropriate since pursuing accreditation, at

least in most cases, is not compulsory.

When religious educational institutions undergo change, the top-level leaders are often

the primary initiators of the changes required by the accrediting body (Hackett, 2019; Martin,

2018). In an ideal situation, one where there is a true servant leader with ability to gather

consensus (Greenleaf, 2015) as the initiator of change, the changes may be top-down, but they

may not incur as much resistance as might be expected since stakeholders perceive that God is

guiding the leader (Phipps, 2011). This is where Bible colleges are distinct from Christian liberal

arts institutions or conservative seminaries. Recall that the student population at Bible colleges

tends to be aligned to the sponsoring faith-community much more than typical Christian college

students might be. Thus, the combination of spiritual leadership and allowing stakeholders to

play what they perceive to be a vital role in enacting change (Hackett, 2019) is likely to lead to

much less resistance than might otherwise be experienced.

This lack of resistance occurs when high-level leaders acknowledge and validate the

viewpoints and perspectives of stakeholder groups (LaManna, 2019). Because of the ability to

see the viewpoints of others, effective leaders have empathy and are more able to gather

consensus (Northouse, 2019). Unless a leader possesses the ability to conceptualize and to see

what's ahead, however, those relational aspects will not last. A leader must be able to see the big

picture and be accountable for failures (Northouse, 2019). In the case of Bible colleges which

seek regional accreditation, the regional accreditation is an external impetus, and the top-level

leader is often the change-enactor. Research indicates that when the initiator and entity responsible for carrying out change are external to the college, change-leaders may incur more resistance (La Manna, 2019; Martin, 2018). This places potentially onerous pressure on top-level leaders to seek out and actively engage marginalized voices. This work must be done in a true spirit of inquiry. Otherwise, there is risk for harm. In considering the ways people rationalize decisions, it is essential to consider that many choices people make are actually reflexes rooted in a need to protect something—either themselves or their perceived territories (Galef, 2016). While this study was not solely focused on the ways in which stakeholder groups experience change, it is necessary to acknowledge that when institutions undergo drastic change, whether those schools are secular or religious, there is risk of alienating stakeholders.

While change theory allows for analysis of part of the ways Bible colleges experience the changes which occur throughout the process of regional accreditation, it does not allow for analysis of the entirety of the changes. Phipps' (2011) framework provides a unique opportunity to examine the ways Bible colleges experience the change brought about by regional accreditation. Phipps (2011) examines organizational change in such a way that assists in interpreting the "influence of a strategic leader's personal spiritual belief on strategic decision making" (p.177). Specifically, through a series of six propositions, Phipps (2011) explained the ways top-level leaders' spiritual beliefs affect the ways they approach organizational change, and, by extension, the ways those views trickle down to their constituents. In addition, this framework allows for examination of the potential for the ways corporate spiritualism may tend toward coercive relationships. Phipps' (2011) first proposition explained that it is natural for the spiritual beliefs of a leader to function as a schema which helps the leader make decisions, and

proposition six explained that the context of the organization mitigates and further filters top-down decision-making.

In Phipps' (2011) theory, he noted that there is inherent danger of the possibility of the above-noted coercive leader-employee relationships whenever corporate spiritualism exists. Such corporate spiritualism is present in Bible colleges (Guenther, 2019). Christian higher education to some degree, and Bible colleges in particular, exemplify the spiritual nature of institutions which can complicate the perception of where the impetus for change initiates (see Table 1). When an accrediting body is an impetus for Bible college change, the change is likely to be met with resistance, and this resistance comes because stakeholders struggle to know if God is directing the top-level leaders or if the accrediting body is doing so. What this means for Bible colleges which seek regional accreditation is that the path to each segment of change is likely to be met with some level of resistance, and that means the approaches the top-level leaders must take should be nuanced (Burnes, 2020; Galef, 2016; Martin, 2018). This also means that Bible college top-level leaders must ensure they filter and frame their decision-making in such a way that the spiritual underpinnings of their decision are clearly communicated to relevant stakeholder groups (Phipps, 2011). Because the requirement to comply within the time constraints of accrediting bodies is a pressure which creates stress (Burton, 2021), it is even more important for top-level leaders to be prepared to face some level of resistance.

Organizations will remain static when the status quo is not challenged. As such, there must be an impetus for change. This change is often brought about by the organization being made aware of a deficiency or improper process or procedure; this awareness, often accompanied by a sense of urgency, can be created by external or internal forces (Dahlvig, 2018, Lewin, 1997; Seyfried & Ansmann, 2018). Lewin's (1997) model explains that organizations must *unfreeze*,

which means they must become open to change. The realization that change is needed may come from within the organization, such as when a stakeholder group recognizes a lack or a failing. The realization also may come from without, such as a governmental agency or, in the case of this study, an accrediting body (BPPE, 2020; WASC, 2020; Wenzel, 2016). Once organizations unfreeze, they experience the moment of change—the transformation. Then, organizations must *refreeze* with the new change becoming the status quo (Lewin, 1997). When change is initiated by internal forces with the true motive of improving the organization, such change is met with less resistance, and, as a result, the act of unfreezing takes less time (La Manna, 2019; Lewin, 1997; Seyfried & Ansmann, 2018). When change is initiated by external forces, however, such change is likely to be met with more resistance, which means the act of unfreezing may be lengthier (La Manna, 2019; Lewin, 1997; Seyfried & Ansmann, 2018).

It is important to note that Lewin's (1997) stages of change are not always linear; rather, they may in fact be recursive and hierarchical, depending on the level of stakeholder buy-in, the organizational culture, and on the complexity of the change (Cumming & Miller, 2019; Dahlvig, 2018). When top-level leaders are careful to establish the need for and a clear vision and strategy for change and then to gather consensus, the stakeholder groups who have bought into the vision will serve as liaisons, of sorts, who carry-out the top-level leader's vision (Dahvig, 2018; Martin, 2018). When organizations follow this process, it allows them to unfreeze much more easily and makes it more likely the changes will be sustained (Dahlvig, 2018).

Lewin's (1997) change theory model explains that change is not something that occurs once or all-at-once. Rather, there are distinct phases to change, and, at each phase, there is a period of time for the change to take root and become the new practice and procedure. Change theory, then, is an apt lens through which to view Bible colleges' interactions with regional

accreditation. In fact, while accreditation often brings rapid change, the change cannot and does not occur all at once, nor can the change be short-term. As Reynolds and Wallace (2016) point out, rapid change can often present itself as a "hurricane of change," which conflicts with the stasis which is central to Christ-centered institutions, which often operate from a perspective that "a house built on a rock foundation is more likely to weather the storm" (p. 108). In fact, they go on to explain that the need for stability and tradition is a nonnegotiable in the missional identity of Christian higher education institutions. Yet societal change and regional accreditation both necessitate rapid, often robust change (Reynolds & Wallace, 2016; Toms, 2018).

The focus on continuous program improvement which accompanies accreditation means that as long as the institution is accredited, the changes will never stop (Baker & Sax, 2012; Farrar-Myers & Dunn, 2010). While change is healthy for organizations, when external pressures compel that change, it can be scary, and, compared to organic grassroots change, the change often suffers from more opposition (Greenleaf, 2015; Reynolds & Wallace, 2016). When Bible colleges undergo regional accreditation, it places external pressure on them to experience rapid change in ways which may cause conflict with their sponsoring faith-community's expectations (Christian College Coalition, 1997; Daniels & Gustafson, 2016; Firmin & Gilson, 2010).

With the understanding that Bible colleges which pursue and achieve regional accreditation are in continuous cycles of change (Baker & Sax, 2012; Farrar-Myers & Dunn, 2010), it was appropriate to couch this study in a model of organizational change with a focus on top-level leaders being motivated by and led by God. As has already been noted, when any institution undergoes the accreditation process, it necessitates change in their processes and procedures (Farrar-Myers & Dunn, 2010; McGuire, 2009; Parker & Pettegrew, 2009; Wells, 2016). Some changes are likely to be surface-level, such as changes in the terms used for certain

reports or processes (Donahoo & Lee, 2008). Many changes, though, are deeply revolutionary, affecting the ways the schools conduct their day-to-day operations (Barrett et al., 2019). Change theory combined with spiritual decision-making theory provide a meaningful lens through which to view the experiences of Bible colleges which pursue and are granted regional accreditation (see Figure 5). Therefore, Kurt Lewin's (1997) three-stage change model combined with Phipps' (2011) framework is an apt starting place in evaluating the effects of regional accreditation on Bible colleges.

In this particular study, the author sought to understand the reasons Bible colleges seek regional accreditation, and since top-level leaders' spiritual framework affects the decisions they make (Phipps, 2011), Phipps' (2011) theory connects primarily to the first research question. Likewise, Lewin's (1997) change theory connects strongly to this study's second research question, which sought to identify and understand the ways Bible colleges experience the change brought about by regional accreditation.

While the concepts associated with institutional change are effective means through which to approach Bible colleges which have undergone the rigors of regional accreditation, change theory alone does not tell the full story. Rather, since Bible colleges are, at their core, spiritual endeavors (Lim, 2014), it made sense to approach this study with a focus on the influence of spiritual beliefs on decision-making. This study looked at Bible colleges which have achieved regional accreditation with the intention to discover two items: the reason Bible colleges seek regional accreditation as well as the ways in which the identity of the organization changed as a result of accreditation demands (Barton, 2019; Pennington, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2018; WASC 2020). Specifically, this study used Phipps' (2011) framework "that describes how the personal spiritual beliefs of a top-level leader operate in strategic decision

making like a schema to filter and frame information" (p. 177) as a method by which to interpret the changes Bible colleges undergo as a result of regional accreditation.

Top-level leaders at Christian higher education institutions, when they approach change in such a way that attempts to interpret and experience change in a spiritual manner, focusing on the leading of God and not just on other external pressures (Martin, 2018), may be able to take their schools through the process of change Lewin (1997) lays-out in such a way that maintains their core identities. When they weave spirituality and academic endeavors together and clearly convey this to stakeholders, top-level Bible college leaders have a strong likelihood of enacting real change at their respective schools (Lawrence, 2007; Martin, 2018). This may sometimes include modifications to the very identity, the core, of the institution: the mission statement (Martin, 2018).

The Role of Mission Statements in Higher Education Institutions

In higher education, mission statements are the ways in which an entity proclaims its core values. While the mission statement on the surface is just a string of sentences, when it is lived out, it becomes the fundamental way of transmitting values (Collins & Clanton, 2018; Denig, 2012; McCowan, 2017). In the case of secular institutions, the values are transmitted to the accrediting agency, to constituent groups on the campus itself, and to the community at-large (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009). Similarly, Christian higher education institutions' mission statements serve to reach accrediting bodies, current and potential students, and the community at-large, including the sponsoring faith-community (Graham et al., 2017; Muntz & Crabtree, 2006; Weeks et al., 2017).

Mission statements should not simply voice the values of the institution; they should shape the values and identity (Velcoff & Ferrari, 2006). Higher education mission statements

serve to tell the public at-large how the institution sees itself and its purpose (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009), and mission statements also serve to help constituent groups on campus understand the overall goals of the school. Ensuring that stakeholders understand a school's mission statement is not enough. In order for mission statements to actually guide a school, the entire institution, from high-level administration to faculty to support staff, must concern itself with transmitting and living-out this mission statement (Barton, 2019; Dosen, 2012; Glanzer et al., 2019).

The actualization of missional values is of utmost importance. The mission statement could possibly assist prospective students and their families in initially ascertaining whether a particular school is a good fit and is compatible with their values. It also establishes expectations which students should assume the school would meet should they decide to attend (Woodward, 2020). If an institution is to ensure it meets its obligations to stakeholders, simply articulating mission statements and values will not be enough; it becomes necessary to put those statements into practice. When the mission statements are lived-out, they are pivotal in shaping the identity of the school. In the case of typical Christian higher education institutions, the living-out of those values is conveyed in much the same way as it is at Bible colleges: by strong focus on the faith-convictions of the school (Firmin & Gilson, 2010). However, in the case of Bible colleges, mission statements serve to transmit core values to an additional subset of people beyond the constituent groups who are a part of the institution and the public at-large. This subset is the larger faith communities to which Bible colleges are beholden, including the churches and constituents who belong to the same denomination as the Bible college (Christian College Coalition, 1997; Daniels & Gustafson, 2016).

These faith communities both guide and rely upon their Bible colleges. Faith-based schools are guided by missions that are informed and motivated by their faith convictions (Delucchi, 1997; Firmin & Gilson, 2010; Wilson, 1996). Further, a religious organization's mission statement is the implementation of the practical reflection of that religion: many faith-based colleges and universities serve as the practical application of the sponsoring religion or faith-community's religious and cultural expectations and aspirations (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016; Wilson, 1996). For religious colleges and universities, constituents should expect to find some form of spiritual identity communicated within the institutional mission and vision statements (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009). It is crucial that institutions formulate how their educational mission is related to God and to their denominational values if they hope to remain true to their historic mission and values (Roels, 2017).

Overall, the mission statements of Christian higher education institutions include a clearly articulated focus on spiritual development (Carter, 2019). This is a distinguishing factor between Christian institutions and secular ones (Alleman et al., 2016; Fergusson, 2022). Focusing on factors of a spiritual nature differentiates the mission statements, and as such, the articulated values and culture—the identities—of Christian higher education institutions from secular schools (Graham et al., 2017). The primary mission of theological higher education must be to produce leaders who are able to lead local churches and missionary work (McKinney, 2004; Yong, 2020). This directive includes Bible colleges.

As noted above, the role of mission statements in higher education in general is to explicitly articulate the core values of the institution to stakeholders and the public at-large (Graham et al., 2017). Christian higher education institutions' mission statements are no exception. When schools are accredited, there is one additional group which must be considered

when writing and living-out their mission statements. Accrediting bodies require that their member institutions have mission statements and that they are able to document their attempts at following those statements effectively (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016; Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Whitfield et al., 2020). Because the mission statement guides the college, directly dictating and communicating its values and practices, it serves a central role in shaping higher education institutions; it is central to the identity of the institution. As such, the mission statement is of utmost importance to the agency responsible for certifying the college's solvency and quality (LaManna, 2019; Holomshek, 2019).

Regional Accreditation

The stated goal of regional accreditation is to ensure quality programs and student protection (U.S. Department of Education, 2018; WASC 2020). In addition to the stated goals of the accrediting bodies, there are unintended, or perhaps unstated, implications when Christian higher education institutions pursue and are granted regional accreditation (Edlin, 2009; Henck, 2011; Donahoo & Lee, 2008). When Christian higher education institutions seek regional accreditation, there is potential for a shift in curriculum and in core missions (Guenther, 2019; Holmes, 2002). This tension—for Bible colleges to remain true to their historic identities yet remain relevant in a changing higher education landscape—is no small matter, nor is it a recent one. Holmes (2002) study provided multiple examples of tension between Bible colleges and regional accrediting bodies, including pressure from the regional accrediting bodies to change the makeup of the governing board and to make changes to the faculty ranks. As such, the stated goals of Christian higher education are sometimes, though not often, at odds with the stated goals of regional accrediting bodies (Collins & Clanton, 2018; Denig, 2012; McCowan, 2017). Yet the

changes to Bible colleges which were brought about by regional accreditation have not been
recently studied.

In the United States, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) oversees
and authorizes the six regional accrediting bodies. The regional accrediting agencies are
autonomous from one another, yet the United States Secretary of Education recognizes their
authority to supervise public and private institutions to ensure they consistently meet standards
of quality in their programs of study and in their financial solvency, and in their ability to meet
their stated missions. The regional accrediting bodies are: The Middle States Association of
Colleges and Schools (MSACS); New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE); the
Higher Learning Commission (HLC); Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (NASC);
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS); and Western Association of Schools and
Colleges (WASC); WASC also has under its jurisdiction two additional accrediting bodies—one
for community colleges (ACCJC) and one for higher education specifically (WSCUC) (Donahoo
& Lee, 2008; Manning, 2011).

Accreditation utilizes a "voluntary review process," which judges "the value of higher
education institutions and programs" (Donahoo & Lee, 2008, p. 320). The six regional
associations as well as other accrediting agencies are responsible for establishing and
maintaining standards with the expressed purpose of holding member institutions accountable for
meeting them (Brittingham, 2009; Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Eaton, 2020). This review process
makes sense—schools voluntarily seek out these accrediting bodies, and they also voluntarily
submit themselves to the demands of these bodies (Bardo, 2009). However, the demands of the
regional accrediting bodies have the potential to create cultures of compliance with, rather than

true alignment with, the accrediting bodies (Baker & Sax, 2012, Bardo, 2009; Pennington, 2020). While not the norm, perhaps, it is worth noting that it is also not an anomaly.

The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) requires accreditors to act as gatekeepers which ensure the quality of America's educational system (Burton, 2021). The accreditors then demand accountability from member institutions (Burton, 2021). The goal is for schools to adopt cultures of improvement instead of cultures of compliance (Stanny, 2021).

It is clear that accreditation keeps colleges accountable to other professionals in the field as well as to their students (Adams, 1997; Brittingham, 2009; Karakhanyan & Stensaker, 2020; Sizikova et al., 2020; WASC, 2020). Christian colleges face a unique set of struggles in the sense that accreditation's demands can sometimes conflict with their own desires to honor their religious traditions' values (Bardo, 2009; Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Henck, 2011; Lawrence, 2007; Roels, 2017; Pennington, 2020).

While all six regional accrediting bodies include accountability measures, which are embedded in their standards, and all member schools must meet these measures, there is not always true buy-in from member schools (Jones et al., 2017). There are myriad reasons why schools may not fully buy into the changes requested by the accrediting body. Among these reasons are conflicting ways to reach the desired goal, lack of stakeholder investment, or even true disagreement with the accrediting team's requests—all can lead to higher education institutions making changes simply to satisfy the demands of regional accreditation. In cases such as these, the changes are often compliance-driven and only done under pressure to maintain such accreditation (Baker & Sax, 2012; Bardo, 2009; Brittingham, 2009; Pennington, 2020). In fact, there are unintended consequences when accrediting bodies place expectations on institutions which those institutions have not fully adopted, and those consequences include

outright fraudulent representations of the ways a school operates—in essence putting on a show for accreditors (Jones et al., 2017; National Association of Scholars, 2021). As the external pressure to meet standards increases, the prevalence of inauthentic behaviors increases (Jones et al., 2017). While the overwhelming cases of accreditation visits are positive, it is important to recognize that the external pressures, including high financial stakes, can cause inauthentic review cycles to occur (Hodges, 2022). Burton (2021) points out that the pressure on top-level leaders in accredited schools trickles down and has "wide-spread impact on the institution" (p. 8).

This pressure by regional accrediting commissions is valuable in the sense that it requires member institutions to maintain quality and rigorous programs and processes. The systematic, data-informed decision-making and evaluation which are precipitated by accreditation demands do help member institutions become stronger and remain respected (Barret et al., 2019; McGuire, 2009; Pennington, 2020). However, the pressure to meet the demands of accrediting bodies also often requires member institutions to continually change— and this change, over time, can drastically alter the mission, and therefore the identity, of a school (Bardo, 2009; Whitt et al., 2008). Of course, stagnancy is not the appropriate answer either. When organizations refuse to change, they often render themselves irrelevant (Edlin, 2009; Resane, 2018). In contrast, change that is top-down, and especially change that originates from outside of the campus community—such as the changes often brought about by accreditation demands—can serve to breed discontent and frustration among stakeholder groups (La Manna, 2019).

Accreditation as a Change-Driver for Institutions

Research has shown that when colleges pursue and are granted regional accreditation, it significantly changes their cultures (Adams, 1997; Baker & Sax, 2012), typically for the good (Barret et al., 2019). While this is an important issue for all colleges, this is a particularly interesting issue for private, and especially religious, colleges (Broer et al., 2017; Daniels & Gustafson, 2016; Hochschild, 2017; Holliker, 1992; Reynolds & Wallace, 2016). The process of regional accreditation, which includes an intensive reopening and revisiting of processes which have been in place, sometimes for generations, brings with it the real possibility that a school may not be able to maintain their historical identity, including its mission and vision statements (Guenther, 2019). Specifically, Guenther (2019) calls out the "universitizing" of Bible schools, which causes them to give up their Bible college distinctives as they seek to be accepted as mainstream, liberal arts schools (p.184). There are various reasons Bible colleges seek accreditation. For some, it may be a desire for recognition and respectability (Guelzo, 2015; Holliker, 1992), and for some it may be a matter of being able to attract enough students to remain financially solvent, a struggle which many Christian higher education institutions face (Henck, 2011; Holliker, 1992). Other schools may pursue accreditation because of changing faith-community values; that is to say, it is possible for a faith-community to desire an accredited school, and such desire may serve as impetus for the school to seek accreditation (Carter, 2019; Dosen, 2012; Henck, 2011; Holmes, 2002). Whatever reason Bible colleges seek regional accreditation, there is some evidence Bible schools may lose their historical mission and values when they undergo accreditation in general (Guenther, 2019; Holliker, 1992; Sutherland, 2010).

In order to achieve accreditation, it is sometimes required that these colleges abandon altogether or significantly modify years of practice and pedagogy (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016;

Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Ferris & Enlow, 1997; Guenther, 2019; Henck, 2011; Meadowcroft, 2007). Some schools welcome the changes, wholeheartedly embracing the demands of accreditation. Yet other schools, for a wide array of reasons, struggle to accept the required changes (Bardo, 2009; Pennington, 2020).

Throughout the literature, several key points repeatedly surfaced. The first is that accreditation changes institutions (Adams, 1997; Barret, Fernandez, & Gonzalez, 2019). The second is that while most of the changes are good, not all of them are, especially in the case of religious schools (Ferris & Enlow, 1997; Guenther, 2019; Henck, 2011; Holliker, 1992; Holmes, 2002; Meadowcroft, 2007; Pennington, 2020). That is not to say the intentions behind them are wrong, but what is clear is that it is not uncommon for Christian colleges to struggle to maintain their identities within the framework of secular accreditation (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016; Holliker, 1992; Holmes, 2002). In an era when regional accreditation is the standard for colleges, it is important to consider the implications of Bible colleges which may be asked to compromise or altogether abandon their historical mission and values in pursuit of regional accreditation; this is especially true in sight of the relative modern or premodern tendencies of Bible colleges juxtaposed with the post-modern values of higher education in general, and liberal arts specifically. (Ferris & Enlow, 1997; Guenther, 2019). The change accrediting bodies invite is change that is ongoing and is cyclical in nature, and this continual cycle of change, over time, has potential to alter institutions in drastic ways (La Manna, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2018; WASC 2020).

In many ways, regional accreditation drives Christian higher education institutions to a crossroads—to a moment when historical mission and values collide with other goals (Graham, et al., 2017; Holliker, 1992; Holmes, 2002; Lim, 2014). While things such as strategic plans—

which can be byproducts of accreditation if the institution does not already have one—are important to have in place in the sense they provide stakeholders an opportunity to develop a mindset that embraces change and creates community, they also serve to promote long-term institutional change, which does require large-scale buy-in of stakeholders, and sometimes results in unintended changes to the mission of a school (Cumming & Miller, 2019; Farrar-Myers & Dunn, 2010; Lamm, et al., 2016).

While it is essential for accrediting bodies to maintain rigor and ensure continuous quality improvement (Andreani, et al., 2020; Natow, 2015), there must be a balance between policing and helping (Eaton, 2020; Mochtar & San, 2020). The crucial issue is whether these accrediting bodies wish to be gatekeepers, or will they be pathfinders (Burton, 2021; Natow, 2015; Neal, 2008). Since Bible colleges are institutions which tend to value tradition and stasis (Guenther, 2019), since the goal of accreditation is to ensure continuous quality improvement (Burton, 2021; Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Henck, 2011), then the demands of regional accrediting agencies may, in fact, collide with the historical missions of Bible colleges. (Bardo, 2009; Holliker, 1992; Le Cornu, 2003; Pennington, 2020; Rizzi, 2019; Smith & Davies, 2016; Van Oudtshoorn, 2013).

Institutions which struggle to enact or maintain accreditation's forward-moving requirements because their religious missions' conflict with the requirements could potentially suffer from what is, in effect, gatekeeping (Baker & Sax 2012; Farrar-Myers & Dunn, 2010; Holliker, 1992). It is not simply the moving forward that presents an issue for Bible colleges; instead, it is the direction they are often asked to move that presents the problem. The push toward secularism and toward liberal arts has the potential to take Bible colleges in a direction which may not align with their historic values (Belcher, 2004; Edlin, 2009; Henck, 2011). Bible

colleges value tradition. Accrediting bodies value transformation. While it is possible for the two to coexist, it is not always easy. It is important to note that, of course, the accrediting bodies do not endeavor to lock gates, but the effects of their demands may create such situations (Bardo, 2009; Burton, 2021; Holliker, 1992; Neal, 2008; Pennington, 2020). Even when Bible colleges do the work required to become regionally accredited, they must continue to change in such a way that there is continuous improvement, or risk losing their accreditation. For Bible colleges, there are several stakeholder groups outside of those which exist on the campus which the institution must seek to satisfy.

Recall that even at the same institution, different stakeholder groups experience the same mission and values in very different ways (Barton, 2019; Graham et al., 2017; Rizzi, 2019; Smith & Davies, 2016). This is worth noting since it could impact the ways in which stakeholders view the changes required by accreditation (Bardo, 2009). Because one of the core questions is whether the ways in which regional accreditation challenges or changes the core mission of Bible colleges are valuable for the institution, different stakeholder groups may experience it differently, and, thus, have differing opinions (Jahansoozi, 2006).

At the heart of the issue is that research indicates that even if there are some subtle shifts (Henck, 2011), it is worth it in many cases for religious institutions to pursue accreditation. While regional accreditation does, at least in some ways, enact change for the institutions, the changes are often valuable (Hammond, 2019; Henck, 2011). Most schools which seek and attain accreditation do not actually lose their entire historical mission, though there is a struggle to remain true to their identities (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016). This struggle derives from the process of change: as stakeholder groups on campus begin to internalize the requirements of

accreditation, they must go through the process of accepting the need for change, and then becoming open to making changes (La Manna, 2019; Lewin, 1997).

Part of the reason religious higher education institutions struggle in different ways than other non-religious organizations do is that in order to survive accreditation with their mission and values intact, religious higher education institutions interact with and engage their "worlds" in very unique ways—specifically, they view the world through spiritual lenses, something which secular institutions typically do not do (Barton, 2019; Hammond, 2019). As Estrada (2018) noted, regional accreditation necessitates a movement toward inclusion—of practices and beliefs which may conflict with the school's faith-tradition or historical practices.

Christian Higher Education Distinctives

While Christian higher education does have the mission of academic progress and potential for focus on the liberal arts, it also focuses on spiritual formation (Martin, 2018). Christian higher education institutions may teach a liberal arts curriculum, but many do so in such a way that pushes back against secularism by including spiritual and religious facets in actual curriculum as well as in extracurriculars such as chapel (Collins & Clanton, 2018; Lawrence, 2007). It is understood that Christian higher education institutions have committed to biblical training, to spreading the gospel, to holy living, and to equipping ministers; these commitments are absolute (McKinney, 2004).

One distinctive of Christian higher education relates to the primary focus of the type of institution, specifically, as it relates to "the pursuit of the spirit as an academic concern" (Vondey, 2017, p.85). This is especially important since part of the role of Christian higher education is to be instrumental in shaping who the attendees will become—not just in their scholarly pursuits or career choices, but in their core being (Wells, 2016). Christian higher

education is universally concerned with spiritual formation, to some degree (Collins & Clanton, 2018; Lim, 2014).

Another distinctive is one that relates specifically to accreditation. Donahoo & Lee (2008) note that there is a perception that religious colleges and universities are somehow inferior to secular higher education institutions, regardless of their accreditation status. The distinctive is not simply in the ways Christian higher education is perceived by the public. Rather, the distinctive is in the ways regional accreditation creates a conflict "between the institutional obligations and the spiritual nature of religious colleges and universities; and how such a conflict may affect the accreditation status of these facilities" (Donahoo & Lee, 2008, p.323). While Donahoo & Lee (2008) identified this potential for conflict over ten years ago, and Holliker (1992) alluded to it thirty years ago, the struggle remains (de Muynck et al., 2017). In fact, rather than behaving in proactive ways, religious schools tend to be reactive in the ways they respond to the demands of accreditation in the sense that they are institutions which value tradition over change (Farrar-Myers & Dunn, 2010; McGuire, 2009; Parker & Pettegrew, 2009; Pennington, 2020; Wells, 2016).

Bible College Distinctives

Bible colleges are like other Christian higher education institutions in many ways, but they differ in several very important ways as well (Bramer, 2010, Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Henck, 2011; Meadowcroft, 2007). Bible colleges, a subset of Christian higher education, are unique in the populations they serve and in the ways they serve those populations. Whereas Christian liberal arts colleges and universities struggle against secularism, which is the predominant hegemony in social sciences and humanities (Enstedt, 2020), Bible colleges are better able to avoid secularism by reframing their mission so that there is less opportunity for nonspiritual

ideas to enter in (Lawrence, 2007). This preference for spiritual endeavors at the cost of liberal arts curriculum has led to a view of Bible colleges as anti-intellectual (Lawrence, 2007; Lim, 2014; Marangos, 2004) which has affected the ways Bible college faculty and staff view their schools (Holliker, 1992). It is not that spirituality and liberal arts curricula cannot coexist. They do exist together in Christian liberal arts institutions. Rather, there is a tension between the two—when one becomes increasingly more important, it is necessary for one to decrease in significance (Bramer, 2010; Hall et al., 2016; McKinney, 2004). This tension is not one which schools create; there is simply not space for both focuses to be completely realized (Edlin, 2009). In a world where degrees have finite numbers of credit hours, those credit hours are allocated in ways which necessarily privilege one focus at the expense of others.

Landmark research by Ferris & Enlow (1997) identifies core Bible college distinctives, which include:

1. Christian service;

2. Commitment to the priority of biblical formation;

3. Commitment to spiritual and ministry development;

4. Emphasis on Christian character development through setting and enforcing standards;

5. Emphasis on indoctrination in orthodoxy as a safeguard to doctrinal purity;

6. Emphasis on teaching practical ministry techniques;

7. Emphasis on a view of leadership which stresses the intrinsic authority which accompanies divine appointment and guidance (Ferris & Enlow, 1997, p. 7).

Ferris & Enlow (1997) do not simply identify these distinctives; instead, they also suggest that they must be re-examined as well, to determine which are enduring. Specifically, Ferris & Enlow (1997) suggest that Bible colleges must look for the elements which "have

enduring relevance" (p.8). These distinctives, though identified over twenty years ago, are enduring in the sense that there has not been more recent definitive definitions of Bible college distinctives (Bussmann, 2009; Ferris & Enlow, 1997; Lim, 2014; Sutherland, 2010).

One distinguishing attribute of Bible colleges is, while they do not call themselves job-training schools, they serve vocational functions (DeMuynck et al., 2017; Roels, 2017). This distinctive is incredibly relevant given that the goal of vocational schools is to prepare students to enter the workforce in their chosen field (Bramer, 2010; De Muynck et al., 2017; House, 2018; Hulme, et al., 2016; McKinney, 2004). Dahlvig (2018) points out that there is a shift in higher education in general away from its roots of character development and toward job skills. However, as of this writing, the core stated missions of most liberal arts colleges and universities, whether secular or religious, do not focus on job skill development (Christian College Coalition, 1997; Department of Education, 2018; Daniels & Gustafson, 2016). Specifically, a primary goal of contemporary higher education is to prepare students to function in a world in which they will encounter people with diverse identities (Shaheen et al., 2021). So, while there may be a change on the horizon, the current model of liberal arts education is not primarily to educate for job skills.

The historical mission and values of Christian higher education institutions, and of Bible colleges in particular, indicate that these types of colleges have typically operated, at least in part, as vocational schools (Bramer, 2010; De Muynck et al., 2017; House, 2018; Hulme et al., 2016; McKinney, 2004). That means the missions of Bible colleges are different from those of other, secular, private and public institutions (Alleman et al., 2016; Bramer, 2010; Henck, 2011; House, 2018; Hulme, et al., 2016). Vocational schools tend to prepare students for paying jobs within specific fields. Bible colleges, on the other hand, prepare students to fulfill their spiritual

calling, which may include work in a specific ministry; however, Bible colleges are distinct from

traditional vocational schools in that the training they offer does not always lead to paying jobs

(Coz, 2019; Estrada, 2018; Ferris & Enlow, 1997; Sutherland, 2010). The primary the role of

Bible colleges, then, is to help students find and fulfill their spiritual calling, regardless of

whether they eventually work within traditional ministry (Estrada, 2018; Lefevere, 2019). Yet

these schools, once they submit to regional accreditation, must embrace a dual mission: to satisfy

the expectations of the secular regional accrediting body (De Muynck et al., 2017) and to train

students of a religious faith-community to make valuable contributions to the kingdom of God.

　　As has already been noted, Bible colleges, while they purport to educate for spiritual

endeavors, in many ways have much in common with job-training schools. Bible colleges seem

to fit quite nicely in this niche. A primary goal of Bible colleges is to prepare students to enter

Christian ministry as vocation vocations, both paid and unpaid (Coz, 2019; Sutherland, 2010).

One key difference and one that serves to distance Bible colleges from traditional vocational

schools is that the goal of vocational schools is to place graduates into paying positions in the

field they have studied (Bramer, 2010; De Muynck et al., 2017; House, 2018; Hulme, et al.,

2016; McKinney, 2004). This is not the case for Bible colleges. While Bible colleges do educate

for vocation (De Muynck et al., 2017), that vocation is in the field of Christian ministry, and it

does not necessarily include the graduate finding a paying job in his or her field of study.

Instead, it is possible that the graduate will serve in a lay minister role in a congregation or as

missionary (Sutherland, 2010). While both vocational schools and Bible colleges seek to educate

students in such a way that they learn practical skills to use in the field, the key difference is that

the two institutions are preparing students to work in two different fields. While the typical

vocational school teaches students to work in their given field—their industry, discipline, or area

of expertise, Bible colleges prepare students to work in God's field—seeking to reach for a world that does not have a relationship with Christ (Roels, 2017).

The enormity of the difference cannot be overstated. Job training to work in a given industry is considered successful when students find paying jobs (Vos, 2017). However, training to work as a minister for the Lord is considered successful when the graduate lives a fulfilling life, making valuable contributions to the kingdom of God (Schreiner, 2018). While it is not atypical for Bible colleges to eschew being considered vocational, the fact is that it is only a matter of semantics—Bible colleges do, indeed serve, at least on some level, to prepare students to enter a calling (Roels, 2017).

Another distinguishing attribute of Bible colleges is that, as Bramer (2010) noted, the work of Christian institutions is to focus on spiritual formation, which is the mission they were founded upon. Bramer (2010) goes so far as to indicate that spiritual formation is the core of Christian higher education. Spiritual formation, then, is the heart of Christian higher education in general (Lim, 2014), but, in many ways, even more so is it the core of Bible colleges (Mittwede, 2013).

The above-noted seminal research by Ferris & Enlow (1997), which is over twenty years-old but has managed to remain relevant, indicates that there are seven Bible college distinctives, without which the line between Bible college and Christian Liberal Arts education is easily blurred (Estrada, 2018; Wells, 2016). But since the cultural conditions in which these distinctives emerged have drastically changed, there must be changes if Bible colleges wish to remain relevant, which is to say if they wish to attract students and educate them in ways which meet the needs of their sponsoring faith-communities and of our postmodern world (Darroux, 2013; Ferris & Enlow, 1997; Toms, 2018). In this article, the authors assert that each of the distinctives must

be revisited with an eye toward candidly evaluating the ways in which each of the distinctives positively or negatively affects the function or the public perception of Bible colleges. They conclude that Bible colleges must forthrightly search for ways to reassert elements which have enduring relevance and must examine how to adjust in areas where their emphasis or perception is skewed.

Recall that one of the ways in which Bible colleges are unique and have managed to endure is that they typically have strong ties to "sponsoring denominations" (Guenther, 2019, p.192). This tie to congregant bases within their respective denominations is a hallmark of Bible colleges, and is not only one of its distinctives, but it is also one of the reasons they have managed to maintain their distinct identities (Bramer, 2010; Ferris & Enlow, 1997). So, while Ferris & Enlow (1997) claim that, "in many ways the conditions which gave birth and impetus to the Bible college movement no longer exist" (p. 7), some Bible colleges have managed to endure, and in some cases, have continued to thrive.

This distinctive—the very focus of the college—can be summed up neatly. Crabtree (2006) established that Christian higher education institutions "are open to students from other faith traditions and often to non-Christians interested in studying in a faith-centered environment" (p. 20). In general, then, whereas Christian colleges and universities are not exclusively open to members of their own denominations, or even their own faith in general, Bible colleges typically do not open their doors to non-members of their sponsoring faith organizations (Christian College Coalition, 1997; Daniels & Gustafson, 2016).

Conclusion

The distinctives of the Bible college movement magnify the resolve of regionally accredited Bible colleges to maintain their historic purpose for existing. In a movement that

might easily be considered irrelevant to modern sensibilities, the pressure to conform to outside standards and the pressure to maintain fidelity to Bible college distinctives are likely to clash (Collins & Clanton, 2019; Resane, 2018). It will require strong leadership from key campus leaders and strong buy-in from stakeholders and constituents in order for Bible colleges to maintain their historic missions while continually improving per regional accreditation standards (Barton, 2019; Cumming & Miller, 2019; Guenther, 2019; Holliker, 1992).

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

Introduction

When institutions experience drastic change, there is bound to be fallout of one kind or another, to varying degrees. As institutions undergo rapid change in response to external pressures, stakeholders may resist and, if the institution is not cautious, the changes may be such that the institution loses its historical mission and values. Accreditation drives such change, at least to some degree. The researcher, throughout this study, attempted to consider the effects of regional accreditation's demands on the changes to Bible colleges which pursue such accreditation. Because the qualitative approach involves "working to understand individual perceptions," it lends itself to studies which attempt to view events or experiences through individuals' lenses (Stake, 2010, p. 15).

Since qualitative research relies heavily on sample selection, the focus is on quality of data from the sample as the focal feature (Malterud, et al., 2016). In this study, there were relatively few schools to study; as a result, the researcher utilized purposive sampling as well as snowball sampling (Parker & Geddes, 2019). There are over 900 religious higher education institutions in the United States, which include Christian liberal arts schools, seminaries, and Bible colleges. The Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) has over 50 Bible colleges among its membership (ABHE, 2021). In stark contrast, as noted above, only fifteen Bible colleges are regionally accredited across all six regional accrediting bodies (Carter, 2019; Weeks et al., 2017). This study considered the experiences of these regionally accredited Bible colleges.

Research Design

In qualitative research, the approach and design of the research are important in ensuring the thoroughness of the work (Kambouri-Danos & Pieridou, 2020). In addition, qualitative research deals with people, and that can lead to a high level of familiarity with the research. In most cases, qualitative researchers are intimately involved in the research process, and, as a result, their choices inevitably influence their interpretation of their findings (Kambouri-Danos & Pieridou, 2020). Because there is possibility of familiarity and intimacy skewing the research process, there must be appropriate design and approach (Ngozwana, 2018).

Before the actual study was conducted, the researcher completed a pilot of the initial email communication, the open-ended survey, and the semi-structured interview. Because of the small participant size, it was determined that two pilot participants would be sufficient. These two pilot protocols were conducted with personnel at schools which currently or previously identified as Bible colleges. This study was broken into 4 distinct phases: (1) publicly available current mission statement collection from each participating college, (2) open-ended survey deployed via Qualtrics to Bible college personnel, (3) follow-up semi-structured telephone interview with the same personnel, and (4) coding of interview transcripts along with mission statement and survey analysis. Out of fifteen Bible colleges, 8 responded to the survey and thus became participants in the study. With a response rate of just over 50%, this study purported to demonstrate the overall experiences of Bible colleges which pursue and achieve regional accreditation.

The act of piloting can provide invaluable information to the researcher regarding instrumentation and data collection processes (Creswell, 2015). Using a like demographic sample, the researcher established usability of the survey among the established study population

(Creswell, 2015). The piloting of a semi-structured interview protocol helped clarify the strengths and deficiencies that existed within the instrument (Creswell, 2015). Piloting interview protocols provided valuable insights for this study. In addition to gaining experience with interview methods, the researcher was able to better understand the population involved in the study (Creswell, 2015). The survey and interview were piloted with two administrators at a regionally accredited Christian Liberal Arts school which until recently identified as a Bible college. This process allowed for consistency in collected data (Creswell, 2015).

During piloting, special care was given to verify the instruments' ability to gather the needed data for the research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The researcher also noted the time it took for pilot participants to complete the survey and to complete the interview. This information was considered when modifying the final instrument (Creswell, 2015).

One of the benefits of a qualitative study is that the prevalence of an incident or experience is sufficiently significant to be predictive of future experiences (Yin, 2014). This research relied upon a qualitative approach (Stake, 2010) to analyze the reasons Bible colleges pursue regional accreditation. It also focused on the changes regional accreditation caused Bible colleges to make to their mission statements.

Qualitative research resembles a fabric which is composed of many small threads of different colors and materials (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because of the nature of qualitative research to weave strands of information from various sources, qualitative research is the appropriate method when examining the ways in which different pieces come together to constitute a whole. In this particular research, a multi-site case study was an effective means to gather data to explore the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One advantage of multi-

site case studies is that they have the possibility to discern patterns and common themes across cases, which allows for the researcher to draw comparisons (Yin, 2017).

Qualitative research acts an interactive process. It is a methodology which attempts to understand a participant's view of reality (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In this case, the participants' respective views of reality were told through the use of survey, interviews, and publicly available documents.

Participants

The participant sample size constituted a manageable number of people which could be reasonably engaged at locations and within a timeframe that would allow for the generation of adequate data (Ngozwana, 2018). In this case, with fifteen regionally accredited Bible colleges as the overall population size, the researcher hoped that by reaching out to the presidents of each campus, there would be at least one member from each campus who was willing to participate. Yet it was determined the research would proceed as long as there was a minimum of 6-8 total participants. While college presidents were the initial point of contact, the eventual participants in this study included current Bible college presidents, vice presidents, provosts, and accreditation committee members from regionally accredited Bible colleges. The participants were selected to be part of the sample through purposive sampling techniques (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lavrakas, 2008). This method of nonprobability sampling was effective for this kind of qualitative research since it produced a small sample which was representative of the population.

In the event the researcher missed any regionally accredited Bible colleges, the use of snowball sampling was a possible means of ensuring no qualifying schools were missed. This snowball sampling could be used to identify other members on the participants' same campus as well as ones on other campuses which the researcher might not have already identified as

regionally accredited Bible colleges. Snowball sampling is particularly effective in situations where the researcher begins with a small number of initial contacts who meet the research criteria; those contacts are then asked to recommend other contacts who meet the research criteria and who may also be willing participants who then also recommend other potential participants, and so on. This allows researchers to gain sampling momentum after establishing initial contacts, thus snowballing the number of participants until target sample size or saturation is reached (Parker & Geddes, 2019). In the case of this study, the researcher contacted one school via snowball sampling. Upon contact with school personnel, though, it was determined the school did not self-identify as a Bible college. However, multiple school presidents suggested other personnel on their campus to participate in the study.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), note that sample sizes must be large enough to provide data saturation to ensure the researcher's ability "to extract thick, rich data" (p. 242). Data saturation is the continued sampling and data collecting from participants until repetition is achieved and no new information is obtained (Bowen, 2009). Indeed, data collection should continue until thematic saturation in coding is reached (Saldaña, 2015). It is up to the researcher's judgment to determine when continued sampling would not lead to new information. In this study, the researcher proceeded with the research with 8 participants because there were multiple data points for each participating school.

The sample size for this study was substantial enough to add significant knowledge, the process by which is corroborated by Malterud et al. (2016), who suggest researchers in qualitative studies focus on satisfying the demands of rigor and thoroughness by ensuring the information obtained from the participants is valuable and noteworthy, meaning that it portrays information which is relevant to the study. Since qualitative research relies heavily on sample

selection, the focus is on quality of data from the sample as the focal feature—which means the focus is not on the sample size, per se (Malterud et al., 2016). Researchers are responsible for ensuring they have the appropriate number of samples based upon the research questions and the objectives. As a result, the researcher governs whether or not the sample size and research method can sufficiently provide adequate data within each category (Patton, 2015).

More specifically once the researcher deems that saturation has occurred, the sample size can be considered sufficient (Bowen, 2009; Creswell, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Because of the relatively small number of regionally accredited Bible colleges, the number of documents and interviews needed was not as large as it would be with a larger pool from which to pull. As such, there was more than enough data available to reach saturation.

Data Collection

As noted above, this qualitative study was broken into distinct phases which included mission statement collection, deploying surveys and interviews, and coding and analysis. Since the survey and the mission statements were already written documents, there was no need for transcribing those two portions of the study. The interviews required transcription since they were conducted via telephone. After utilizing a Otter.ai, a transcription service, for the interviews, the researcher sent them to participants to ensure accuracy. Then, the researcher coded the interview transcripts and analyzed the survey responses and the mission statements. Each of the aforementioned phases was distinct in that they occurred at separate times.

This qualitative study utilized survey and semi-structured interviews to better understand the reflective perceptions of Bible college leaders as they sought to recall their experiences leading up to, during, and after pursuing regional accreditation. As Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate, it is important to gather data from multiple sources when conducting qualitative

research. As such, once respondents completed the initial survey (see Appendix D), a semi-structured interview was conducted with each individual (see Appendix E) in an attempt to gather in-depth narratives of their regional accreditation experiences.

After all interviews were conducted, the researcher moved into the next phase of the study, which included data coding and analysis. In this case, the researcher read through the transcripts numerous times as advised by Patton (2015) in order to prepare for coding. Coding serves as a means of discovery because it allows for themes and patterns to emerge (Saldaña, 2015). The researcher did not have any predetermined codes before beginning the research, which meant that themes could be emergent in nature. Inductive analysis of this kind is known as open coding, and it is commonly used in qualitative inquiry (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Because the researcher collected and reviewed publicly available mission statements and had survey data prior to conducting interviews, the researcher had a general understanding of the nature of the college, and had a sense of the recency of accreditation as well as access to the current mission statement of each school.

Mission statement collection. The first phase of data collection included a gathering of the participating Bible colleges' current mission statements. This research was conducted before the survey and interviews to allow for the researcher to have a basic understanding of the values and practices at each school before conducting the interviews. This allowed the researcher to yield more fruitful information from the interviews. The information gathered during this phase of the research was used to supplement the researcher's understanding of changes to core mission and values of the colleges.

Open-ended survey. Presidents of regionally accredited Bible colleges received initial communication, which provided a context for this study, asking them to participate in the study

(see Appendix A). In some cases, the president suggested someone else, such as another administrator or an accreditation steering committee member, to be a part of this study. When this occurred, the initial email was also sent to the new participants. The researcher sent one reminder email to colleges who did not respond to the initial email with an option to reply and politely decline (see Appendix B). This phase of data collection was deployed solely via email. The contact information for the recipients was gathered from each college's respective website.

Once a participant was identified and provided consent to participate (Corti et al., 2000) the researcher deployed an open-ended survey to the Bible college personnel (see Appendix D). The purpose of the survey was to gather pertinent data before the interview. This data ensured that the school self-identified as a Bible college and that the researcher had identified the correct personnel at the college—ideally ones who have participated in the accreditation process. Because many Bible colleges did not have the term "Bible college" in their names, it was beneficial to conduct a survey before interviewing. The researcher interviewed the same set of people as answered the survey.

Benefits for open-ended questions in a survey are that such questions allow for the potential for unexpected and sometimes surprising responses, and this type of survey also allows for respondents to frame their answers in whatever way they wish (Tasker & Cisneroz, 2019). In addition, open-ended questions allow for more in-depth responses than multiple choice or closed questions (Tasker & Cisneroz, 2019). Since the aim of this study was to find out as much as possible about the reasons Bible colleges seek regional accreditation and the ways Bible colleges' mission statements are changed as a result of said accreditation, open-ended questions were an appropriate method of collecting initial information about respondents and their experiences. The researcher-created survey consisted of eleven questions. Of these questions,

two had sub-questions for a total of fourteen individual inquiries. The researcher did not expect the length of the survey to diminish the number of respondents because three of the questions were yes/no questions, and six of the questions were designed to elicit short responses (questions asking which accrediting body the school is accredited with, for instance).

      Interviews. The next phase of data collection was composed of follow-up semi-structured interviews as a means of gathering pertinent data from respondents (see Appendix E). These interviews were 8 questions long with follow-up probes for each question to ensure depth of response. The interviews typically lasted twenty to twenty-five minutes. Whereas the survey was intended to gather background information, the purpose of the interview was to seek in-depth information regarding the changes regional accreditation brought to the Bible college. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate tools to use when gathering data in qualitative studies in which respondents are asked to re-live their experiences in a way that goes beyond basic recall of events (Husband, 2020). In fact, one benefit of semi-structured interview is that it attempts to encourage respondents to critically evaluate their experiences and to think reflectively (Husband, 2020). It is interesting to note that semi-structured interviews may, because of their inherent reflective nature, lead to change in the perception of the respondents or even in potential campus-wide change if the respondent is in a position to enact such change (Husband, 2020). This is because answering questions and engaging in discussion about topics could cause respondents to consider issues which they may not have previously considered, or they may potentially change their perspective on an issue because of the exploration (Husband, 2020). While change was not a stated or underlying goal of this study, since Bible colleges which have undergone regional accreditation are involved in continuous cycles of change and improvement (Andreanni et al., 2020; Baker & Sax, 2012; Barrett et al., 2019; Brittingham, 2009; Department of Education,

2018; Jones & RiCharde, 2005), it is worth noting that there was possibility for reflection which leads to change as a result of the exploration which occurs in a semi-structured interview.

        Coding. Coding is a valuable means of discovery in qualitative research because it allows for themes and patterns to emerge from the data (Saldaña, 2015). This study relied upon DiscoverText, a CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software), to assist with coding. Some of the benefits of CAQDAS is that the software can help researchers visualize data via the use of generated charts, maps and word clouds (dos Santos et al., 2022; Vignato et al., 2021). In fact, word clouds, which are clusters of words which visualize the frequency of the use of words based on word text size, are a means of triangulating coding in the sense that it helps the researcher find words or phrases which might have been missed and assists with corroborating data findings (Vignato et al., 2021). In addition, word clouds rely upon participant voices to generate the clouds, which is one method of honoring their voices (Saldaña, 2015). Further, CAQDAS systems are valuable tools to allow the qualitative researcher to better understand the data since it presents it in different ways (dos Santos et al., 2022). With novice coders, specifically, CAQDAS are valuable systems of facilitating transparency in the data analysis process (Vignato et al., 2021).

        While there are many advantages of the use of software in qualitative data analysis, this method of coding and analysis is not without its disadvantages. Among the disadvantages of using software to assist with coding is that the time it takes to learn the program, which can be considerable, is a distractor from the actual coding process (Michalovich, 2021; Vignato et al., 2021). More specifically, research demonstrates that qualitative researchers often approach software analysis tools with high expectations which are often not realized (Micalovich, 2021). Among the reasons for the struggles with such software is that there is often insufficient training,

and the software is often multi-layered and complex (Micalovich, 2021).

In this research, the coding was conducted in two distinct rounds. The first round of coding involved the use of descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2015), during which commonly used words and phrases emerged and were visually depicted by frequency of use (see Appendix G). Then, the researcher continued the first round of coding using in vivo coding, which examines the words of participants verbatim (Saldaña, 2015). The researcher utilized the word cloud feature of the CAQDAS to begin to group similar words or phrases. Specifically, the word cloud allowed the use of one-, two-, and three-word phrases as well as permitted the researcher to combine words and phrases into categories to group similar words or phrases. This type of visual representation of the data was valuable for assisting with both descriptive coding and in vivo coding for the first-round coding of the semi-structured interviews.

In in vivo coding, the researcher labels sections of data, which could be a short phrase or a word, in a way that honors the participants' voices (Saldaña, 2015). While in vivo coding is typically part of a grounded theory approach, it proved a valuable tool for the researcher to hone the words and phrases used by participants in ways that honored their voices and the particular ways in which Bible colleges viewed the accreditation process. During the first round, the purpose of the coding was for the researcher to attune herself to the participant's values, language patterns, and worldviews. The CAQDAS assisted with this by allowing the researcher to click words or phrases and be taken immediately to the use of the word or phrase in context for each instance of its use. In this round, the overarching goal was to identify big picture concepts which began to emerge. At this stage of coding, there was very little interpretation (Saldaña, 2015).

The second round of coding was pattern coding. In this round of coding, the researcher

looked for key words or phrases. It is in this round that the researcher hoped to find phrases and word patterns which many or all participants used. Creswell (2015) suggests the use of a coding process which organizes the material into segments, which is what pattern coding does. Saldaña's (2015) approach includes performing multiple types of coding, among which are descriptive coding and in vivo coding. The second cycle utilizes pattern coding as well as focused coding. The process of coding, which is, in essence, a process of analyzing data is what Yin (2014) noted is done with the goal of searching for patterns via examining and categorizing the data. Saldaña (2015) encourages the use of analytic memos to document and reflect on the coding process and presenting patterns, connections, and categories.

Overall, the procedures for analyzing this qualitative data followed the structure which Saldaña (2015) outlines. This necessitated beginning with descriptive coding and then moving to deeper coding. The interviews were recorded by the transcription service and were transcribed in real-time as the interview was conducted. Additionally, prior to conducting interviews, the researcher obtained permission to record their voices (Ngozwana, 2018). Since the interviews included language and acronyms specific to Bible colleges, the researcher read the transcripts for accuracy as soon as the interview was complete. Once transcripts were transcribed, the researcher sent them to participants to ensure accuracy.

In an effort to maintain confidentiality, efforts were taken to ensure the setting and participants were not identifiable in the reporting. To maintain this confidentiality, the researcher gave the participants codes when transcribing and analyzing the data. Specifically, in reporting on data, the researcher used pseudonyms as well as noted regions of the country as opposed to specific schools, or even states. Additionally, all data was stored on a password-protected computer and will be destroyed upon the completion of the mandatory five-year period. Written

consent was obtained prior to beginning the surveys and follow-up interviews by embedding it in the survey, and participants were notified they could discontinue their participation at any time.

Analytical Methods

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research includes inquiry which requires determined data analysis which results in lengthy reports—reports for which there are often no firm guidelines to direct researchers on the methods of interpretation or data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kalman, 2019; Saldaña, 2015). Since the survey and interviews were directly given to the researcher, the respondents knew the nature of the inquiry. In any case where respondents are aware of the nature of inquiry, it is possible they may slant their responses for a variety of reasons, including fear of retribution. In addition, the surveys and interviews were conducted after-the-fact, which left the possibility for data to be presented to the researcher in biased terms. Another consideration was that each survey and interview included only one person's perceptions of the effects of regional accreditation.

On the other hand, the mission statements offered glimpses of the thought processes of multiple stakeholders in, or very close to, the moment. This was important because, over time, recollections can be shifted based on outcomes or distance from the original event. For instance, while the initial regional accreditation cycle might have been a difficult experience in the moment for a respondent, if a positive outcome was achieved (for instance, regional accreditation was granted), and if enough time has passed, it is possible that a respondent may not convey the same sentiments in the survey or interview as may be noticeable in documents dated closer to the actual experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

After data was collected, it was organized, transcribed, explored, and then coded for patterns of similarity and frequency. The researcher used a table to organize text. The researcher

analyzed the transcripts from the interviews to categorize and cluster words, labels, and direct phrases into appropriate groupings with the assistance of data analysis software using the process of reading and re-reading surveys and interview transcripts, and dividing and coding information into themes. While the coding of such data was, indeed, a judgment call on the part of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and was therefore subject to potential for bias, the researcher took care to research and analyze in a responsible manner.

As noted above, in this study, using descriptive and in vivo coding, the researcher developed codes, categories, and themes which emerged from the data. The first phase of coding consisted of preliminary pre-coding. Pre-coding, which occurs early in the coding process and guides the investigation by helping the researcher establish recurring concepts, consists of circling, highlighting, and underlining participants' quotes (Saldaña, 2015). For this research, the use of data analysis software assisted with pre-coding by providing word clouds as well as frequency charts (see Appendices F & G). In this way, preliminary pre-coding guided the emergent investigation (Saldaña, 2015). After descriptive coding and in vivo coding, pattern coding—continued for multiple rounds as necessary to identify codes and themes.

This process continued until themes began to emerge (Saldaña, 2015). From this opening round of coding, the researcher established starter concepts which were either supported by or contradicted by the later data coding (Saldaña, 2015). The goal in such precoding was to give shape to emergent themes in coding and the data analysis process. The second phase of coding focused on developing "categorical, thematic, conceptual and/or theoretical organization" which built upon the precoding (Saldaña, 2015, p.207). In order to find dominant and non-dominant codes, the researcher utilized pattern coding which assisted in distinguishing codes and subcodes. Pattern coding helped pinpoint themes as they arose from the data. The researcher then recorded

the data in a table in such a way that described the codes, concepts, and themes which were reflected in the data.

Limitations

In every qualitative study, there are always limitations (Wiersma, 2000). Wiersma (2000) asserted that limitations associated with qualitative studies often relate to legitimacy and reliability. It is often the case in qualitative research, that researchers find it challenging to reproduce their studies "because the research occurs in the natural setting" (Wiersma, 2000, p. 211). When research occurs in such a way that it might be difficult to reproduce, it limits the repeatability of the study, yet it does not diminish the study's legitimacy.

One limit of qualitative study design is that the researcher's ability to draw complex conclusions are not always generalizable. Because qualitative data is inherently subjective, it is essential to design and employ careful data analysis procedures (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Additionally, since this study examined the experiences of Bible colleges which have achieved regional accreditation, and since there have been relatively few Bible colleges which have undergone these changes, there is the possibility the findings of this study may not be generalizable.

Finally, it is impossible to approach any research without some sort of bias, of course. The researcher has personal values and biases which necessarily guided the research process, including which questions were asked and the ways the findings were presented (Kambouri-Danos & Pieridou, 2020). In this case, the researcher is an English professor who teaches full-time at a California Community College, and who teaches part-time and serves as the General Education Department Chair at a regionally accredited Bible college. The researcher's involvement in the Bible college movement causes both personal and professional bias. It is

necessary, then, to be cognizant of the potential of both of these to impact the objectivity of this study. This potential for bias was not ignored at any step of the process. And despite the potential for bias, the researcher was truly interested in discovering in what ways, if any, Bible college identities are changed by accreditation. As someone who had no interaction with the Bible college until they were already conditionally approved for regional accreditation, and who spent one day per week, on average, at the college, it was less difficult to maintain objectivity than might be expected.

Overall, the goal of the research was to discover common themes, if there were any, which led Bible colleges to pursue regional accreditation. In addition, the researcher hoped to discover reasons Bible colleges sought regional accreditation. Through the process of gathering data and coding it, the researcher gained valuable insights.

Chapter IV
Results

Introduction

This multi-site case study sought to understand the motivations of Bible college leadership for pursuing regional accreditation as well as the impacts on the identities of these schools after achieving regional accreditation. This chapter presents a report of the research findings and results of the study. The researcher collected data from three sources: participating Bible college publicly available mission statements, an open-ended researcher-created survey, and semi-structured interviews. Using these three data points to ensure triangulation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018), several themes emerged which offered insights into both the factors leading Bible colleges pursue regional accreditation as well as the effect of such accreditation on schools which have achieved it.

This qualitative study utilized an open-ended survey and publicly available college mission statements as a lens through which to view and analyze themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. The institutional mission statements and surveys provided a comprehensive means for the analysis of interview responses as well as serving to ensure each participating school self-identified as a Bible college. In addition, the survey provided necessary background information, including the number of years each school had been accredited, and whether the participant had been part of any accreditation cycles. As such, both the mission statements and survey responses combined to allow the researcher to frame the results of the study.

The process began with the researcher gathering mission statements from participating colleges and then using Qualtrics to gather open-ended surveys from each respective participating school. Once the researcher collected both, they were used to help interpret the

interviews. The interviews were conducted via telephone with Otter.ai transcription service recording and transcribing the interviews in real-time. These interviews were the first voice contact the researcher had with participants.

This research was guided by the following questions:

RQ1: Why do Bible colleges seek regional accreditation as opposed to seeking accreditation through vocational or religious accrediting bodies?

RQ2: What are the effects of regional accreditation on these Bible colleges as it relates to their institutional identities?

The purpose of Chapter IV is to provide results of the qualitative data as they relate to the study research questions. This includes results of the mission statement analysis, survey, and interview data for each of the study's research questions. Results of the coding and analysis of the data will be detailed in this chapter, question by question, to explain the outcomes of the study.

Literature recognizes that Bible colleges are distinct from other types of Christian higher education institutions (Edlin, 2009; Schreiner, 2018; Toms, 2018), and it also acknowledges that regional accreditation is a conduit for change for schools which pursue and are granted regional accreditation (Baker & Sax, 2012; Holliker, 1992; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Current research also suggests that the process of regional accreditation is not without its stumbling blocks (Jones et al., 2017; National Association of Scholars, 2021).

Accreditation leads Bible colleges through a change process (Holliker, 1992; Holmes, 2002), with built-in mechanisms which force unfreezing followed by change and then refreezing (Lewin, 1997). The process of accreditation itself is a model of effective change experience in the sense that there is required data-gathering followed by change and then required reflection on that change via the self-study. In this way, this study demonstrated that Bible colleges experience

change in ways which are typical of other organizations (Lawrence, 2007; Martin, 2018), but their positionality as spiritual enterprises sets them in a unique position of leaning on perceived spiritual guidance in many cases as well as secular guidance from the regional accrediting bodies.

As is consistent with prior studies utilizing Lewin's (1997) 3-stage change model, the results of this study suggested that top-level leaders bear the responsibility of anticipating resistance to change as well as shaping followers' perceptions of and orientation toward future change (Tombiri, 2019). Because this study listened to the voices of top-level leaders, the points-of-view shared are necessarily those which were responsible, when necessary, with preparing followers to shift their cultures in a way that disrupted the status-quo enough to unfreeze the organization and prepare for change (Lewin, 1997).

Similarly, as with prior studies which relied upon Phipps' (2011) spiritual leadership framework, this study found that leaders' spirituality, including their religious beliefs as well as the values which those beliefs help shape, is instrumental in affecting both the ways in which they lead as well as the directions they lead toward (Bryan, 2022). Specifically, this study affirmed that spirituality is integrated into the ways top level Bible college leaders approach change because their approaches to change are grounded in their core, authentically held belief.

Further, this study indicated the ways top-level leaders at Bible colleges approach and frame change for their followers, as well as for additional stakeholders (including their students and constituents of their faith traditions), can be aptly interpreted using the study's combination of change and spiritual leadership theories (see Figure 6). The results of this study confirmed that Bible colleges are spiritual enterprises as well as being academically focused. This study also confirmed that leaders at Bible colleges frame and influence change in ways which manifest their

internally held spiritual and religious beliefs. Interestingly, based on study outcomes, the same

impetus can be used to drive or restrain change, depending on the context (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 *Spiritual leadership and change at regionally accredited Bible colleges*
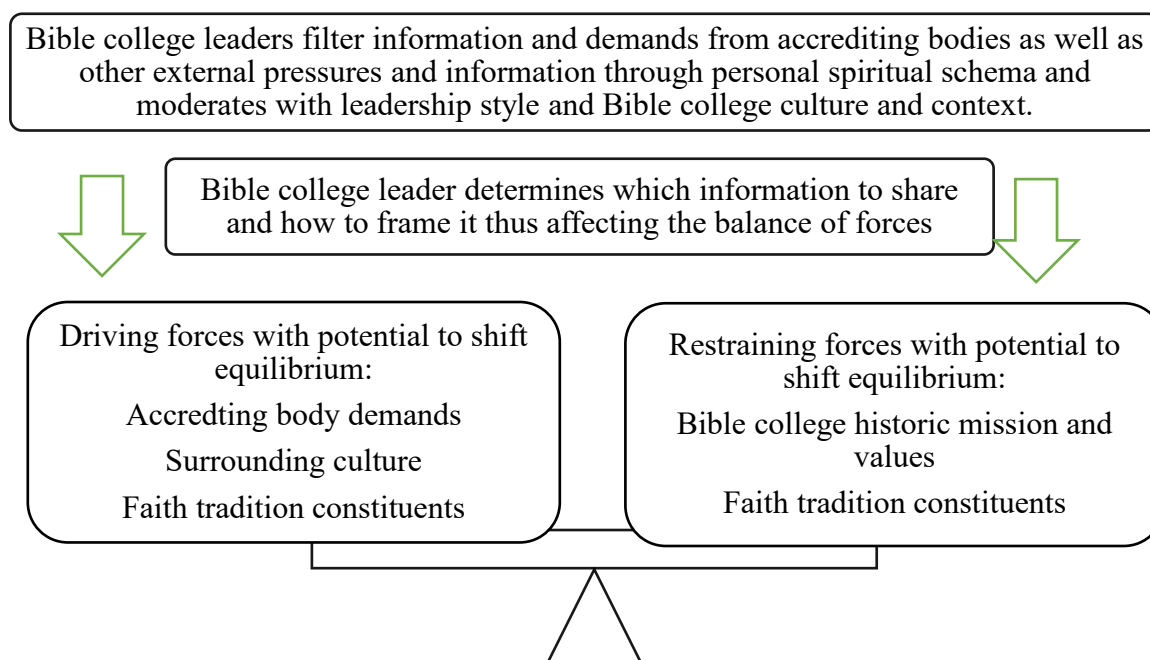
Data Collection Instruments

Survey instrument. The researcher-created, 11-item, open-ended survey (see Appendix

D) was used in phase one of this study. The survey was accessed digitally through the platform

Qualtrics, using a link embedded in an email. The first three items of the survey solicited basic

demographics of the participants as well as ensured the participant worked at a school that

identifies as a Bible college. The remaining questions sought to determine which entity the

school was accredited with and to find out the participants' roles on campus as well as personal

involvement with accreditation. The final questions on the survey invited participants to share

whether there had been any modifications to the school mission statement as a result of regional

accreditation.

Interview protocol. The researcher-created semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E) included 8 questions which ranged from topics regarding participant perceptions of the value of regional accreditation to changes to the mission statement of the college as a result of regional accreditation. The overall tone of the interview was conversational, with multiple probes for each question to ensure responses were full and thoughtful.

Participant profile. Out of fifteen regionally accredited Bible colleges, administrators of 8 schools agreed to participate in the study. This response rate of 53% was sufficient to ensure the responses were representative of the voices of regionally accredited Bible colleges. Of the eight participants, seven are male, and one is female. In order to ensure confidentiality, pronoun references throughout all reporting will be masculine. All respondents served in the capacity of an administrator for their college. Specifically, the researcher spoke with 4 college presidents, one vice-provost, two academic deans, and one vice president. The average number of years with regional accreditation was 19.875 (see Table 2).

Table 2

Respondent and Bible college demographics

Respondent Pseudonym	Respondent Position	# of Years Regionally Accredited
Respondent #1	President	2 years
Respondent #2	Dean of Operations	35 years
Respondent #3	Academic Dean	15 years
Respondent #4	Vice President	15 years
Respondent #5	President	15 years
Respondent #6	President	16 years
Respondent #7	President	22 Years
Respondent #8	Associate Provost	39 years

Note: Accrediting body name purposely omitted to ensure participant confidentiality.

The researcher sought to determine the regional accrediting body of each institution as well as the number of years the school had been regionally accredited. Of the eight schools which participated in this study, five schools were accredited by HLC (see Table 3). This breakdown of respondents was consistent with the breakdown of Bible colleges with regional accreditation since 9 of the fifteen regionally accredited Bible colleges have HLC accreditation. There are no Bible colleges regionally accredited with either NECHE or NCCWU, so the other respondents were from MSACS, SACSOCS, or WASC schools. To ensure participant confidentiality, the researcher will not present findings in more detail since it could serve to identify respondents.

Table 3

Bible college regional accreditation affiliation
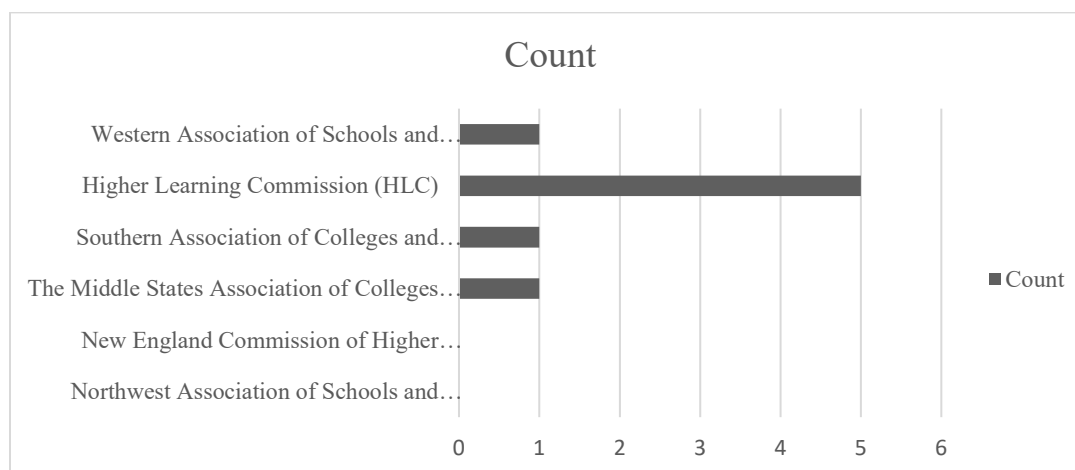
Mission statements as lens through which to view the interviews. The researcher

elected to analyze the mission statements of respondent schools, looking for similarities as well

as seeking to understand the underlying goal of the mission statements to better understand how

the mission statements serve as appropriate filters to allow for the interpretation of the interview

data. The researcher synthesized all mission statements into one lens through which to view all

interviews. That is, rather than use each school mission statement to view only that school's

interview, the researcher noted several similarities in mission statements and thus combined

them (see Appendices F & G). This was necessary to ensure confidentiality since each school's

mission statement is unique and could serve as a means through which to identify the participant

institution.

Of note, the researcher paid special attention to the *Christian* or spiritual terms in the

mission statements. Abelman & Dalessandro (2009) explain that school mission statements

"reflect the realities of their institutions' environments" (p. 85); that which is written in an institution's mission statement reflects the institutional priorities and aspirations. Further, when analyzed with an eye to their prior iterations, there is evidence that Christian higher education mission statements chronicle the slide toward secularization if and when it occurs—from strong, focused religious commitment to more generalized, to eventually not claiming any exclusive religious claims (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009; Holliker, 1992). Further, there is evidence that school mission and vision statements act as declarations which provide a framework for the aspirations and goals of the institution (Mizrahi-Shtelman & Drori, 2021).

In this study, key words in mission statements which portend religious connotations were: biblical, Christ, Christian, church, and God (see Appendix F). These 5 words strongly root the institutions not only in religious faith, but in Christianity in particular. These words serve to distinguish—to set them apart—from higher education in general. In the mission statements of participating schools, every single mission statement included more than one religious term.

Because the researcher used the mission statements as a means through which to view the interview data, it was important to note that the Bible colleges in this study, even though they have achieved secular accreditation, have managed to maintain their Christian distinctives in meaningful ways. Mizrahi-Shtelman & Drori (2021) go so far as to describe mission statements as "performative proclamations" (p.2). More specifically, it is appropriate to assess the statements of administrative leaders differently since their messaging shapes the ways other stakeholders on campus interpret experiences (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009). In that sense, then, when viewing the statements of Bible college leaders from the study interviews, it is appropriate to do so with the assumption that the schools have strong anchors in their religious faith.

Even with strong mooring, study results indicated the participating schools underwent change as a result of regional accreditation. As Lewin (1997) makes clear, when entities undergo change, there is opportunity built into the change process to pause and reflect on the changes before deciding how or if to move forward with future changes. In this study, participant voices pointed to financial factors and the pursuit of respectability as driving forces which opened the organization up to seek change, in this case, the change being pursuing regional accreditation (see Figure 6). Balancing the driving forces, the restraining forces which opposed the driving forces were the Bible colleges' sponsoring faith traditions as well as the colleges' historic missions and values. Of note, this study found that the constituent members of the faith tradition, including parents of potential students and students themselves, may be driving forces or restraining forces, depending on the context (see Figure 6).

As the remainder of this chapter and Chapter V will demonstrate, the results of this study pointed to the process of freezing in between seasons of change. Change allows Bible colleges to maintain their values and traditions, to reset their anchors and check their moorings, before deciding whether and how to progress. In these moments, leaders at participating Bible colleges reported relying on their spiritual values to frame the outcome of the change and to ensure followers are prepared for future change. Study results also indicated some Bible college leaders used the time of equilibrium to attempt to prepare for real or imagined potential concerns.

When considering the ways institutions change, Porter et. al (2019) assert that change is not always linear or straightforward, because change includes both driving forces as well as restraining forces (Lewin, 1997). This in conjunction with Lewin's (1997) assertion that there is a transition period between unfreezing and changing makes it difficult for the researcher to know for certain whether the school mission statements accurately represent the overall current

priorities of the school as a whole. That is, using the mission statements to interpret the interviews does allow for the researcher to assess whether or not the person being interviewed perceives the current mission statement as an accurate reflection of the school's priorities. However, it does not allow the researcher to determine if other administrators or constituent groups view it as such.

To further complicate the issue, leadership is linked in part to influencing a group of individuals to either accept or reject potential change (Tran & Gandolfi, 2020). When change is instigated from outside of organizations, it may be seen as a threat (La Manna, 2019; Martin, 2018). The ways regionally accredited Bible colleges experience change may be different from how other schools would because the spiritual leadership aspect complicates the ways in which constituent groups might be inclined to view changes—affecting whether deviations from historic identities are viewed as threats or opportunities (Phipps, 2011; Tran & Gandolfi, 2020).

While it was not in the scope of this study to analyze the specific changes to the schools' mission statements, the researcher did ask survey questions related to changes to the Bible colleges' mission statements, particularly as they pertain to regional accreditation. Of the eight Bible colleges, only three indicated they made any changes to their mission statements because of regional accreditation (See Appendices E & H and Table 4). Of those three, all of the participants very strongly noted that the changes were minor, not affecting the actual mission or identity of the school. Respondents #1, #4, and #7 all acknowledged changing their mission statements as a result of regional accreditation. Respondent #1 explained that the school's "mission" was a "set of values" before regional accreditation but is now worded as an actual mission statement rather than values statement. The revised mission statement of this Bible college has, the participant explained, the same charge and resulted in "no change to [the

school's] identity." Similarly, Respondent #4 indicated that the mission was changed to be more complete and did not result in changes to the actual values or identity of the school. The only other respondent to indicate a change to the mission statement because of regional accreditation was Respondent #7, who noted that the school did modify the mission statement, but it was a re-wording only and did not produce any change in the effect of the mission statement.

Table 4

Changes to mission statements as a result of regional accreditation
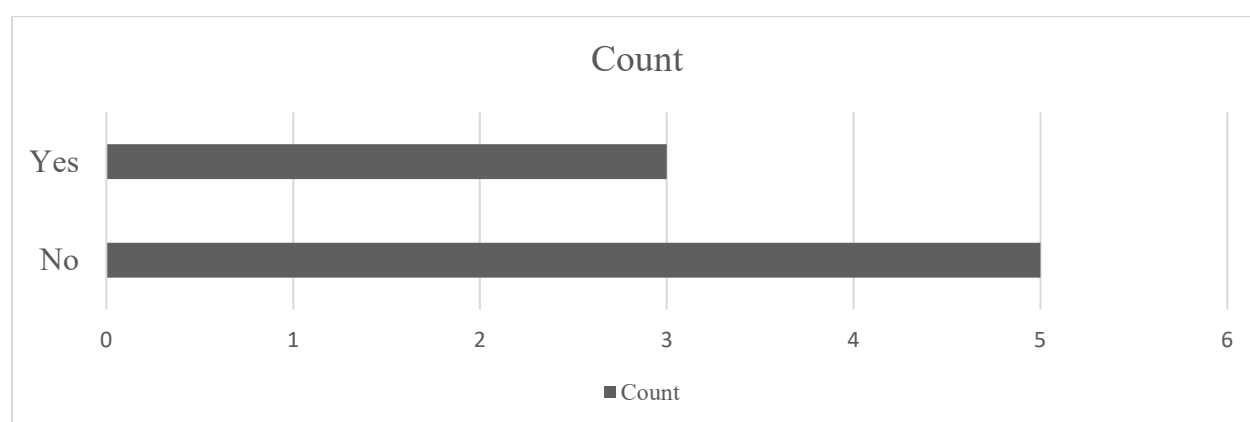
While there were changes to mission statements as a result of regional accreditation for these colleges, the remaining 5 colleges reported no changes at all. Significantly, it is essential to note that while there were nominal changes to the mission statements, there were no reported changes to the actual missions or identities of the Bible colleges. While words were honed, respondents consistently reported that the actual missions as lived-out by the schools were not changed in any of the participating schools.

Results

There were several concepts which reoccurred across the participants' interviews. While participants did not always use the same phrasing, they did reference the same concepts. For instance, while some participants indicated they held dual accreditation with the Association of

Biblical Higher Education, some gave only the abbreviation, ABHE. However, the intent was clearly the same. When situations with similar phrasing occurred, the researcher combined words and phrases in the data analysis software to assist in grouping like ideas. After two rounds of coding, the researcher carefully re-read each entry in each group, making notes (see Appendices F & G). This process allowed for overall concepts to be developed and summarized (see Table 5). The researcher did not approach the study with preselected keywords or themes. Rather, both emerged from the interviews (see Table 5).

Table 5

Emerging keyword count and instrument comparison

Keyword	Total number of participant references to the keyword	Study instrument asked about this topic?
Mission statement	21	yes
Quality assurance	16	no
Pursuit of respectability	18	no
Dual accreditation	12	no
Spiritual leadership	20	yes

As an example of the process the researcher followed in in coding, the keyword *dual accreditation* emerged during descriptive coding because there were 21 unique references to the concept. At first, all references to each keyword were counted. Upon further utilization of in vivo coding, it became clear that not all the unique references were discussing dual accreditation in the same way (see Table 6). Specifically, Respondent #1 only discussed dual accreditation to explain why his school did not hold accreditation with more than one accrediting body. When the

non-related occurrence was removed, the 20 remaining references, with at least one by each of the seven remaining participants, were further coded using pattern coding to identify themes.

Table 6

Example of coding process

Emerging Keyword: Dual Accreditation

	Type of Coding	Count
Unique references	Descriptive	12
Number of Participants who referenced concept	Descriptive	8
Occurrences not actually connected and therefore removed	In vivo	1

Emerging Theme: Dual accreditation as the anchor of mission and values		
Unique references	Pattern	11
Number of Participants who referenced concept	Pattern	7

Creswell (2015) explains that data tends to produce many codes which can be distilled down to "about 30 to 50 codes" and then via identifying redundancy or overlap can be "collapse[d] further into about five to seven themes that become major headings" (pp. 155-156). Following this process, six distinct sets of keywords emerged: mission statement, quality assurance, financial incentives, pursuit of respectability, dual accreditation, and spiritual leadership. The researcher then considered the research questions and noted connections between each of these keywords and the study research questions (see Table 7).

Table 7

Research questions and emerging themes

Research questions	Emerging themes
1.Why do Bible colleges seek regional accreditation as opposed to seeking accreditation through vocational or religious accrediting bodies?	Quality assurance Pursuit of respectability Spiritual leadership Financial incentives Dual accreditation
1. What are the effects of regional accreditation on these Bible colleges as it relates to their institutional identities?	Quality assurance Pursuit of respectability Mission statement

From these six keywords, the researcher further distilled the data. Using pattern coding, to draw out underlying connections between participant voices, the following themes developed:

- mission statement as the guard of institutional identity and purpose;

- regional accreditation as a tool to ensure quality of programs and processes;

- regional accreditation as a means to gain respect from secular and other religious institutions;

- dual accreditation as the anchor of mission and values;

- spiritual leadership as a filter for decision-making.

Of the 5 themes identified, subthemes emerged from two (see Table 8).

Table 8

Research keywords and themes

Keyword	Mission Statement	Quality Assurance	Pursuit of Respectability	Dual Accreditation	Spiritual Leadership
Theme	Mission statement as the guard of institutional identity and purpose	Regional accreditation as a tool to ensure quality of programs and processes	Regional accreditation as a means to gain respect from secular and other religious institutions	Dual accreditation as the anchor of mission and values	Spiritual leadership as a filter for decision-making
Subtheme			Regional accreditation as a means to access federal funds	Dual accreditation as a safety net in case regional accreditation becomes impossible	

The purpose of the study was to present data in such a way that it offers a full picture of the causes and effects of regional accreditation on Bible colleges. As such, the participants' own words best illustrated the themes of this study. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, the researcher will use direct quotations wherever possible to honor the participants' voices and accurately capture the essence of their words. Because the themes derived from the participants' responses to the interviews, their voices are integral in explaining the themes.

Study Themes

Theme 1. Mission statement as the anchor of institutional identity and purpose. All respondents indicated a specific role their mission statements played in helping them maintain their historical identity. After careful reading and multiple rounds of coding of the interviews, the theme related to mission statements emerged in such a way which revealed that at participating Bible colleges, the mission statement serves as an anchor for the institution as it relates to the

historical identity of the school. Recall that no respondents indicated they changed the essence of their mission statement because of regional accreditation. Rather, from the responses, it was clear that each school saw their mission statement as an authentic representation of their lived-out values. In fact, when asked in the interview about their school mission statements, three of the eight respondents quoted from memory their school mission statement verbatim, with enthusiasm.

Mission statements were mentioned by every single respondent, some multiple times. As a result, mission statements emerged as a keyword. From 8 interviews, there were over twenty unique references to the theme of mission statements as guard of institutional identity and purpose (see Table 9). For instance, Respondent #8 noted, "our mission really guards what we do." Further, Respondent #8 mentioned the role of living out their mission statement as a means of fulfilling "what God's calling us to do." The clear implication is that the mission of the school is God-given. The role of the mission statement as a guard of historic mission and identity is more than tangential. Respondent #5 stated, "the way that we fulfill our mission includes [a] strong proponent of biblical teaching." Based on the participant interviews, it appears this focus on biblical education is another way to guard historic missions and values.

Table 9

Occurrences in semi-structured interview of mission statement key words

Keyword	Number of unique occurrences using a key word	Number of unique occurrences of words or phrases with similar connotation to keyword
Mission statement	7 (mission) 14 (mission statement)	n/a

In the case of Bible colleges and regional accreditation, while their accreditation gives them a chance to "sit at the table" (Respondent #8) with well-respected schools, their mission

statements function, at least in some respect, as a check and balance against allowing the

constant cycle of improvement to cause them to lose their mooring (Collins & Clanton, 2018;

Denig, 2012; McCowan, 2017). This theme was mentioned by every respondent (see Table 10).

Table 10

Mission statement theme rate

Theme	Number of participants who referenced theme	Number of unique references
Mission statement as the guard of institutional identity and purpose	8	20

Lewin's (1997) change theory explains that one phase of change—freezing—is necessary

in order for the changes enacted to be complete. In the context of this particular study, the

freezing phase seems to also allow time for reflection and for the spiritual leaders on campus

(Phipps, 2011) to check the changes against the benchmark, which in some cases, was set nearly

a century ago. Respondent #1 noted, "the process [of regional accreditation] has to be genuine,

you have to wrestle, you have to debate, you have to tear things down, and you know like in

building, you have to tear it down to the studs and say, 'why do we do this,' and there's a lot of

self-examination, and that can be very uncomfortable, especially for a legacy school." By

situating his discussion in the context of tearing down and rebuilding, this respondent focused on

the need for authenticity, and this included being authentic to the historic identity of the school.

Respondent #1 continued,

> One of the greatest privileges of my life is that I am the President of a college that's been
>
> around for 80 years, and it's one of the hardest things in my life being the President
>
> college that's been around for 80 years, because the heritage is beautiful, but when you go
>
> to change and to examine 'why do we do this?' there is a lot of institutional lethargy, or

there's a lot of investment to not change. You know people, they don't want to leave how

we've always done it.

This respondent used the word lethargy to explain the times of pause between the tearing down

of old ways and the rebuilding of new ways. Lewin (1997) would call it a "refreezing." Both

refer to the same concept, but they use different terms.

Respondent #4 explained that his Bible college "is guided by [their] articles of faith and

[their] statements of belief." While this exchange was part of a larger discussion about the ways

the Bible college has interacted with the regional accrediting body, the respondent clearly

articulated the ways the school's faith tradition influences their ability to institute college-wide

change. In this case, the school is, in many ways, bound by the past as it moves forward.

Respondent #8 discussed similar means of utilizing the season of pause between changes by

invoking the school community's desire to "show honor to God through following what [their]

accreditors are asking [them] to do, and doing it in a wholehearted, you know, not begrudging

way." Based on the voices in this study, Bible colleges use the pause between phases in the

change process to allow their religious traditions and God to direct their next steps. Moving

forward, for Bible colleges, includes an element of looking backward and upward. Respondent

#1 similarly noted, "we'd rather be true to our identity" than compromise, and further explained

that regional accreditation allows them "to be true to [their] identity true to [their] mission" even

though it is "a much more difficult form of accreditation to achieve."

**Theme 2. Regional accreditation as a tool to ensure quality of programs and

processes.** Based on descriptive coding, words which alluded to quality assurance came up in

every interview, some multiple times. During descriptive and in vivo rounds of coding, phrases

which focused on the value of regional accreditation began to emerge. One such comment was,

"Basically, when it's all come down to the nuts and bolts, [regional accreditation] makes you a better institution" (Respondent #7). Note that neither the word *quality* nor the word *assurance* was present in this answer. However, the underlying focus of this response was such that revealed regional accreditation as a tool for ensuring quality at the Bible college. Respondent #1 explained it even more strongly: "The quality, it's, we're a better college today because we sought and achieved accreditation."

This sentiment is one that was shared by every respondent, and, thus, the theme emerged which points to regional accreditation as a quality assurance mechanism (see Table 11). Respondent #8 summed it up this way: "the [regional] accreditors help us overall, help us to be excellent in what we're doing." Again, even though "quality assurance" was not specifically mentioned, the response clearly conveys the sentiment. Seven times the word "quality" was used by a total of four of the eight respondents. Respondent #7 noted that there is a sense of worth that comes from being an institution that is "producing quality academic programs" which allows their "graduates to find meaningful employment and places of ministry." Notice that there was a focus on overall excellence from Respondent #8, but Respondent #7 focused on academic programs. Respondent #6 explained that there is much buy-in for regional accreditation on their campus because stakeholders "understand the need for quality." This respondent went on to note that the high level of quality that flows from having regional accreditation is such that makes the staff "proud" of their college, "knowing that our data is, is as good as anybody out there." In this case, the focus was on institutional processes and procedures and the product which they yielded.

Table 11

Occurrences in semi-structured interview of quality assurance key words

Keyword	Number of unique occurrences using a key word	Number of unique occurrences of words or phrases with similar connotation to keyword
Quality assurance	6 (quality) 1 (assurance)	4 (better institution) 1 (good college) 4 (excellence)

Based on the participants' responses, regional accreditation helps Bible colleges improve in meaningful ways and serves as a conduit for improvement (see Table 12). Because of the intervals between regional accrediting body site visits and recommendations, there is time for Bible colleges to adjust to recent changes and to reflect on ways to move forward in cases where the changes they have made are not working. This process of changing, including the phases of unfreezing, freezing, and re-freezing (Lewin, 1997) serves to ensure Bible colleges are able to utilize the regional accreditation processes in ways that yield meaningful results for them.

Table 12

Quality assurance theme rate

Theme	Number of participants who referenced theme	Number of unique references
Regional accreditation as a tool to ensure quality of programs and processes	8	14

Theme 3. Regional accreditation as a means to gain respect from secular and other religious institutions. None of the questions asked in any of the instruments included questions about respectability, yet each respondent alluded to it (see Table 13). For instance, Respondent #3 indicated regional accreditation has served to help their school "build marketplace credibility." While this respondent did not use the word *respectability*, the sentiment was

conveyed. In a similar statement, Respondent #4 stated that regional accreditation "improved our academic currency." In both cases, the researcher noted the presence of a desire to be validated by peer institutions as well as potential student bases and perhaps even the larger faith community they serve. To further exemplify this, Respondent #5's point is particularly poignant: "for incoming high school seniors who are considering their options, a regionally accredited college has greater legitimacy in the mind of many people." Note the nuances in this response. The respondent was interested in the ways prospective students see the school. However, the answer then extended to "many" people. Based on the responses, Bible colleges do not view respectability as a primary goal of achieving regional accreditation. Rather, it is a marginal goal as well as a welcome byproduct.

Table 13

Occurrences in semi-structured interview of pursuit of respectability key words

Keyword	Number of unique occurrences using a key word	Number of unique occurrences of words or phrases with similar connotation to keyword
Pursuit of respectability	n/a	2 (credibility) 2 (legitimacy) 1 (credence) 3 (academic currency) 4 (pursue) 6 (seeking)

Though schools indicated the pursuit of respectability is not a primary reason for pursuing regional accreditation, it must be noted that the schools' focus on improving "academic currency" (Respondent #4) is one that was alluded to by each of the respondents (see Table 14). Respondent #7 stated, "in the world of academia it's changed where, you know, the first question people ask you [is] 'Are you accredited?'" While the respondent was not specific about which "people" are asking this question, given that there are only two main groups outside of the campus community who would be interested in the answer to this question—prospective students

and their families and other institutions—the underlying point this question hearkens to is that being accredited provides a level of respectability which other means cannot provide. In a lengthier exchange, Respondent #7 provided deeper explanation:

> my own personal opinion is regional accreditation is essential for survival in the marketplace, especially as you try to compete with other institutions. As you try to position yourself with business employers and parents and donors, it would likely be harder in each of those categories to do well if you didn't have the regional accreditation as the stamp of approval.

This "stamp" indicates "you are worthy as an institution" and are "producing quality academic programs which then allow your graduates to find meaningful employment and places of ministry (Respondent #7)." The use of terms such as "compete" and "position" indicate the cognition that the institution is in a marketplace in which the respectability which comes from regional accreditation adds value to the *product* which the Bible college offers. Further, the respondent acknowledges a sense of "worth" which comes from regional accreditation. This sense of worth is similar to the pride in their institution which Respondent #6 expressed above.

utilize the regional accreditation processes in ways that yield meaningful results for them.

Table 14

Pursuit of respectability theme rate

Theme	Number of participants who referenced theme	Number of unique references
Regional accreditation as a means to gain respect from secular and other religious institutions	8	9

Respondent #5's point above regarding the "greater legitimacy" which regional accreditation provides serves as a reminder of the sometimes-competing populations Bible colleges must seek to honor (Phipps, 2011). In many ways, just as institutional mission statements serve as anchors for Bible colleges, so too do the competing constituent groups (Phipps, 2011 Tran & Gandolfi, 2020). That is, while the Bible college may have a "seat at the table" with Ivy League schools, the schools' sponsoring faith tradition may care more about the Christian values the school upholds. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Subtheme: Regional accreditation as a means to access federal funds. Regional accreditation as a means to access federal funds was not mentioned enough times or by enough respondents to be a standalone theme. However, given that there were no questions anywhere in any of the research instruments that addressed finances, the fact that it was mentioned by half of the respondents is significant. In context, each of the references to funding were not simply about sustainability for their respective schools. That is, the respondents did not directly mention funding as a means to keep their doors open; rather, the mention of funds was part of a larger desire on the part of the Bible schools to attract students. Based on the interviews, schools believe students are more likely to attend their Bible college if there is a possibility of accessing federal financial aid during their course of study.

Whether or not regional accreditation is an actual requirement of having access to Title IV funds, Bible college administrations think it is. Respondent #4 articulated the belief that regional accreditation "made funds available" to the Bible college. Similarly, Respondent #5 spoke of regional accreditation as a means "to be entitled for money." Respondent #5 further explained that although federal financial aid is "accessible through our accreditation as ABHE, not all state aid, and not all funding and scholarships, automatically come under, under that."

Both of these participants expressed the belief that regional accreditation was a vehicle for their Bible college to be able to secure full federal financial aid for their students. Respondent #2 articulated the same belief, but in more general terms. According to this participant, "some Bible colleges" pursued regional accreditation "because of the feds." Further, Respondent #2 clarified the belief that the federal government wants "to see that you're appropriate, you know, to be entitled for money and all that sort of stuff."

In an educational landscape in which many schools are struggling to survive, federal monies are invaluable. However, not all of the participating Bible colleges have chosen to accept federal financial aid. Out of the participating Bible colleges, only Respondent #1's school has not accepted federal money. While the reasons for this are outside of the scope of this study, Respondent #1 explained that regional accreditation has brought high demand to the Bible college so much so that they have experienced "20% growth over the last two years" since achieving regional accreditation, even though no federal monies are available to students at this Bible college.

Overall, this theme revealed that respondents viewed regional accreditation as a means to gain respectability in the higher education marketplace as well as a means to secure funding. As evidenced by the respondents' voices in the above discussion, it becomes clear that the validation which comes from the "stamp of approval" from a secular accrediting body is perceived as valuable by the respondents, both with regards to respectability and monetarily.

Theme 4. Dual accreditation as the anchor of mission and values. It is common for colleges to hold multiple professional accreditations (Holliker, 1992). However, in the case of Bible colleges, Christian accreditation has historically been the professional benchmark (Holliker, 1992). In this study, there was one question on the survey which asked respondents

whether their school had ever been accredited with another agency. It did not ask if the school currently held accreditation with more than one body since the researcher did not anticipate dual accreditation becoming a category. Specifically, the interview asked respondents: "Can you tell me some of the reasons/motivations for pursuing regional instead of other types of accreditation?" (See Appendix E). Note that the researcher did not anticipate respondents to speak to the perceived value of dual accreditation in response to this question. Instead, the researcher asked about accreditations with other agencies as a demographic question as well as to understand the path each respective school took on their journey toward regional accreditation. None of the questions was phrased in a way that framed or was intended to prompt responses about the perceived value of dual accreditation. That seven of the eight respondents mentioned dual accreditation, with 12 unique references, then, speaks to the importance of dual accreditation for Bible colleges (see Table 15).

Table 15

Occurrences in semi-structured interview of dual accreditation key words

Keyword	Number of unique occurrences using a key word	Number of unique occurrences of words or phrases with similar connotation to keyword
Dual accreditation	1 (dual accreditation) 1 (dually accredited)	9 (ABHE)

Bible colleges do not typically draw from students outside of their faith traditions. As such, the desire for a stamp of approval from secular bodies appears to be unnecessary. However, all except one of the schools participating in this study have dual accreditation (see Table 4). Given that these dually accredited schools do not need regional accreditation to be able to operate as legitimate higher education institutions, on the surface, the desire for regional accreditation does not make sense.

Of the eight respondents, seven respondents maintained at least one dual accreditation (see Table 4). Of note, the only school which did not maintain dual accreditation is the school which has been regionally accredited the shortest amount of time (see Table 2). While this school is not dually accredited with the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE), the respondent indicated that the school did consider it but chose not to pursue ABHE accreditation because of an issue relating to "doctrinal compliance." Further, while two schools also maintained discipline specific niche accreditations, all 7 dually accredited schools maintained accreditation with ABHE.

As noted above, while neither the survey or interview questions sought to determine the perceived value of dual accreditation, the eleven unique references (see Table 13) to it can be summed up by Respondent #7's point: "We like the ABHE accreditation, because it keeps us tied to our Bible College heritage." Two of the respondents pointed out that part of the way ABHE keeps them rooted in their historic identities—their Bible college roots—is by requiring member institutions to require students to complete a minimum of thirty units of Bible and/or Theology coursework.

Every respondent mentioned dual accreditation in the interview, but because there was an interview question directly related to this topic (see Appendix E), that was not surprising. One respondent only did so to clarify his school did not hold any dual accreditations. Thus, seven of the eight respondents mentioned dual accreditation in a way that described dual accreditation as a means of ensuring they remained connected to their historic identities (see Table 16).

Table 16

Dual accreditation theme rate

Theme	Number of participants who referenced theme	Number of unique references
Dual accreditation as the anchor of mission and values	7	12

The changes that regional accreditation compels Bible colleges to make are ones that require schools to maintain rigor and integrity (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The requirements of ABHE accreditation also ask schools to do so. So why maintain both?

In spiritual leadership, the concept of submission to authority is central (Phipps, 2011). In the case of Bible colleges, it seems that regional accreditation requires submission to secular authority whereas ABHE accreditation serves as a quasi-spiritual leader to which the schools voluntarily submit themselves. Four of the seven participants from dually accredited schools pointed out that maintaining both ABHE and regional accreditation costs significant amounts of money and requires significant resources. Respondent #5 asked the question several other respondents alluded to: "should we drop our ABHE accreditation and just keep the regional? What's the point of having both?"

For dually accredited Bible colleges, there is much redundancy. Regional accreditation and ABHE both require self-studies and site visits, for instance. Respondent #7 noted that it is "a full-time job keeping both" accreditations. So why do so many regionally accredited Bible colleges submit to both? The religious accreditation functions at least on some level as a spiritual authority to which Bible colleges make themselves accountable. Phipps' spiritual leadership framework is intended to focus on the ways in which individual leaders use spirituality to influence individual decision-making, however, he noted that leaders do not always have "the

authority, accountability, and resources to make" decisions, and that there are "many corporate contexts in which the CEO would not be able to make" decisions "due to constraints on the organization, despite feeling compelled by their spiritual beliefs" (Phipps, 1997, p. 184). Such is the case with regional accreditation. This is why so many Bible colleges maintain dual accreditation. Seven of the eight Bible colleges in this study maintained at least one dual accreditation (see Table 17).

Table 17

Dual accreditation

Respondent Pseudonym	School is Dually Accredited?	Accrediting Bodies
Respondent #1	No	N/A
Respondent #2	Yes	ABHE
Respondent #3	Yes	ABHE; Social Work Accreditation
Respondent #4	Yes	ABHE
Respondent #5	Yes	ABHE; Teacher Education
Respondent #6	Yes	ABHE
Respondent #7	Yes	ABHE
Respondent #8	Yes	ABHE

Note. Names of accrediting body except ABHE has been redacted to ensure confidentiality.

Respondent #2 indicated regional accreditation helps with "professionalizing the infrastructure" of the school. However, 3 respondents indicated ABHE accreditation did the same thing and that regional accreditation was redundant in many ways. For instance,

Respondent #5 explained, "regional accreditation has been a bit of a hassle. And sometimes we do wonder like why do we need both [regional and Christian accreditation]."

The point of regional accreditation for schools which are dually accredited does not seem to be simply to ensure quality programs, though that is what most respondents indicated. Rather, schools which are dually accredited indicate their Christian education accreditations are rigorous and thorough. As noted above, Respondent #3 described regional accreditation as "essential for survival in the marketplace, especially as you try to compete with other institutions" and "as you try to position yourself with business employers and parents and donors.

Subtheme: Dual accreditation as a safety net in case regional accreditation becomes impossible. Dual accreditation serves as both an anchor for preserving the historical identities of Bible colleges with regional accreditation as well as a mechanism to ensure the sponsoring faith-community is secure in knowing the school maintains fidelity. In addition to ensuring biblical teaching remains a priority, dual accreditation serves another purpose for institutions which maintain both. The underlying issue is two-sided. On one hand, Bible colleges are hesitant to drop Christian accreditation in case biblical fidelity, or faithfulness to Scripture as one sees it, doesn't allow regional accreditation to remain viable in the near future. On the other hand, Bible colleges are concerned biblical accreditation itself may be disallowed by the federal government because of issues related to biblical interpretation. Respondent #4 articulated this concern "I do think that it raises the question about whether or not ABHE, as a national accreditor can still maintain its accreditation if the Department of Ed asks ABHE to do something that it can't live with."

3 respondents indicated an apprehension about their futures with the regional accrediting body. Respondent #6 noted that there was "handwriting on the wall" regarding potential

compliance "in regards to some of the moral issues" which distinguish Christianity from secularism. Respondent #4 specified that there have been "some warning flags for Bible College institutions" from the federal government primarily regarding "matters of human sexuality." The respondent was not specific regarding what those "warning flags" are but was clear about the subject matter they related to. Respondent #5 explained that there is an expectation on campus that the regional accrediting body will be "tolerant up to a limit, until the federal government starts, requiring things that we, you know would not tolerate."

On one hand, Respondent #5 expressed "fear that the federal standing of the Association for Biblical Higher Ed, might not be doable." On the other hand, Respondent #6 advocated for maintaining dual accreditation as a means to keep his Bible college "in a position where we walk away, than for them kicking us out." In either case, dual accreditation seems to serve as a safety net for Bible colleges who maintain accreditation with more than one entity. It is also true that dual accreditation reflects a means of pursuing respectability with multiple "worlds" in the sense that religious accreditation ensures constituents the school is fixed in its biblical fidelity whereas the "stamp of approval" from regional accreditation ensures that the school is a valuable investment (Respondent #3). This concept is discussed more fully in the research question #1 results below.

Theme 5. Spiritual leadership as a filter for decision-making. The fifth theme focuses on the ways in which Bible colleges perceive God and, by extension, godly leaders as integral to their decision-making processes. One interview question specifically asked whether the respondent perceived their school was directed by God to pursue regional accreditation (See Appendix E). While there were a variety of responses to the question regarding where the campus communities generally sought direction from God, every respondent affirmed that the

culture of their school was such that there was either one person or a group of people who were

considered spiritual leaders on their respective campuses (see Table 18).

Table 18

Occurrences in semi-structured interview of spiritual leadership key words

Keyword	Number of unique occurrences using a key word	Number of unique occurrences of words or phrases with similar connotation to keyword
Spiritual leadership	5 (leadership)	14 (pastor) 1 (seeking)

When asked if it was fair to say that God directed their school to pursue regional

accreditation, Respondents #4, 6, and 8 answered affirmatively, but with nuanced answers. For

instance, Respondent #4 indicated that while there was not a clear focus on God's divine leading

toward regional accreditation, the president at the time the school sought regional accreditation

"would certainly be in agreement with that from the perspective that it improved it improved our

students' learning, and it improved our students' academic currency, and so God would have

been honored by the steps to improve our efforts." Notice that the respondent associated the

outcome as one that was positive and would therefore bless others, which would bring honor to

God. Respondent #6 was also not present at the time the school sought regional accreditation,

and this respondent was a little more pointed than other respondents in saying "I can't say that

every decision was God directed. But, you know, I believe they felt like it was." Respondent #8

simply wasn't present at the time so couldn't offer any information.

It is worth noting that each of the three respondents who did not answer in the strong

affirmative to this question were ones who were not present at the time of initial bid for regional

accreditation. Each respondent who was present for the accreditation bid was quick to point to

the role of God's leading in their pursuit of regional accreditation (see Table 19).

Table 19

Spiritual leadership theme rate

Theme	Number of participants who referenced theme	Number of unique references
Spiritual leadership as a filter for decision-making	8	20

The remaining 5 participants affirmed that it was their belief that God was directly involved in the school's decision to pursue regional accreditation. Respondent #1 used the word "amazing" to explain how God was moving on one end of the decision to nudge the campus pastor to request the college try for regional accreditation. This respondent said that the college pastor "was in prayer one day and said he felt from the Lord it was time to seek regional accreditation." While this might seem like an incredible statement, it was not out of character for the Bible colleges which participated in this study.

Respondent #2 was not present at the time of initial accreditation, but affirmed he believed the prior administration was "very prayerful" and "didn't decide and say 'let's do this'" but rather "were prayerful about it because it was such a significant change." Similarly, Respondent #3 was not present on the campus at the time of the initial regional accreditation bid, but the respondent explained that the school has a strong belief in "God's sovereignty" and was certain "there were times of prayer, times of discernment." This respondent was quick to point out that he was "assuming a few things" but was confident "there would have been a sense of direction from God." The parallels in both instances are that neither respondent was present, but both, based on their knowledge of the school and faith tradition, were confident that the change initiators believed God was directing them to seek regional accreditation. Further, each was equally confident those change initiators really did hear from God regarding this decision.

Respondent #7 also was not present at the time of the initial accreditation, but this respondent knew the previous administration and had confidence that the bid for accreditation "was a decision that was prayed about." This respondent then stated: "I know beyond a shadow of a doubt it was committed to prayer. So yes. Yes, I would say definitely" it is fair to say God directed the school to seek regional accreditation.

This theme related to spiritual leadership yielded particularly valuable information because it is not possible to simply look at the motivations of Bible colleges through secular lenses. Rather, it is necessary to understand that Bible colleges operate under a spiritual leadership dynamic which serves to interpret the ways they interact with both their secular regional accrediting body. In the cases of the participants in this study, overwhelmingly, the participants placed God at the center of the decision to seek regional accreditation and saw the people in positions of leadership on the campus as the enactors of God's will for the college.

Research Question 1 Results

The first research question, "Why do Bible colleges seek regional accreditation as opposed to seeking accreditation through vocational or religious accrediting bodies?" was richly explored by this study. Based on respondents' voices, Bible colleges do not seek regional accreditation as opposed to vocational or religious accreditation. Rather, Bible colleges typically appear to seek regional accreditation as a complement to, or enhancement of, vocational and religious accreditations. Based on the participant responses, Bible colleges pursue and maintain regional accreditation for two reasons: the pursuit of respectability, which includes financial standing, and quality assurance.

To address the portion of the question that attempts to discover the motives, the researcher noted that the theme which addresses the pursuit of respectability clearly provides one

answer to this question. As Respondent #7 pointed out, "in the world of academia, it's changed where, you know, the first question people ask you [is] 'are you accredited?'" While this respondent didn't identify the question of accreditation as an external pressure, the acknowledgement that the question of accreditation is at the forefront of potential students' as well as other institutions' minds is relevant as this study sought to understand the motivations for seeking regional accreditation. Respondent #3 explained that part of the reason "people" ask about accreditation is because regional accreditation serves as a de-facto "stamp of approval" that a school is "worthy as an institution."

While the pursuit of respectability provides a partial motivation for the reasons Bible colleges pursue regional accreditation, it does not provide a full picture. The participants in this study offered multiple underlying motivations for reasons Bible colleges seek regional accreditation—even when they already have other accreditation. Respondent #8 described regional accreditation serves as a means to "make sure we're fulfilling our mission." Respondent #6 indicated that regional accreditation "helped us to understand how to operate like a good college."

Research Question 2 Results

The second question which guided this research was: What are the effects of regional accreditation on these Bible colleges as it relates to their institutional identities? The instruments which the researcher used in this study yielded significant data to ensure this question was answered in a meaningful way. In fact, of the 5 themes which emerged in this study, three of them clearly spoke to this question.

The theme related to mission statement as anchor of institutional identity and purpose strongly demonstrated that the effects of regional accreditation on Bible college identities is such

that regional accreditation, rather than being a threat to historic mission and values, appears to strengthen the institutions' commitments to their core values. Interestingly, the regional accrediting bodies did not require changes to Bible colleges' mission statements. Rather, a byproduct of authentically engaging the cycles of institutional assessment appears to be a strengthened commitment to historic values.

In answer to the RQ #2, it is clear that study participants view regional accreditation as a helpful tool to ensure the college is actually acting out their mission. Respondent #6 explained: "What it's [regional accreditation] done to us, it really has helped us to understand how to operate like a good college." This respondent went on to point out that this particular Bible college now has "set up assessment" and "data collection constantly over everything." Then the participant explained why this is so monumental; it is because this type of data collection—the data-driven decision-making "was never done before."

Respondent #8 made a similar point—that the requirements of regional accreditation serve to help their Bible college operate at a higher level of accountability as well as a higher level of functionality. This is because at this particular school, "our administration, our president, see it as a way to actually fulfill our mission" and "to do it in a way that's excellent, and the accreditors help us overall, help us to be excellent in what we're doing" (Respondent #8).

This study demonstrated that regionally accredited Bible colleges do not simply pay the fees and go through the motions of meeting the demands of regional accrediting bodies. Rather, they see the authentic interaction with the regional accreditation process as a means to strengthen their schools and to simultaneously honor God. Respondent #8 put it this way: "[our] president wants to show honor to God through following what our accreditors are asking us to do, and doing it in a wholehearted, you know, not begrudging way, but in a way that honors what the

accreditors are asking us to do, and therefore honors God." Further this participant noted, "whereas sometimes accreditation and compliance can sort of feel like this, like we have to do it. From my seat, I would say that our administration, our president, see it as a way to actually fulfill our mission and what God's calling us to do, and to do it in a way that's excellent, and the accreditors help us overall" (Respondent #8). The work of regional accreditation, then, if approached with honest intentions, is valuable for Bible colleges.

It is this willingness to honestly engage the process which helps Bible colleges perceive regional accreditation as a valuable tool. From the participants' perspective, the effect of regional accreditation on Bible colleges is that of improving institutional quality. On the surface, it serves as such. While all participants expressed the sentiment, 4 participants also references some level of apprehension on their campuses that the process of regional accreditation might take them from their Bible college roots. Respondent #6 explained that prior college leadership "made changes to move [them] away from the heart of [their] mission" at the beginning of their bid for accreditation several years before, which caused some tension on campus. As a result, this school is in the process of "going back to" the mission "that's been a part of [them] for a long time." While Respondent #6 pointed to some concern from the past, Respondent #5 noted some concern moving forward. In speaking of the identity of the college moving forward and as it relates to regional accreditation, Respondent #5 explained there has been some tension between the historic identity of the college but that "the tension has not been has not been high on the list" of concerns as related to "religious issues."

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that respondents perceive regional accreditation as a valuable conduit for change. However, the results of the study also indicate that in stakeholders' views,

religious accreditation in conjunction with regional accreditation serves as a check-and-balance to ensure schools do nott leave behind their religious roots.

Regardless of whether the Bible colleges still maintain the Bible college distinctives, all of the respondents made it clear that regional accreditation is a hassle, but one they perceive as worth the effort. Respondent #1 stated it strongly: "if you don't need [regional accreditation], don't get it, because it is hard work." This respondent continued, by asserting that even though regional accreditation is difficult, "It's absolutely worth the endeavor, but it does absolutely come at a cost." Regional accreditation appears to be a beneficial tool for Bible colleges to use to ensure quality and maintain respectability.

In a review of the materials, several themes emerged which are relevant to understanding the relationship between the Bible colleges and regional accreditation. Initially the researcher did not expect to connect the responses to this question to dual accreditation. It became clear, though, that part of the reason many of the participating Bible colleges sought regional accreditation was because they believed God asked them to do so. Respondent #1 further explained that because the school's pastor and leadership believed the bid for regional accreditation was something God wanted, the Bible college president needed to "become the salesman on why change is necessary" by selling it "upwards to the board of directors" who were not "always in agreement" as well as to the "faculty sell to the staff—sell it to people that are overworked and underpaid" and to "students, when their programs changed while they're in the middle of the program because now we've got new guidelines" (Respondent #1). The role of top-level leaders in instigating and maintaining momentum for change cannot be overstated in Bible colleges which value spiritual leadership (Phipps, 2011). As this respondent noted, the job of a top-level leader is that of a salesman. The goal is to sell required changes to stakeholders in such

a way that they can see the requirements of the accrediting body as ones with which God would be pleased.

Chapter IV provided a glimpse into the ways participating Bible college administrators viewed regional accreditation as it relates to the processes at their colleges. In addition, this chapter utilized a qualitative research design to demonstrate the perceptions of Bible college top-level leaders regarding the changes to their institutions brought about by regional accreditation. Using open-ended surveys and mission statements as a lens through which to view the semi-structured interviews served as a productive method to allow participant voices to guide the themes and the answers to the research questions. Using this methodology, the researcher was able to glean relevant information to shed light on the reasons Bible colleges seek regional accreditation as well as the changes brought about by this accreditation.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

Regional accreditation has gradually become the standard in Christian higher education (Donahoo & Lee, 2008). As a result, there is increasing pressure on religious educational institutions to seek regional accreditation or risk losing students (Guenther, 2019; Henck, 2011). Bible colleges' pursuit of regional accreditation highlights the potential disparities between the urge to move forward while at the same time preserve their historic missions and values—their identities (Guenther, 2019). The nature of regional accreditation is such that it deeply affects member schools' processes and procedures (Baker & Sax, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2018) through ongoing change (La Manna, 2019; Simmons, 2018). This study attempted to discern whether Bible colleges have been able to maintain their Bible college distinctives while pursuing secular accreditation.

The research questions which guided this exploration are:

RQ1. Why do Bible colleges seek regional accreditation as opposed to seeking accreditation through vocational or religious accrediting bodies?

RQ2. What are the effects of regional accreditation on these Bible colleges as it relates to their institutional identities?

Chapter V will offer interpretation of the study's results, including connections to literature as well as the theoretical framework. Additionally, this chapter addresses recommendations for further research as well as the implications of the study on professional practice.

Summary of the Results

Participants in this qualitative study overwhelmingly viewed regional accreditation as a valuable means of demonstrable, meaningful institutional improvement. Consistently, all study participants felt their historic missions and identities were valued by regional accrediting bodies, and only one reported discomfort during a site visit. Not one participant reported being asked to change the school's mission statement in a way that amounted to a change in school identity or focus. While some participants expressed frustration with the time and resources which must be directed to maintaining regional accreditation, the participants, without exception, felt that the costs were worth it (see Table 20).

Table 20

Overall keyword occurrences in context of presence or absence of leading question

Keyword	Total number of participant references to the keyword	Study instrument asked about this topic?
Mission statement	21	yes
Quality assurance	16	no
Pursuit of respectability	18	no
Dual accreditation	11	no
Spiritual leadership	20	yes

This study collected publicly available mission statements from the participating regionally accredited Bible colleges and then conducted open-ended surveys and semi-structured interviews with top-level leaders at these schools. In order to gauge the participants' perceptions as related to whether and in what ways regional accreditation has affected the identity of each

respective Bible college, the researcher sought information from each respondent on a variety of topics including:

- whether the school's mission statement had changed because of regional accreditation

- whether or not there has been tension between the school's articulated mission and the regional accrediting body

- participant perceptions of any negative changes to the Bible college as a result of regional accreditation

- whether or not the participant believed colleagues shared their views on the results of regional accreditation

- whether or not there has been large scale buy-in for the changes brought about by regional accreditation

Additionally, in an attempt to measure the participants' perceptions as related to the role of spiritual leadership dynamics on each college, the researcher sought information from each respondent on a variety of topics including:

- Whether or not the respondent perceived God directed the school to pursue regional accreditation

- Whether there was a person/group of people on campus who the campus community looked to in order to find spiritual direction

- If so, who or what group

The mission statements and surveys were combined to serve as a lens through which to view the interviews. The qualitative nature of this study yielded sufficient data to allow a worthwhile investigation of the study's research questions. The use of several data sets ensured

triangulation of data to support the validity of findings. Finally, the study relied upon Lewin's (1997) change theory as well as Phipps' (2011) spiritual leadership framework to shape the interpretation of the study results.

Analysis and coding of data yielded 5 themes of the study:

- mission statement as the guard of institutional identity and purpose;

- regional accreditation as a tool to ensure quality of programs and processes;

- regional accreditation as a means to gain respect from secular and other religious institutions;

- dual accreditation as the anchor of mission and values;

- spiritual leadership as a filter for decision-making.

Research Question #1: Summary of Results and Discussion

The first research question which guided this study was: why do Bible colleges seek regional accreditation as opposed to seeking accreditation through vocational or religious accrediting bodies? While the answers to this question were nuanced, data gathered during this study suggested that Bible colleges view regional accreditation as a means to gain access to federal funds as well as a means to gain respectability amongst their peer institutions as well as their stakeholders. The distinction is necessary since all except one Bible college in this study maintained at least one dual accreditation, while many of the Bible colleges mentioned the role of regional accreditation in assisting them in strengthening their internal processes and procedures, many of those same schools also indicated that their other accrediting body, in most cases ABHE, also provided the same impetus.

When schools pursue accreditation, there are several intended consequences, including the strengthening of the institution as it pertains to their day-to-day operations (Adams, 1997;

Barret, Fernandez, & Gonzalez, 2019) as well as providing a mechanism to ensure accountability

amongst member institutions (Adams, 1997; Brittingham, 2009; Karakhanyan & Stensaker,

2020; Sizikova et al. 2020; WASC, 2020). In addition, the systematic, data-informed decision-

making and evaluation which regional accreditation demands help member institutions

strengthen and garner respect (Barret et al., 2019; McGuire, 2009; Pennington, 2020). However,

there are also unintended consequences (Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Edlin, 2009; Henck, 2011;

Holliker,1992) such as significant changes to their cultures as it related to decision-making and

workload. (Adams, 1997; Baker & Sax,2012). Such changes are not unique to religious higher

education institutions; nevertheless, the ways Christian higher education institutions experience

these changes is unique as they seek to meet the demands of regional accreditation while

ensuring they honor their religious traditions' values (Bardo, 2009; Donahoo & Lee, 2008;

Henck, 2011; Holliker, 1992; Lawrence, 2007; Pennington, 2020; Roels, 2017). The participants

in this study did not note changes to their overall cultures or identities outside of the shift to

reliance on data-driven decision-making.

On one hand, the results of this study demonstrated that top-level leaders at regionally

accredited Bible colleges perceive accreditation as a valuable conduit for positive change,

offering them the tools and impetus to strengthen their internal processes and procedures.

However, on the other hand, the results of this study revealed some degree of apprehension

regarding the future of regional accreditation as it relates to Bible colleges. From the point of

view of three of the participants, regional accreditation may not be a viable option long-term

because of changes in the societal landscape.

Respondent #5 noticed a "huge liberal trend" in regional accreditation and explained that

regional accreditors "have to be tolerant and up to a limit," but expressed fear of a future day

when "the federal government starts, requiring things that we, you know would not tolerate." Respondent #8 expressed current satisfaction with regional accreditation but also noted some level of apprehension. This respondent expressed the following sentiments regarding regional accreditation: "I think when it goes into that other direction, then we'll have different conversations. But, yeah, so we'll see, we'll see what the future holds on that." While Respondent #6 did not use the exact same words, he did express the same sentiments. Specifically, Respondent #6 said "In the future, I do have concerns about, about what they may expect out of us, in regards to some of the moral issues."

Respondent #4 also mentioned issues which might foreshadow changes to the ways Bible colleges experience regional accreditation. This respondent, however, did not express belief that regional accrediting bodies were behind any changes which might be on the horizon. Rather, this respondent's perception was that any changes that might come would be directed by the federal government. As noted in Chapter IV, he expressed that if the "Department of Education" made a decision "that requires an institution to run contrary to who it is, then I think the accreditors wind up being obligated to enforce that on behalf of the Department of Ed, (Respondent #4)." This respondent expressed concern that there were already "warning flags for Bible college institutions" which could possibly portent changes related to moral issues, specifically with "matters of human sexuality."

Given the concerns voiced by half of the respondents, one might expect there to be hesitance on the part of Bible colleges to wholeheartedly engage the process of reflection and change which regional accreditation demands. However, half of the respondents spoke about the authenticity of the process at their particular Bible college. Literature indicates there are times when changes which occur during the process of regional accreditation may be inauthentic in the

sense that they are compliance-driven and only done under pressure to maintain such accreditation (Baker & Sax, 2012; Bardo, 2009; Brittingham, 2009; Pennington, 2020). Based on the participants' responses in this study, that does not appear to be the case for regionally accredited Bible colleges. Five comments from four participants spoke directly to the nature of the genuineness of the changes which have taken place at their schools during the regional accreditation process which confirmed the authenticity of the process. Phrases which demonstrate a true commitment to engaging the process include: "the process has to be genuine" (Respondent #1) and assertions such as we "show honor to God through following what our accreditors are asking us to do, and doing it in a wholehearted" way, one that is not "begrudging" but "honors what the accreditors are asking us to do, and therefore honors God" (Respondent #8). Participants #7 summed it up by explaining that at his campus, "there is full-scale buy-in" for regional accreditation.

Lewin's (1997) change theory explains that organizations must unfreeze before undergoing change. When an accrediting body asks changes of institutions, the school must become open to change. In the case of the Bible colleges in this study, the changes were primarily related to moving from anecdotal decision-making to data-driven decision-making. Based on participant responses, at Bible colleges, this work is engaged in a true spirit of inquiry and engagement. One of the reasons Bible colleges engage the process of regional accreditation with eagerness is because they believe that in doing so, they are honoring God. In a situation where spiritual leadership is part of the culture, such as it is at Bible colleges, the top-level leaders, focus on the leading of God (Phipps, 2011) and so seem able to engage in the process of change Lewin (1997) lays-out in such a way that maintains their core identities.

Research Question #2: Summary of Results and Discussion

The second research question which guided this study was: What are the effects of regional accreditation on these Bible colleges as it relates to their institutional identities? Data gathered during this study revealed that regional accreditation strengthens Bible colleges overall, and that respondents believe it has a negligible impact on their historic mission and values. Respondent #1's comment "we're a better college today because we sought and achieved accreditation" succinctly captures the points of view of study participants. Every participant, in their comments, spoke directly to the belief that their schools' identities were not affected by regional accreditation.

Respondent #4 was unequivocal in his proclamation: "We haven't had to change anything as far as the essential of who we are." This participant's point was similarly state by Respondent #8 who explained, "Accreditation is just to make sure we're fulfilling our mission, as opposed to accreditation telling us [what] to do." Respondent #7 also explained that the regional accrediting body does not prescribe identities for member institutions. Rather, "All regional accreditation does is makes you be accountable for who you say you are" (Respondent #7). While Respondent #6 did not extrapolate, he did speak specifically to his experiences with regional accreditation on his Bible college. He explained that the regional accreditors "have never asked us to change our mission statement. They've never challenged, who we are; in fact, they, they have kind of told us no, you need to be who you are" (Respondent #6).

This study looked at identity overall. However, research demonstrates that college mission statements are one fundamental way for institutions to transmit values (Collins & Clanton, 2018; Denig, 2012; McCowan, 2017). In this study, every respondent strongly affirmed

that the regional accrediting body did not ask them to change their mission statement in a way that affected the core identity of the school.

All study participants expressed the view that one benefit of regional accreditation is that it helped them strengthen their historic mission and values, yet there were moments during the interviews when the understandings of some Bible college personnel made distinctions which indicate there is a sense the college might have strayed from its historic identity. A prime example of this occurred when Respondent #3 said there were some employees at the Bible college who would "much rather see [their school] return to just a Bible college." It is important to note that every school in this study self-identified as a Bible college. The nuance in this response is important—the respondent explained that staff at this college views the school as somehow different than they were at a point in their past. Respondent #3 further explained that some people on his campus "think [regional accreditation] broadens the focus of the institution too much. Some likely might see it as a move away from a traditional theological position." While this concern was not expressed by every participant, Respondent #4 similarly expressed that there were those on his campus who had "questions about what whether or not we would have to compromise, you know the Bible college would have to compromise, who we are and what we teach and, and what our mission is about if we had to get accredited by a regional accreditor." This respondent was clear that those questions hadn't been here in quite some time, and ended by concluding that "we haven't had to change anything as far as the essential of who we are."

Although half of the respondents indicated fears of future tension, the results of this study clearly indicated there is not much current tension between Bible colleges and regional accrediting bodies. One study participant noted some level of discomfort with the process in

recent visits. Respondent #4 explained that at a recent site visit, "one particular issue" was "an agenda item for a couple members on a peer review team in a way I had not experienced." This participant described the "particular issue" as one related to "lifestyle matters" and matters of "human sexuality" (Respondent #4). This was the only study participant who indicated any level of current tension between the school's identity and the regional accrediting body, but there were three others who mentioned fears about future tension. While the first respondent indicated tension in the visit, it is important to underscore there were no instances of adverse decisions or outcomes noted in any of the study participants' responses. In his 1992 study, Holliker noted similar concerns, explaining that "several respondents expressed concerns about regional accrediting agencies adopting agendas that appeared to go beyond what the respondents believed was the responsibility of these agencies in measuring the quality of educational institutions" (p. 144). In particular, participants in Holliker's (1992) study had concerns regarding "diversity requirements" of regional accrediting bodies (p. 144).

Similarly, this current study highlights concern on the part of participants that the movement toward secularism has the potential to move regionally accredited Bible colleges in a direction which may not align with their historic values (Belcher, 2004; Edlin, 2009; Henck, 2011) if they maintain their regional accreditation. Research indicates that it is not uncommon for Christian colleges to struggle to maintain their identities within the framework of secular accreditation (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016). Four study respondents spoke directly to this concern.

Conclusion

This study suggested that regional accreditation is a valuable conduit for authentic change since these schools authentically engage the processes and changes which regional accreditation

asks of them. While there is a perception among Bible college top-level leaders that regional accreditation is a valuable mechanism for enacting change while maintaining their historic identities, research indicates that Bible colleges' long-term relationship with regional accreditation may be rocky. Rine and Guthrie (2016) explain:

> As leaders of Christian colleges look to their future, many may perceive cultural, financial, and regulatory storm clouds on the horizon. Prudence will dictate a focus on what can be controlled, namely, on how the institution should react to environmental changes. Empirical analysis of national data can empower campus leaders not only to identify and publicize stories of success, but also to acknowledge and address institutional shortcomings. Indeed, faithfulness to one's institution—and to the One for whom that institution exists—requires nothing less (p. 19).

Based on the participants' responses in this study, Bible college leaders already have concerns regarding the educational landscape as well as the societal pressures which are continuing to mount regarding issues of morality. Rine and Guthrie (2016) contend that in situations where there is pressure on Christian higher education institutions to discard religious convictions, top-level leaders must "assess the effectiveness" of "particular actions taken in pursuit of" the colleges' mission and goals given that there is "increased public skepticism and governmental scrutiny" (p.19). In an academic landscape where Christian higher education institutions are under disproportionate levels of scrutiny by regional accreditors (Donahoo & Lee, 2008), it is particularly important for Bible college leaders to remain vigilant.

While literature indicates that when Christian higher education institutions seek regional accreditation, there may be a shift in curriculum and in core missions (Guenther, 2019), this study has not found this to be the case. All study participants reported maintaining the ability to

maintain fidelity to their historic identities while remaining relevant in a changing higher education landscape. If regional accreditation remains valuable as a means for Bible colleges to continue to enact their historic missions and identities, it should continue to be a viable consideration.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this study addressed the existing gap in research related to regionally accredited Bible colleges as it pertains to their historic institutional identities. This qualitative study was designed to ascertain the impetus for Bible colleges to seek regional accreditation as well as to determine in what ways regional accreditation has changed the Bible colleges that have pursued and maintained it. During this study, the researcher found several Christian liberal arts institutions which have Bible college roots. Further research into the motivations for the change from Bible college to Liberal Arts school could yield valuable information. Holliker (1992) and Holmes (2002) found 26 dually accredited Bible colleges. Since there are currently only fifteen regionally accredited, and dually accredited, further research will be valuable in order to determine whether the remainder have either a) closed down, b) shifted in mission to become a liberal arts school, or c) dropped regional accreditation.

Further research is also needed to understand the effects of regional accreditation more fully on Bible colleges. While this study looked at the effects of regional accreditation from the standpoint of top-level leaders, it did not consider the viewpoints of other campus stakeholders, nor did it examine the strength of the relationship of the Bible colleges with their sponsoring faith communities. Neither did this study attempt to understand the motivations for Bible colleges who maintain dual accreditation.

While each of the Bible colleges which participated in this study have strong

relationships with at least one accrediting body, it is not clear whether the Bible colleges have such strong relationships with their sponsoring faith communities. Even at the same institution, different stakeholder groups experience the same mission and values in very different ways (Barton, 2019; Graham et al., 2017; Rizzi, 2019; Smith & Davies, 2016). This is worth noting since it could impact the ways in which stakeholders view the changes required by accreditation (Bardo, 2009). As such, one suggestion is to study the points of view of other stakeholders within the institution such as students or front-line staff. It may also be valuable to study the views of stakeholders in the sponsoring faith communities, which may include religious leaders or families.

Almost thirty years ago, Ferris & Enlow (1997) called for a revisiting of Bible college distinctives with the goal of evaluating which distinctives might need adjustment. As of this writing the author is unable to locate a scholarly re-examination of Bible college distinctives. One suggestion for future research, then, is for an examination of Bible colleges with an eye toward their distinctives.

Finally, as a result of his findings, Holliker (1992) called for a future study to determine whether "any of the distant danger signals perceived by respondents [have] actually come to fruition" (p. 144). Three decades later, this study found similar concern on the part of study participants regarding their schools' future relationships with regional accrediting bodies. As noted above, half of study participants indicated trepidation related to future relationships with the regional accrediting body; however, further study is needed to determine if these fears are founded. As such, a future study focused solely on current tensions between Bible colleges and regional accrediting bodies would be beneficial.

Implications for Professional Practice

The findings of this research highlighted multiple implications for professional practice to assist Bible colleges as they determine whether to pursue and maintain regional accreditation. Regional accreditors are deputized "to act as agents of the Federal government on a growing list of oversight responsibilities" related to accreditation (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 1). Given that Bible colleges depend upon the relationship with regional accreditors as well as upon their connection with their sponsoring faith communities (Estrada, 2018), it is important for Bible college leaders to approach regional accreditation with an appropriate balance of engagement and hesitance.

In a higher education landscape with ever-increasing measures of accountability by funding entities as well as federal agencies and accrediting bodies, a reasonable measure of caution is warranted (Edlin, 2009). While literature indicated it may be tempting for schools to uncritically engage the regional accreditation process, the regionally accredited Bible colleges in this study have not approached the process haphazardly or uncritically. Nevertheless, such schools ought to not forsake their alliances with their sponsoring faith communities as they seek to grow and maintain financial stability (Estrada, 2018).

Given the overwhelmingly positive response to regional accreditation on the part of all study participants, Bible colleges which do not currently maintain regional accreditation may be apt to approach regional accreditation without counting all of the costs. However, Bible college administrators may benefit from circumspection as well as from consideration to the future implications, including but not limited to fiscal considerations and personnel requirements, of pursuing and maintaining regional accreditation. Literature indicates that regional accreditation deeply affects member schools' day-to-day operations (Baker & Sax, 2012; U.S. Department of

Education, 2018) and requires ongoing change (La Manna, 2019; Simmons, 2018). Additionally,

Bible colleges must ensure they are willing to authentically engage the regional accreditation

recommendations while at the same time making firm stands in regards to their religious

convictions. While Holliker's (1992) dissertation which examined the experiences of Bible

colleges with dual accreditation noted that regional accreditation's requirements have the

potential to alter the school's focus, the results of this study indicate that if Bible college

personnel are intentional in maintaining their historic identities, it is clearly possible to resist the

urge to go off-course. Literature contends that the external pressure from regional accrediting

demands can lead to inauthentic review cycles in some cases, especially as pressure to meet

demands increases (Burton, 2021; Jones et al., 2017; National Association of Scholars, 2021).

With this in mind, Bible college personnel must be intentional in their commitment to

authenticity even if authentic engagement brings with it the risk of losing accreditation. This is

particularly poignant given the half of the study participants' concerns regarding the ability of

Bible colleges to continue to maintain regional accreditation in the future.

Data from this study indicated that it may be wise for Bible college leaders to approach

regional accreditation as one avenue while considering also pursuing or maintaining other

accreditations. Holliker (1992) acknowledged that when regionally accredited Bible colleges fail

to maintain dual accreditation with a religious accrediting body, there is risk as it relates to loss

of association with fellow Christian academic institutions. Further, all seven study participants

whose schools maintained dual accreditation overwhelmingly noted the value of maintaining

ABHE accreditation alongside their regional accreditation, something which Holmes (2002)

confirmed. Interestingly, Holmes' (2002) study demonstrated that Bible college personnel at

dually accredited Bible colleges placed more value on regional accreditation than on their

religious accreditation.

Study results indicate internal stakeholders in Bible college communities would be well-served by ensuring the school's mission accurately codifies the heart of the institutional identity and then maintaining fidelity to that mission regardless of accreditation demands. Based on survey and interview responses in this study, it did not appear there is current tension with regards to missional identity and accrediting standards. However, data from this study indicated participants note varying levels of concern about maintaining regional accreditation in the future.

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Appendix A: Initial Email Contact with Participants

Dear ____,

My name is Tina Royer, and I am a PhD candidate at Northwest Nazarene University. My dissertation research focuses on the effects if any the pursuit and achievement of regional accreditation had on the mission of the Bible college.

This is important research in the field of Bible college work. There has been a dearth of information in recent years, but in an educational landscape which is changing rapidly, it is necessary that research on Bible colleges be recent and relevant. As someone who teaches at a regionally accredited Bible college myself, I understand that you are probably very busy, but I am hopeful you will be able to find the time to take part in my study. If you agree to participate, I will ask you to complete one written survey (20-30 minutes) and one interview (30-45 minutes). In some instances, I may request a follow-up interview of 30 minutes. All answers will remain confidential, and any identifying information you might share will be redacted or modified in order to maintain strict confidentiality. In addition, please know that you will have an opportunity to approve the transcript of our interview and redact any information to ensure accuracy.

Thank you in advance for your help. Please click the following link to the survey if you are willing to participate. If there is someone else at your campus who would be better-suited to take part in this study, please forward this email to that person. This is important research for Bible colleges. As such, I hope I can count on your assistance. I appreciate your time and your consideration of this very important study.

Thank you, Tina Royer

Appendix B: Follow-up Email

Dear _____,

On _____, you should have received an email from me in which I sought your participation in my research regarding the effects of regional accreditation on the missions of Bible colleges which undergo the accreditation process.

If you are unable to participate in the study, please let me know. However, if there is someone else at your campus who would be better-suited to take part, please let me know.

Thank you again for your consideration.

Tina Royer

Appendix C: Qualitative Informed Consent

A. PURPOSE of the Research

Tina Royer, student in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to the changes accreditation caused your Bible college to make. We appreciate your involvement in helping us investigate in what ways regional accreditation changed the institution.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a volunteer, over the age of 18 and are a student, staff, or faculty at a regionally accredited Bible college.

B. PROCEDURES involved in the research

If you agree to participate in the study, the following will occur:

You will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the study.

You may answer a set of interview questions and engage in a discussion on the effects of accreditation on your regionally accredited Bible college. This discussion will be audio taped and is expected to last approximately 30 minutes.

You will answer a set of demographic questions on standard paper and pencil. It should take approximately 5 minutes to answer these questions.

You will be asked to read a debriefing statement at the conclusion of the interview.

You will be asked to reply to an email at the conclusion of the study asking you to confirm the data that was gathered during the research process.

These procedures will be competed at a location mutually decided upon by the participant and principal investigator and will take a total time of about 40 minutes.

C. Foreseeable RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

Some of the discussion questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

D. Alternatives to participation

If you prefer, you may choose not to participate in this study.

E. Benefits of the research to society and possibly to the individual human subject

This study will help other Bible colleges and higher education religious institutions understand the changes that are required when they seek regional accreditation.

There are no immediate benefits, monetary or otherwise, to you for participating in this research.

F. Length of time you are expected to participate
This interview should take approximately 30 minutes. There may be one follow-up interview which should not take more than 30 additional minutes.

G. Person to contact for answers to questions or in the event of a research-related injury or emergency

I am under the direction of my dissertation chair Dr. Boozang. If at any time you wish to contact Dr. Boozang please use the following information: email: bboozang@nnu.edu phone: _508-446-7685

H. Voluntary Participation Statement

Participation in this research is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, you will not face any consequences or any loss of benefits which you would otherwise be entitled to receive

I. Right to Confidentiality and Right to Withdraw from the Study

Your participation in this study, including responses to questions, will be confidential. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

For this research project, the researcher is requesting demographic information. Due to the make-up of your Bible college's population, the combined answers to these questions may make an individual person identifiable. The researchers will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.

Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, audio tapes, and disks will be kept in a locked file cabinet and the key to the cabinet will be kept in a separate location. In compliance with the Federal-wide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

J. BENEFITS
There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help Bible colleges better understand the effects of regional accreditation on them.

K. PAYMENTS
There are no payments for participating in this study.

L. QUESTIONS

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. Tina Royer can be contacted via email at troyer@nnu.edu, via telephone at 916-548-5358 (C) or by writing: PO Box 325 Rio Linda, CA 95673

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

M. CONSENT
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

(THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.)

Participation in research is voluntary. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. This research study has been approved by the Northwest Nazarene University Human Research Review Committee .

I give my consent to participate in this study:

_____   _____
Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

I give my consent for the interview to be audio taped in this study:

_____   _____
Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study. No person identifying information will be used in the report from this study:

_____   _____
Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   **Date**

Appendix D: Open-ended Survey Questions

My name is Tina Royer, and I am a PhD candidate at Northwest Nazarene University. In addition, I teach at a regionally accredited Bible college. Please answer the following questions as fully as you are able to.

1. Please provide your name and the best phone number at which to contact you:

2. Does your school identify as a Bible college?

3. What is/are your role(s) at the Bible college you represent?

4a. To your knowledge, has your Bible college ever pursued or been granted any other type of accreditation than regional?

4b. If so, what type, and with what entity?

4c. Why did your Bible college choose regional accreditation as opposed to other types of accreditation?

5. Which regional accrediting body is your Bible College accredited with?

6. How many years has your Bible college been accredited?

7. How integral would you describe your role in accreditation on your campus?

8. Were you involved in the initial accreditation cycle?

9. How familiar are you with your campus Mission Statement?

10a. Are you aware of revisions to your campus' mission statement as a result of the college pursuing regional accreditation?

10b. If yes, please describe those changes:

11. Other than the mission statement, what effects from regional accreditation have you personally observed on your campus?

Thank you for your help. I will be in touch to schedule the interview.

Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Opening Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on the ways in which regional accreditation affects the historic mission and values of Bible colleges. I am faculty at a regionally accredited Bible college, so I am particularly grateful for your willingness to take part. This interview should take approximately 30-45 minutes. If at any time you would like to end the interview, please let me know. I will be asking you questions about your institution and your experiences with regional accreditation. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Did you ever attend a Bible college yourself?

This is a conversation-starter intended to put the interviewee at-ease. I am trying to get a sense of their overall Bible college experience. See probes below.

[PROBES: What made you choose Bible college work as a career? Did you intend to work at a Bible college when you attended one? How long ago did you attend a Bible college? Was that Bible college accredited? Have you ever worked at another Bible college?]

2. Can you tell me some of the reasons/motivations for pursuing regional instead of other types of accreditation?

[PROBES: What, if any, was your role in deciding to pursue regional accreditation? Have there been any reaffirmations or site visits since you've been there?]

3. Would you say regional accreditation has had a positive or negative effect on your Bible college?

[PROBES: If positive, have there been any negatives? If negative, have there been any positives?]

4. What would you say are the biggest changes to your college that have come as a result of regional accreditation?

[PROBES: As far as you know, are your perceptions of these changes shared by your colleagues or other campus employees?]

5. Is it fair to say that your campus was directed by God to pursue regional accreditation?

[PROBES: Is there a particular person on your campus who the campus community as a whole trusts as it relates to finding direction from God for the college?].

6. Without looking at the actual mission statement of your college, what would you say the mission of your school is?

[PROBES: Has there been any tension between the mission you articulated and the requirements of the regional accrediting body? What impact, if any, would you say regional accreditation has had on the mission of your school as you perceive it? Would you say your perceptions are unique to you? How would you characterize the nature of these impacts?]

7. Would you characterize the changes as ones there was large-scale campus community buy-in for the process of regional accreditation?

8. Is there any other pertinent information you would like to share with me?

Closing Script: Thank you for taking the time to help with this study. After transcription, I will send you a copy of this interview so that you can review it for accuracy.

Appendix F: List of Common Mission Statement Words in Descending Order

Term	Count
biblical	5
equip	4
service	4
students	4
world	4
worldview	3
christ	2
christian	2
church	2
educate	2
engage	2
god	2
impact	2
proclaim	2
provide	2
society	2

Appendix G: Visualization of Common Words in Mission Statements

biblical christ christian church educate engage equip god

impact proclaim provide service society students

world worldview

Appendix H: Redacted Completed Survey Results

Q2 - Does your school identify as a Bible college?

● Choice Count
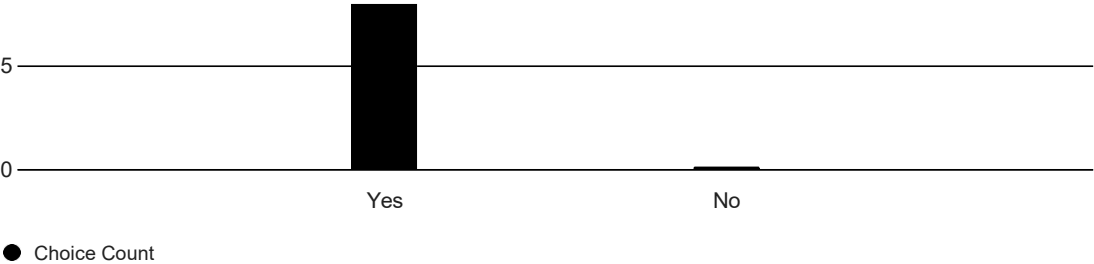
Q4 - To your knowledge, has your Bible college ever pursued or been granted any other type of accreditation than regional?


● Choice Count
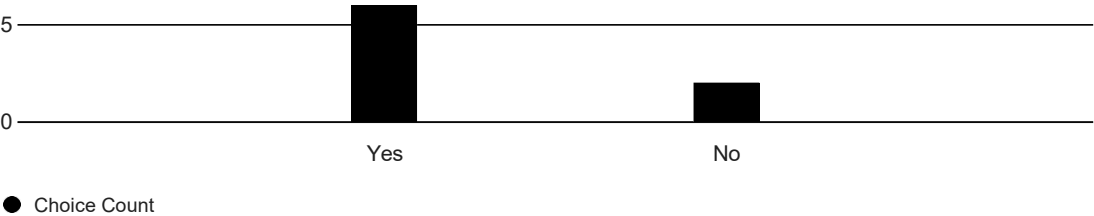
Q6 - Why did your Bible college choose regional accreditation as opposed to other types of accreditation?

The regional accreditors have a higher status as compared to national accreditors. When we were originally accredited, we chose to be accredited by Middle States as they were our only option at that time.

Highest level of accreditation and transfer of credits.

Access to grad programs, job market for graduates. Regional accreditation appears to confer status and legitimacy to a small institution such as Emmaus Bible College

Provides good credentials for students and graduates.

I believe it was because the Institute started offering 'full' bachelor of arts and master of arts degrees. Before the mid 1980s, the Institute offered non-accredited degrees or two years of a degree that required a student to transfer to an accredited institution to earn a degree.

NBC added regional accreditation by HLC to its accreditation by the COA of ABHE to improve the academic currency of its courses and degrees.
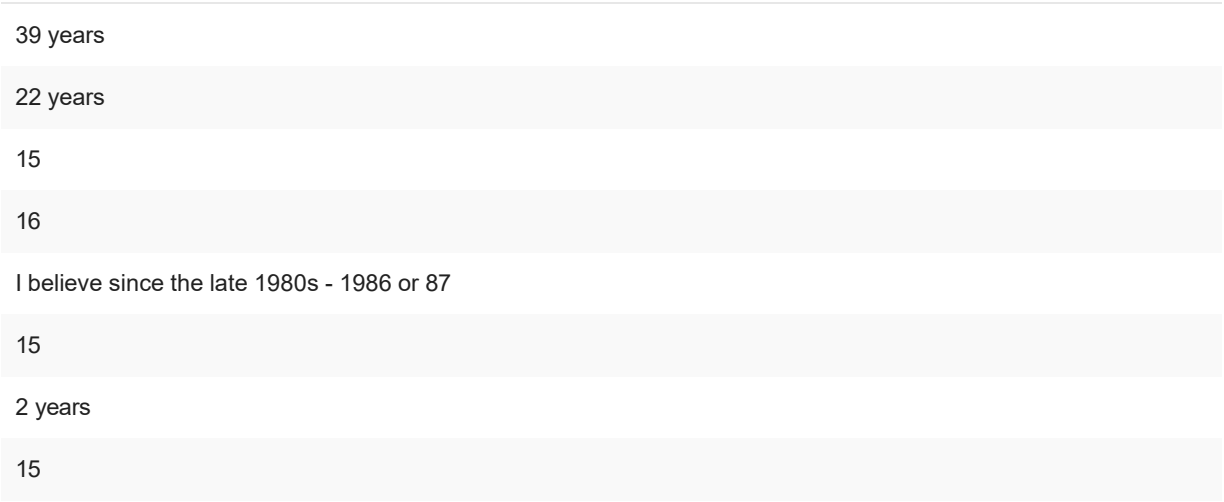
National religious accrediting agencies require the completion of a doctrinal compliance statement. To remain true to our identity and culture, we could not, in good conscience, affirm compliance to all of the items listed on the statement. Additionally, national accreditation for trade schools requires job placement for a percentage of graduates; our mission, which focuses on training students for ministry service (often in volunteer roles), does not align with this type of accreditation. Hence, to remain true to our identity, beliefs, and mission, regional accreditation proved to be the most viable and legitimate form of accreditation for ███.

Credibility as we work with other institutions and in the recruitment of students.

Q7 - Which regional accrediting body is your Bible College accredited with?

● Choice Count
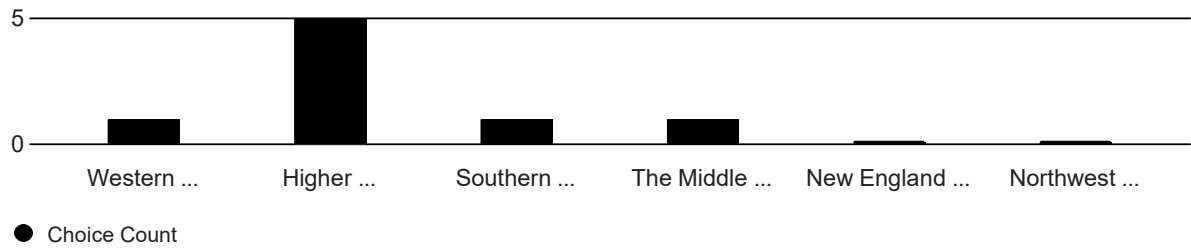
Q8 - How many years has your Bible college been regionally accredited?

39 years

22 years

15

16

I believe since the late 1980s - 1986 or 87

15

2 years

15

Q9 - How integral would you describe your role in accreditation on your campus?

I would say fairly integral. Currently in my role, I supervise the Coordinator for Institutional Research & Compliance and work directly with our Provost who is our Accreditation Liaison Officer.

Complementary to the Accreditation Liason

Very integral

Very involved. Given the size of our staff, all of our administration is very involved and knowledgeable.

I oversee the accreditation and assessment office - it is staffed by a director and a student admin. During times when this office is vacant, I oversee accreditation relationships with HLC, ATS, ABHE and ASCI and NAMN. I am the ALO for HLC
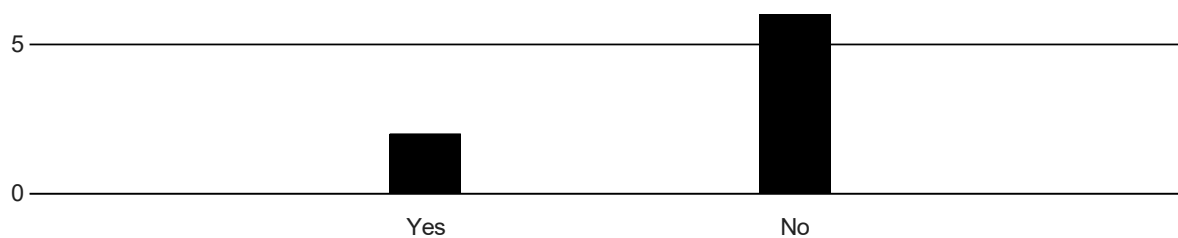
I am the accreditation liaison for both HLC and COA of ABHE

Pivotal; I was hired to oversee the successful management and completion of the process of becoming an accredited institution of higher education.

The liaison between the college and the accrediting agency

Directs accreditation work

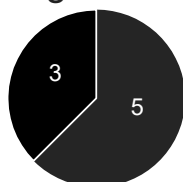## Q10 - Were you involved in the initial accreditation cycle?

Q11 - How familiar are you with your campus Mission Statement?

Q12 - Are you aware of revisions to your campus' mission statement as a result of the college pursuing regional accreditation?

● No   ● Yes

Q13 - If yes, please describe those changes:

Added more complete description statements to the more global purpose/mission statement.

Only a rewording of the same mission statement. It didn't change the focus of the mission for the institution at all.

What we had in place prior to accreditation was a set of values: commitment to Christ, biblical fidelity, educational excellence, and service. Through the process of becoming an accredited institution, we have continued to embrace these values while also defining a much clearer vision and mission.

Q14 - Other than the mission statement, what effects from regional accreditation have you personally observed on your campus?

The Coordinator for Compliance has worked to implement and document our efforts to remain compliant to new federal legislation (i.e. licensure disclosures).
We provide access to our curriculum for institutions that do not have regional accreditation.
I have worked with others across the institution to meet the increased transparency requirements.
Accreditation elevates our status among other Bible colleges.